PAPER 1: AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD

Elizabeth Minor

Relatives with identified remains of their families in Putis, Ayacucho, Peru (© Equipo Peruano de Antropología Forense)

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1 This is the first paper in the collection “Good Practice in Conflict Casualty Recording: Testimony, Detailed Analysis and Recommendations From a Study of 40 Casualty Recorders”

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About Oxford Research Group

We welcome feedback and comments on our work. If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study, please contact Elizabeth Minor, Research Officer at Oxford Research Group elizabeth.minor@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND TO THIS PAPER

Many violent deaths from conflict around the world are either poorly recorded or not recorded at all. Oxford Research Group (ORG) is working to develop an improved understanding of the range of available casualty recording practices, along with guidance for their implementation, towards the goal that every casualty of armed violence is recorded as an individual. The research that this paper is based on is the largest study of casualty recording practice ever carried out, to our knowledge. Many of the recorders interviewed for this study reported that they started from scratch in developing their methodology: they were not aware of any previous projects doing this kind of work, nor were any other kinds of guidance available. Some thought that they might have been the first to attempt recording. One aim of this project is that recorders in the future will have a stronger basis for the development of their work.

This paper, the first in a series of five on issues in casualty recording practice, sets out a framework for considering the field of conflict casualty recording, and steps that casualty recorders should consider taking in order to develop recording practice and standards for the field.
The key findings discussed in this paper are:

1. Casualty recording as practiced now can be incident or individual based, but different approaches can connect: less detailed recording can contribute to building a more comprehensive record of individuals later.

There is a spectrum in casualty recording, from less detailed to more comprehensive records. Casualty recording can be based around recording the numbers killed in conflict incidents, or, at the highest and most comprehensive standard, can constitute a detailed record of every individual that has died. The minimum information that all recorders surveyed collected was the date, location, numbers killed in an incident, and a description of the violence/cause of death/ weapons used. This constitutes a basic standard in casualty recording (see section 1.2 p7). However, there was a recognition or aspiration among many recorders that a comprehensive and detailed record of individuals should be the eventual goal. It might not be possible to achieve this immediately, for a variety of reasons. However, less detailed work is valuable to this goal for the baseline or starting point it provides towards achieving a more comprehensive record. For a comprehensive record, it is crucial that whatever recording is possible under the circumstances should be done. This is important for preventing information loss. Recording should also continue for as long as is necessary. (See section 2.5 p25.)

2. Different ways of recording are deployed under different circumstances.

There is a range of approaches to casualty recording. Different approaches will be appropriate under different circumstances (see sections 2.3 p17, 2.4 p22 and 6 p43). The detail and certainty that a casualty recorder achieves in their records of deaths will depend on the context and the resources available to them, as well as their goals. A recorder’s work will be affected by: the types of sources of information that they can use and the investigations that it is possible to do; the intensity or stage of the conflict; and how much political space there is for recording deaths. These factors will mean that different approaches to recording will need to be taken.

3. All casualty recording is valuable, and recording supports a number of different objectives.

Casualty recording can support the rights and recognition of victims and their families; fuller knowledge of the trends and consequences of conflict; and processes to uphold the law (see section 2.2 p15, 2.3 p15, 2.4 p22 and 6.9 p51 and the paper ‘Why We Record Conflict Casualties’ in this collection3). All approaches to recording will have uses (see section 2.3 p17, 2.4 p22 and 6.9 p51 for the different approaches to recording and their associated uses). Different approaches will also have purposes that are needed at different stages during and after conflict. The level of detail and certainty given by the data produced will vary between approaches. However, being able to achieve a narrower set of details about each case or a lower standard of proof does not mean that recording will serve no function.

4. This study has identified some basic key standards for effective recording, and topics of discussion that practitioners can consider for the development of the field.

Key standards that are important both to the process of recording and for building credibility with audiences were identified through examining the work of the recorders we surveyed (see section 3.2 p34). These are that a casualty recorder’s work:

- Is, and is seen to be, impartial and reliable
- Has clear, transparent definitions and inclusion criteria
- Has a transparent methodology with robust, multiple-stage checking procedures
- Is connected to local communities
- Uses multiple sources
- Publishes disaggregated incident/individual level information (as long as is it safe to do so)
- Is open to correction, or the addition of new information

Section 4 of this paper p37 discusses the questions that recorders might wish to address in order to move towards developing professional standards, and possibly some standardisation across the field. These issues are also raised throughout the paper.

3 For other papers in this collection see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection
Why is Casualty Recording in Particular our Subject?

ORG is committed to the principle that every death from armed violence should be recorded (see ‘About Oxford Research Group’, p 53). Every casualty should be promptly recorded, correctly identified and publicly acknowledged. These requirements are at the centre of the call of the recently established Every Casualty Campaign, of which ORG is a founding member. Some of the key benefits of casualty recording identified in earlier consultations before the establishment of the campaign are summarised in the Charter for the recognition of every casualty of armed violence, published in September 2011 with the support of over 40 NGOs.

This research study was designed to examine in detail how casualty recording is being done, with the aims of: gaining a greater understanding of the field that could be shared with others including policymakers; and, helping practitioners to strengthen their work, through gathering and organising knowledge about the field into one accessible resource. Whilst other methods of estimating conflict deaths have been studied in depth, to our knowledge no study of casualty recording practice on this scale has been done before. Therefore, we also judged that a practical study on the field of casualty recording only would fill an important gap.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is the Purpose of this Paper?

This paper reflects on the range of practice in conflict casualty recording that this study has learned of. We have found that the range of casualty recording practice is broad, but that different approaches to recording can feed into each other, and are linked by common principles. This makes it possible for us to talk of a field of casualty recording.

Oxford Research Group (ORG) is committed to the principle that every casualty of armed violence should be recorded. We use the definition of armed violence given by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee (DAC). Our focus is on deaths resulting from the use of weapons, in any situation where these go unrecorded. A major cause of unrecorded deaths from armed violence is armed conflict, and this study of recording practice focused on recording the casualties of armed conflict, as one specific form of armed violence. In order to identify the casualty recorders that should be included in the study, we used the Uppsala Conflict Data Program’s definition of an armed conflict. However, the analysis and recommendations given in this paper and the rest of the collection may also be relevant to a broader discussion of recording the casualties of armed violence. Many of the techniques, concepts and processes examined in this collection could equally be relevant in non-conflict settings.

This paper aims to demonstrate the field of conflict casualty recording, allowing casualty recorders (and others) to consider a broader picture that their work fits into. Through analysis and discussion of the field it also considers how the questions of standards and standardisation in casualty recording might be approached, and highlights the importance of context to these questions. Through discussing the range of approaches and introducing some important issues in the practice of recording, this paper aims to give current and would-be practitioners key ideas to consider in developing their recording work.


Which states that armed violence is “the use or threatened use of weapons to inflict injury, death, or psychosocial harm”. www.poa-iss.org/kit/2009_OECD-DAC_Guidlines.pdf OECD, 2009, p.28 (Date of retrieval 16 September 2012).

“An armed conflict is a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year.” Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), (Date of retrieval 16 September 2012), www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/, Uppsala University Department of Peace and Conflict Research.

For other papers in this collection see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection.
Examining the work of the recorders who took part in this research allows us to propose three key components to any casualty recording system, and seven key standards for effective recording, which we consider to be applicable across the field.

The three key components of a casualty recording system (described in section 3.1 below p31) are:

- A data model
- A codebook
- A procedure

The seven key standards for effective recording (described in section 3.2 below p34) are that a recorder’s work:

- Is, and is seen to be, impartial and reliable
- Has clear, transparent definitions and inclusion criteria
- Has a transparent methodology with robust, multiple-stage checking procedures
- Is connected to local communities
- Uses multiple sources
- Publishes disaggregated incident/individual level information (as long as it is safe to do so)
- Is open to correction, or the addition of new information

For considering what the next joint steps for the development of this field should be, these standards could be useful to consider.

1.2 What Do We Mean by Casualty Recording?

The casualty recorders interviewed for this study all documented deaths from armed conflict as part or all of their casualty recording work. This study looks at the recording of deaths only, though the term casualty can also include people who are injured. Within these boundaries, casualty recording has the following fundamental characteristics:

1.2.1 Incident or Individual Level Documentation

Casualty recording involves either:

- Documenting the deaths of individual people from conflict violence (e.g. listing individual victims and the circumstances of their deaths), or
- Documenting separate events or incidents in which deaths from conflict violence occurred (e.g. listing dates and places of separate incidents of violence and the numbers killed in each).

Many recorders will document both these kinds of information: the collective picture of all the deaths that occurred in a particular incident, and the details specific to individual deaths. However, for some recorders, the format of their casualty records will be either completely incident based, or completely individual based. This will be for reasons such as an organisation’s goals and motivations, their resources, and the source material available to them. How these factors relate to whether a casualty recorder does incident based or individual based recording is discussed in section 2.4 p22 and 6.8 p53.

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8 There is no single universal definition of armed conflict. A state of armed conflict might be considered to exist when the UN Security Council acknowledges this, when the International Committee of the Red Cross makes an explicit reference to armed conflict, or through assessing some combination of criteria relating to the participants in armed activities, number of casualties, etc. ORG has chosen to take the definition of armed conflict based on the nature and intensity of a conflict created by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program. (ibid.)

9 Most of those surveyed recorded injuries, or conflict violence that was not fatal. Injuries are a major part of the overall burden of armed violence, and in some cases lead to death. It is good practice when recording deaths to follow up cases of injury. Recording injuries has some different challenges to recording deaths, and should be the subject of another study.
1.2.2 Minimum Pieces of Information

In terms of the information collected, at a minimum casualty recording means documenting the following details about each incident of violence recorded:

- The date
- The location
- The number of people killed
- A description of the type of violence involved (which will generally relate to the weapons that were used, e.g. bomb, shooting etc.)

Collecting this information, along with the other characteristics listed in this section, should be considered the basic standard in order for an activity to be considered as casualty recording. Many casualty recorders can and do consistently record more information than this. It should be noted that there is an important difference between:

a. Details that a recorder requires in order to list an incident or individual as a case in their system that will count towards their total numbers. For some this will be the minimum details described above. (Many recorders will also store information that falls short of this, as it may be useful for future investigations.);  

b. Details that a recorder will collect and store where these are available, but might not collect for every case e.g. a victim’s profession might not always be in the source material that a recorder uses, but will be recorded when possible;  

c. Details that a recorder does not try to collect at all e.g. an organisation that is more concerned with trends in conflict violence might not attempt to record any information about individual victims.

Below we discuss the range of casualty recording that was done by those surveyed (see section 2 p10). One aspect of this range is the different level of detail that is collected by recorders about incidents or individuals. This can vary according to factors such as the sources that are available to recorders and their goals and motivations (see sections 2.4 p22 and 6 p43 for discussion of these themes). At its most comprehensive, casualty recording means building a very detailed knowledge about victims, perpetrators, and incidents for every case. A wide range of specific details will be systematically collected.

10 Oxford Research Group would like to thank participants at the conference ‘Recording Every Casualty’ in September 2011 for the inspiration their discussions gave to this section.
An analysis of what information, at a minimum, is required for casualty recording, can be given by looking at what those in the survey stated they always tried to record:

- Of those who recorded information about incidents (34):
  - All recorded the date and location of the event, and the numbers killed;
  - 32 recorded the form of violence that was involved in the incident (e.g. weapons used); the other two recorded individual causes of death.

- Of those who recorded information about individual victims (36):
  - All recorded the sex/gender and some indication of the age of victims (this might be limited to child/adult, or be age in years);
  - 31 recorded names;
  - All recorded dates and locations relating to victims’ deaths (there may be multiple dates and locations to record, for example if a victim who was injured later died);
  - All but one recorded why the victim died – either in terms of the form of violence or weapons used or a cause of death. The recorder who did not do this collected the information necessary for others to make this determination.

- Of all recorders surveyed:
  - 37 tried to make some determination, or noted what information was available, regarding the combat status of the victim, or whether the victim could be considered a civilian or not (for a full discussion of this issue, see the paper ‘Definitions and categorisations in casualty recording’ in this collection).

To summarise, the basic details recorded that were common to most of those surveyed were the following: dates and locations of violence; numbers killed; some description of the violence that occurred or the cause of death; age, sex/gender and whether the victims were civilian or not – followed by names.

Recording some personal details about individuals, starting with the basic detail of their name, was important to the majority of recorders surveyed. This was true even where recorders could not achieve a comprehensive record of these details because they were not available in their source material, or where their recording was primarily incident based. Many aspired to add more detail to their records later, or hoped that the baseline of incidents they recorded could contribute to the establishment later of a more comprehensive record of individuals (see section 2.5 p25).

1.2.3 Thorough, Consistent, Aiming to be as Comprehensive as Possible

Casualty recording means collecting and confirming information about deaths in a way that is thorough, and with a consistent methodology. It will mean keeping a record of the sources of information used for each case (though these will often remain confidential to protect the safety of individuals). Different degrees of confirmation will be possible for casualty recorders operating under different circumstances, who are using different approaches and have different goals – this is discussed below in section 2.5.1 p25.

Recording will aim to give a picture that is as comprehensive as possible of the deaths from the type of violence that is being documented. Some casualty recorders may only record casualties in one particular area of a country in conflict, for example if it is dangerous for them to record in areas where they are considered outsiders. Others may not cover the whole period of time of a conflict, for example because they did not start their work until some years into a conflict. Some may only record violence committed by one perpetrator or from one type of weapon. Others may only record civilian deaths, or concentrate on establishing and recording the fate of the missing or disappeared, or the identification of unknown victims.

Casualty recording aims not just to produce a snapshot of deaths from violence at any given point, nor does it mean documenting just some cases for the illustration of a situation. The goal for all recorders is a record that is as thorough and complete as possible, given the constraints of the situation that any recorder is working in. Recording will give a continuous, case-by-case record of deaths across the time period that a recorder is concerned with.

Casualty recording can be done either during or after a conflict. Some casualty recorders working after violence has ceased will have started their work during conflict. Post-conflict, these recorders will build on the information they have already collected, towards a more detailed and comprehensive record. Others
working after conflict will be starting work that was not necessarily possible before, such as establishing the fate of missing or disappeared people. If casualty recording is being done during conflict, it will generally be done continuously as violence occurs. If a more comprehensive record is to be established, recorders will aim to continue until and likely after the conflict ends, if the information available during conflict is not complete. Casualty records produced during conflict may have different qualities to those produced after conflict, and will often have different uses. This is examined in sections 2 (p10) and 6 (p43) below.

The numbers produced by casualty recorders about how many people were killed in a conflict (or how many were killed across different areas/periods of time, or how many civilians were killed) will be from a simple count of all the individuals, or deaths from incidents, that have been recorded. Therefore, casualty recording is different to approaches that calculate total numbers of deaths through statistical estimation based on sampling. This is a different field that can have different uses and was not our subject of study. Our interest was in approaches to incident or individual level documentation of deaths.

1.2.4 Public Acknowledgment

A key component of casualty recording is that the information produced about incidents or individuals is made public in some way. If there is a threat to safety, releasing casualty information or certain aspects of that information should be delayed (though information might be confidentially shared by recorders for specific purposes that benefit conflict-affected populations). There may be other reasons to delay release, such as to inform families or ensure information is confirmed. However, an assumption of casualty recording is that the information produced is in the public interest (and especially important to the loved ones of those killed), important to the public good, or useful to release for other reasons. For a full discussion on how casualty recorders release their information, and how they connect with other people and institutions that wish to use their records, see the paper ‘Why We Record Conflict Casualties’ in this collection.

2. THE RANGE OF PRACTICE IN CASUALTY RECORDING

This section illustrates the range in casualty recording by looking at the characteristics and work of casualty recorders and dividing these up into different types. The purpose is to give recorders a framework to reflect on of their field, show what might be possible under different circumstances, and demonstrate how the field can link up.

2.1 Some Key Characteristics of the Casualty Recorders in this Study

Before discussing the range of work done by the recorders surveyed for this study, some basic features of the forty casualty recorders that we interviewed are described below. This discussion aims to give some context to the analysis that follows, by helping readers understand what types of casualty recorders took part in the survey.

The study’s purpose was to survey current practice. We therefore mainly sought to interview casualty recorders that were active in their documentation work at the time of the survey. However, we also included organisations that had finished collecting information about casualties but were still working to publicise their results. Additionally, we included casualty recorders that had ceased their activities recently, as we still considered their work relevant to a discussion of current practice (6 of the organisations interviewed had ceased their work at the time of the survey).

2.1.2 What Types of Institutional Settings or Affiliations did the Casualty Recorders Have?

The majority of those surveyed were situated in civil society. These recorders were: individuals or small collectives; NGOs; media or research institutions. This study primarily represents an analysis of civil society

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12 For other papers in this collection [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection)
casualty recorders. The breakdown of the types of survey participants that is shown in Table 1 is predictable given the way the survey invitation list was constructed (see ‘Appendix on Survey Methodology’).\(^\text{13}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of institutional setting or affiliation</th>
<th>Number of casualty recorders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Projects by individual citizens or small groups of individuals without official status</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media organisations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-governmental or academic research institutions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-governmental organisations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State bodies or research institutions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We believe that the discussions of practice in this study have implications beyond civil society recorders, however. This is because there are methodological issues and challenges in casualty recording that apply whoever the recorder may be. The range of benefits to recording is also the same. Additionally, the three organisations included in this research that were not civil society-based casualty recorders were not found to be significantly different in their goals, methods or resources. Several of the civil society casualty recorders we interviewed did their work because of what they saw as an absence of state action to adequately record casualties. The lessons learned from civil society based casualty recording are therefore directly applicable to states and inter-governmental organisations, and the forty responses are analysed as a whole in the collection.

Of the forty casualty recorders surveyed, three stated that they had no other activities apart from recording deaths. Most recorders were organisations with a range of other activities including research, campaigning, humanitarian activities and legal casework: casualty recording was just one area of their work. Most organisations started to do their casualty recording work systematically quite recently. Only eleven started their work before 2000, with the earliest starting in 1970. The remaining 29 started recording in 2000 or after, with six recorders starting their work since 2010.

36 of the recorders interviewed had published or released information about casualties at the time of the survey. Information was released, among other ways, in the form of:

- Public databases;
- Public reports or presentations;
- Sharing information with partners for practical action (e.g. to help inform humanitarian response planning);
- Providing expert evidence in legal processes.

The remaining four organisations intended to release the information they had collected about casualties in the future. One was in the process of producing their first report at the time of the survey. The other three were recording casualties in a post-conflict situation and aimed to publish information when their research was more complete. For an in-depth discussion of how the casualty recorders we interviewed released their information, and how others used it, see ‘Why We Record Conflict Casualties’.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{13}\) For other papers in this collection
www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection

\(^{14}\) For other papers in this collection
www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection
2.1.2 What Size Were the Casualty Recording Projects ORG Surveyed?

In terms of the number of people that worked on them, the sizes of the casualty recording projects ORG surveyed varied considerably. The smallest were projects done by one individual working in their spare time to document casualties. With no funding, such projects relied on information sources that were freely available to access. The largest organisation we surveyed worked in various countries worldwide, with over 200 staff and significant technical resources for forensic investigation at its disposal.

Table 2 illustrates the sizes of the casualty recorders surveyed in terms of the total number of people working the recording project, either paid or unpaid. The majority of recorders were small in these terms. Where projects were large (over 20 in Table 2), they had one of the following characteristics:

1. The recorder relied on a large number of individuals on the ground as a major source of information, and these individuals were considered to work for the casualty recorder. (Others operating this approach, referred to as ‘Recording using an on-the-ground network’ in section 2.3 below p17, did not consider those in what could be described as their network to be working for the organisation, so feature in the lower figures of Table 2);
2. The recorder relied on a large number of volunteers who only gave small slots of time to the project;
3. The recorder worked on the forensic identification of unknown victims (though one organisation doing this kind of work was in the 5 or less bracket of Table 2).

Table 2
How many workers, paid or unpaid, worked on each casualty recording project surveyed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of workers</th>
<th>Number of casualty recording projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 or fewer</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 20 (43 to 221)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 illustrates the size of the projects by the number of paid workers they had. More than half relied on 5 or fewer paid workers, with 6 projects relying entirely on volunteers. Table 3 shows that a number of recorders had very limited paid human resources. The number of paid workers can be seen as an indicator of a project’s total financial resources (though it cannot illustrate the other costs often involved in recording such as software and communications equipment). Casualty recorders frequently named a lack of funding for their work as a limitation. Table 3 indicates that casualty recording can and is being done with limited resources.

Table 3
How many paid workers were assigned to casualty recording in each project?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of workers</th>
<th>Number of casualty recording projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None (all workers are volunteers)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 20</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 20 (45 to 220)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In sections 2.3 (p17), 2.4 (p22) and 6 (p43) below different approaches to casualty recording are discussed, along with their resource implications. Which model a casualty recorder uses will be determined to some extent by their resources: not just the number of people available to work on recording and the technical capacity to investigate and process information, but also non-financial resources, such as the
extent of a casualty recorder’s local contacts for getting information. The approach used by a casualty recorder will also be determined by their motives, objectives, questions of safety, and other factors.

2.1.3 What Types of Conflicts Were COVERED BY THE CASUALTY RecorderS SURVEYED?

Using the classifications of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP),¹⁵ at the time of the survey (or, for the recorders that had ceased their documentation work, at the time they were last recording), the types of conflicts that 36 of the casualty recorders focused on were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of conflict (according to UCDP)</th>
<th>On-going</th>
<th>Terminated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interstate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrastate</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrastate with foreign involvement</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>36</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The remaining four casualty recorders surveyed covered a variety of conflict and post-conflict situations worldwide, cutting across these classifications. One of the casualty recorders included in Table 4 recorded casualties from various on-going intrastate conflicts across one region. The countries covered by those who recorded in only one country were in the following regions: Europe, Central, East and Southern Asia, the Middle East, Northern Africa, Southern Africa, Central America and South America.

This study therefore gives a picture of the work of recorders who were almost exclusively recording the casualties of intrastate conflicts, a majority of which were on-going, across the world.

2.1.4 How Did RecorderS Restrict the Types of Casualties They Included in Their Records?

For a full discussion of the inclusion criteria that different recorders used, see the paper ‘Definition and Categorisation’¹⁶ in this collection. This section looks very briefly at the kinds of casualties that recorders included or excluded, further to their definition of what a death from conflict was (where this was relevant).

19 of the forty recorders surveyed sought to record every casualty of the conflict(s) they were focusing on.

The remaining 21 restricted their records to include only:

- The deaths of civilians (or protected persons as covered by International Humanitarian Law);
- Victims who were missing, or buried in mass or clandestine graves;
- Casualties caused by one conflict party;
- Casualties caused by certain types of weapons;
- Casualties whose deaths could be considered violations of law;
- Casualties recorded in the course of the organisation’s main work (e.g. providing medical services).

Seven of the organisations restricted whom they recorded by applying more than one of the above criteria.

2.1.5 What Were the Relationships of the Casualty RecorderS to the Countries of Conflict?

The majority of the casualty recorders surveyed were based wholly or partly within the countries containing the conflicts that they were recording the casualties of (these will be referred to from now on as the ‘countries of conflict’).

24 of the forty casualty recorders interviewed were based entirely inside these countries. 22 of these 24 recorders were civil society recorders collecting information about the situation in their country. Their

¹⁵ Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Date of retrieval: 25th June 2012) UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia: www.ucdp.uu.se/database Uppsala University
¹⁶ For other papers in this collection www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection
motivations ranged from: dignifying and recognising victims and their families, the right to know, and to build historical memory; justice, accountability, and human rights; transitional justice and conflict prevention; and creating analyses that could contribute to better evidence-based policymaking on violence. One of these 24 was a government research institution looking at a past conflict in the country to create a decisive record that would prevent future political manipulation of death totals. The other of these 24 was an inter-governmental organisation working in multiple post-conflict countries worldwide to develop expertise and strengthen the rule of law. (For a full discussion of the different reasons that casualty recorders did their work, see the paper ‘Why We Record Conflict Casualties’ in this collection. A summary of the reasons for recording is given in section 2.2 of this paper 15, and summary of recording's uses in section 2.4 p22 and 6.9 p51.)

Three of the recorders interviewed were based both inside the country of conflict they were concerned with and elsewhere. These three recorders mentioned as challenges in their work the problems of data security in repressive and sometimes dangerous environments, and ensuring safe passage of information about casualties out of the country. Having separate headquarters in neutral or safer locations was considered an advantage in facing these problems.

Four of the organisations interviewed recorded casualties in more than one country, including the country in which they were based. For one organisation this was because they also recorded casualties in conflicts that their country was involved in abroad. Three had global or regional focuses to their work.

Nine organisations were based entirely outside the countries of conflict that they recorded. One of these had an international focus to their recording.

Table 5 combines this information with the relationship of the recorder to the places where conflict was happening: that is, whether anyone working for the casualty recorder was collecting information within the conflict zone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5</th>
<th>Workers collect information in the conflict zone</th>
<th>Workers do not collect information in the conflict zone</th>
<th>Casualty recorder is working post-conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project is entirely based inside the country/countries of conflict studied</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project is based both inside the country of conflict studied and elsewhere</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project is based inside a country of conflict that it studies, but also records casualties of conflict violence occurring elsewhere</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project is based outside the country/countries of conflict studied</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows a basic but important aspect of casualty recording as documented by this study: in an ongoing conflict, recorders did some forms of casualty recording without conducting their own investigations in the conflict zone (for discussion of the relationship of different approaches to recording to the country of conflict, see sections 2.3 p17, 2.4 p22 and 6.4 p49). The majority of casualty recorders used at least some information that was the result of their own on-the-ground investigation or corroboration, or from speaking directly to witnesses. However, this was not an essential feature of recording as defined in section 1.2 p7. Recorders who do not investigate on the ground will rely on access to and the assessment of documents produced by others such as bureaucratic records, media and social media. This ‘Document-based’ approach is described in the discussion of types of casualty recording in section 2.3 below (for a full discussion of the range of sources used by casualty recorders, see “The Range of Sources in Casualty Recording”17). Context and the recorder’s resources will determine the range and quality of sources.

17 For other papers in this collection see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection
available to a casualty recorder, and like every model in the range of practice, using documentary sources only has advantages and disadvantages that will vary according to the recorder’s particular situation.

As also seen in Table 5, recorders can be situated entirely outside the country of conflict. The reasons for a casualty recorder operating outside the country of conflict varied:

Of the four recorders operating out of country and relying on documents only, one began recording in response to their own states’ military action abroad; one for the sake of global advocacy activities; and one from academic research interests, with the information produced used for risk assessment by companies operating in the country of conflict, and intended to be helpful to policy discussions on violence in the country. The motives and origins of these three projects combined with scarce resources dictated their location and lack of on the ground contact. The other project was an experiment by an inter-governmental organisation in using recording that was document-based to collate information for use by humanitarian response planners. This project existed where it did because of the expertise of a particular country team of the organisation. Several casualty recorders named the greater availability of information online in the past decade (especially media reports) as an advantage to their work, and a majority accessed some or all of their information this way. This has facilitated the work of recorders relying on documentary sources operating both inside and outside countries experiencing conflict. However, it is particularly useful to recorders operating from outside countries of conflict, which might otherwise not have been able to access this information. For some of these recorders it is the very reason that they can exist.

Of the five organisations based outside the country of conflict but operating in it, one was an exile organisation recording information about a repressive and dangerous environment using an on-the-ground network. The others were organisations relying mainly on documentary sources, but with some checking or verification from contacts on the ground. These recorders’ connections to the country of conflict related either to their own country’s involvement in the conflict or a universal concern for accountability, transparency or human rights.

Three recorders had global or regional focuses, recording casualties occurring in more than one country, including the country in which they were based. These had goals relating to either the creation or enforcement of policy on armed violence, or the sharing of their particular expertise in building a historical record about conflict.

The range of relationships of recorders to the countries of conflict is important to note as one aspect of the range of recording practice. For recorders working outside the countries of conflict, recording was aimed at creating change either locally or internationally, and would come from an organisation’s mandate, priorities or indirect connection to the conflict. Recorders looking at the situation in the country where they were based were also seeking change, but perhaps from a different point of view: change in their own societies or the policies of their and other governments to the situation in their country.

2.2 Why Do Recorders Document the Dead?

This section looks briefly at why the casualty recorders in this study did they work, further to the general picture given in section 2.1 about the connections between recorders and the countries of conflict. For a full discussion of the motivations of recorders and the ways they tried to achieve their objectives, see the paper ‘Why We Record Conflict Casualties’ in this collection.18

All the casualty recorders that we interviewed aimed to provide information about conflict deaths that was missing from the public record: Recorders observed a need for important documentation that was not being fulfilled. One common objective in generating this new information was to counteract misinformation or ignorance about casualties. Additionally, a shared belief running through the motivations of all the casualty recorders we interviewed was that collecting and sharing this accurate knowledge about human losses from conflict can achieve positive change, either in national or international policy, or for victims or the community.

“I think this is a story that the public should know about, and we didn’t”

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18 For other papers in this collection see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection
Casualty recorders expressed both practical and moral reasons why they documented deaths from conflict. Together, these form a general rationale for why casualty recording is important from various perspectives. The main reasons to record were:

- To generate data and analysis that could be used for evidence based policymaking or on the ground action such as early warning or humanitarian response;
- To build and raise awareness of an accurate picture of deaths from conflict, through which changes in discourse, perceptions and policy can occur, and so violence can be reduced or its recurrence prevented;
- For the value of an accurate record to political transition, transitional justice and future conflict prevention;
- Because of the need or right to know about human losses from conflict for societies, communities and families, and the value of transparency when it comes to the consequences of conflict;
- To dignify, recognise and memorialise victims and their families’ losses, and give victim communities a voice: some recorders reported the validation that witnesses and families experienced from telling their story to the recorder, and having it re-told by them;
- To inform the creation of a historical record that a post-conflict society can use to address the past, and for young people and future generations to have access to a historical record centred on the victims of conflict;
- For the contribution recording can make to accountability, justice and upholding human rights: Recording can reveal possible abuses through the comprehensive picture of harm it gives, as well as fulfilling families’ right to know the fate of their loved ones.

These reasons to record are about generating important and useful knowledge, the prevention of future harm, and redress for past harm.

Some recorded for one very specific reason or practical purpose. For example, some organisations focused on researching trends in violence to inform their country’s policymaking. However, for many their recording was based on broad principles, and their aspirations included many of those listed above. Several of the casualty recorders we interviewed reported that they did this work because of what they saw as the absence of adequate state initiatives to record, despite the clear importance of knowing about conflict deaths from the moral, legal and practical perspectives listed above. Recording might be done for one specific purpose or because of a range of broad principles: There are multiple reasons why it is important.

A recorder’s motives can determine the methodology or approach they use. For example, recorders focused on analysing trends for policymaking, and so who were not as concerned with victims’ identities, may use approaches based on relatively limited but easy to access documentary evidence to record incidents. These methods can generate the information needed in close to real-time without the need for perhaps more expensive modes of investigation.

“We don’t have the information...[so] we don’t focus on getting information on individuals. We are more in to numbers, trying to sort out trends.”

However, the methodology or approach used by a recorder and the limits of the information they produced did not necessarily restrict the broadness of principles behind their work. For example, some recorders that generated mainly incident-based information saw recording as important to the recognition and memorialisation of individual victims, though their work could not give a full contribution to this goal in its present form.
“What other people have done with the book of the dead in the former Yugoslavia, where you actually really try to have each and every one of the victims, we are just not able to do that right now...but in the long-term we also would like to regain historical memory [through] the database...Recording every casualty with as much information on their personal condition, it is a way of acknowledging the existence of the armed conflict and the huge, awful cost.”

The shared opinion of recorders that collecting and distributing knowledge about casualties is useful to positive change is one reason to consider that casualty recorders, despite their differences, collectively make up a field with a core purpose. The fact of broader shared principles between many of those working in diverse ways strengthens this sense.

2.2.1 The Relationship or Connection of Casualty Recorders to Families and Victim Communities

To understand why recorders document the dead, it is important to consider whom their intended audiences were. These were various, as seen in the reasons to record, and given the different relationships of casualty recorders to the countries of conflict (as discussed in section 2.1 above p10), and the different dynamics of the conflicts recorded (which included local and international actors). These audiences could be within the country of conflict, international, or in the other countries participating in the conflict. Ultimately, casualty recording is important and relevant to many different fields, principles, and groups.

The main groups that casualty recorders sought to reach with their information can be summarised as:

- Families and victims communities
- Policymakers and governments
- Humanitarian actors
- Legal bodies
- Civil society e.g. media, researchers, NGOs
- The broader public

The relationship or connection between the recorder and families and victim communities gives a sense of three types of motivations in recording:

- Recorders with no direct contact or connection with victim communities or families, and for whom ensuring information reached these communities was not an objective (there were different reasons for this);
- Recorders with no or very little direct contact or connection with these communities, but who considered them an audience or had a long-term objective of increasing this connection;
- Recorders who were deeply connected with families and victim communities, as these were both a key source of information and a key audience or beneficiary of their work.

“If it also helps victims and their families in the sense of acknowledging...that would also be great, but that is more the long-term project. We haven’t done anything yet about it. That would be certainly very important for us to do.”

“The strength and the passion and the courage of the families...they are the main motor to do this kind of work.”

Though different recorders will be approaching this work from different starting points, the methodological challenges they face will have much in common with others using the same way of working. The range of approaches to casualty recording is set out in the next section.

2.3 Five Approaches to Casualty Recording

From looking at the work of the forty organisations interviewed, we have developed a categorisation of what we see as the five main approaches to doing casualty recording. The division is based on the types of sources a recorder uses and the way they confirm information about casualties. The results of recording using models 1-3 might be either primarily incident based or primarily individual based. For models 4 and 5, detailed individual based information will be present for every case.
The five approaches are:

1. Document-based recording – used by 11 of the recorders surveyed
2. Document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration – used by 9 recorders
3. Recording using an on-the-ground network – used by 9 recorders
4. Multiple source investigation – used by 7 recorders
5. Unknown victim identification – used by 4 recorders

The purpose of making this categorisation is to give a way of considering the field of recording, and the types of recording that are possible and undertaken under different circumstances. We have seen that the reason a recorder used a particular approach was generally a decision that was influenced by the situation – so a combination of casualty recorders’ goals or motivations and their circumstances, resources and the context of the country of conflict.

Casualty recorders may wish to consider whether work on standards for the field might be usefully pursued within these separate approaches – or in some other way. Those intending to do recording may find this section of interest (along with sections 2.4 p22 and 6 p43) for considering the different ways that casualty recording can be approached, and the different possibilities available.

The categorisation and the discussion in this section simplify the work that is done by recorders. However, we consider it a useful way of making some broad groupings to describe the range of approaches in the field. One thing that has been striking to us in doing this survey is that many casualty recorders, who started their work at different times, and with no knowledge of each other, have come up with very similar approaches to the problem of documenting deaths.

Below are basic descriptions of each of the five models of casualty recording. Following these descriptions, section 2.4 p22 summarises, in a table, discussion on the themes listed here in relation to each approach. The purpose is to give a sense of the key features of and differences between the five approaches to casualty recording, and when and why they might be used. A more extended discussion of these themes can be found in this paper’s appendix (section 6, p43).

a. **Conflict context**
   Is the approach used during or after conflict?

b. **Coverage and level of detail**
   How comprehensive is the documentation produced?
   What level of detail do recorders using the approach try to collect?

c. **Source availability and access issues**
   What sources need to be available, and what potential problems of access affect this approach?

d. **Relationship to country of conflict**
   Where can recorders using this approach be based?

e. **State attitude**
   Is the approach used where the government of the country of conflict is very hostile to recording/documentation, or the context particularly repressive?

f. **Resources needed**
   How well resourced are recorders using this approach?

g. **Goals or motivations**
   What is the relationship between the goals or motivations of the recorder and whether this approach is used?

h. **Data format**
   Is the documentation the approach produces based on listing individuals or incidents?

i. **Uses**
   What uses does this type of recording have?

The five approaches to casualty recording are:

1. **Document-based recording**
   This is recording that uses documentary evidence produced by others as its only source.
Evidence might be from NGOs and other civil society organisations, media, social media, state records and inter-governmental organisations, and accessed publicly or privately (for a full discussion of the range of sources used by recorders and how they were accessed see ‘The Range of Sources in Casualty Recording’). Most recorders using this model used publicly available information as their biggest source. Casualty records were made through the crosschecking and corroboration of different documents about the same incident/individual, and the evaluation of the reliability and value of different sources (for a full discussion of how recorders handle documents, see “Evaluating Sources”19).

The level of certainty given ultimately depends on the quality of documents available. Most using this model during conflict saw their results as an undercount or a baseline, due to the limitations of the sources available to them. For example, many official documents were not accessible or in the public domain; the coverage and quality of media and social media can vary in extent. A baseline is useful for showing patterns in violence over space and time.

This type of recording can be done from both inside and outside the country of conflict, during and post conflict. Many of the documents used will be freely available online: Useful information can be collected whilst avoiding danger to recorders. Where the flow of information is restricted, or the media and the bureaucratic structures of the state give ineffective coverage, this approach will be less useful. Recorders using a document-based approach often did so because it gave maximum coverage on minimal resources.

Casualty recorders using this approach during conflict generally produced records continuously, some in close to real-time (within 24hrs hours of an incident). The majority of documents used were produced in close to real-time (e.g. media reports). Records were therefore used for risk assessment, informing humanitarian response planning, analysis of trends in conflict, and assessing and developing violence reduction policies. Document-based casualty information was used by courts as contextualising material, and to assess the need to investigate possible crimes. It was also used by media organisations. For those using this model in post-conflict situations, the range of documents available was greater, for example with more official records becoming available. A more comprehensive record of casualties was achievable, and these recorders contributed to official counts of the dead.

2. Document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration

This is recording that mainly uses documentary sources as above, but gathers some extra information or corroboration from on the ground sources or investigators.

Recorders using this approach had field workers or on-the-ground contacts who gave them occasional original information, e.g. on unknown cases in inaccessible areas, and/or an occasional extra layer of checking or verification especially on ambiguous or hard to confirm cases. Most of the organisations using this model primarily used media reports. The main documentary sources of others were state records, NGO reports, and information from humanitarian actors. The coverage given by this model primarily depends on the extent of documentary sources but can give increased coverage or better confirmation of certain cases, depending on the extent or depth of the on-the-ground corroboration available. Added on-the-ground corroboration can be useful in circumstances where, for example, media access is restricted to certain areas but a recorder’s contacts can reach information sources.

Like the document-only model, most recorders using this approach during conflict recorded continuously, some in close to real-time. Records were used for informing humanitarian response planning and community early warning, trend analysis, and monitoring and evaluating the actions of conflict parties and the effectiveness of policies to reduce violence. Governments also used the information produced by some using this model to inform their policies. It was also used by media organisations.

3. Recording using an on-the-ground network

This is recording that relies on a network of on-the-ground sources or investigators as its main source of information. This information may be checked against or added to by documentary sources (e.g. information from media, hospitals, police, local government etc.).

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19 For other papers in this collection see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection
A network could consist of civil society organisations (religious, NGO) in close contact with witnesses, families and other sources. Or, it could be built from individual paid workers or volunteers recording in their own areas. Some recorders relied on the workers of various organisations communicating the information about deaths that they routinely collect in the course of their primary work. These networks might start their own investigations, or investigate cases that the recorder had become aware of through other sources (such as hospitals, media). Information received from on-the-ground sources was generally corroborated or reconfirmed by the recorder, either centrally, checking against other types of sources, or locally by more detailed on-the-ground investigation (for example, a volunteer’s tip off might be investigated locally by a paid field worker). The extent of coverage this approach gives depends on the reach of the network. Some were very comprehensive, some only operated in certain areas. The standard of proof for the information produced by this model will vary, depending on which on-the-ground sources the recorder can access and what their sources of corroboration are.

Around half of the organisations using this approach worked in contexts that were extremely dangerous and repressive for anyone known to be attempting to document casualties. The on-the-ground network approach can have advantages in such an environment: it can operate with a low profile, and provides a way of documenting casualties if other information flows are restricted unreliable or do not give good coverage (e.g. media is limited, NGO activity is restricted, official documents are inaccessible).

Some used this approach because they felt it gave them the best access given challenges to information collection such as the remoteness of certain areas or ineffective state structures. Others were motivated for their casualty recording to be a participatory civil society initiative, or gave a special priority to recording the voices of victims as part of an organisational framework of human rights documentation, and so found it important to use information from direct sources heavily.

Recorders using this approach were based both in and outside the country of conflict. Being based outside the country had advantages for data security. However, deep local connections and high levels of trust are always needed to construct a network and collect information.

Recorders using this approach may be able to produce and share information in close to real time. This depends on the structure of the recorder’s communications with the network, which may be slowed in some dangerous environments. Records produced by this approach were used by humanitarian organisations for their assessment of the conflict situation, in legal processes and for compensation, by recorders to make submissions to international courts and Special Rapporteurs in UN system, and by media organisations.

4. Multiple source investigation

This is recording that uses a very wide range of sources with consistent on-the-ground investigation of cases. The aim is a comprehensive and highly detailed record.

All possible documentary and other information are collected in this approach. Collecting information from family members and eyewitnesses is prioritised. This approach aims to establish a wide range of detailed facts about every casualty to a high standard of proof. Evaluation and corroboration of multiple sources and original investigations are the confirmation procedures. This type of recording prioritises accuracy over speed, and will often have longer-term uses.

Most of those interviewed who were operating this model, were working post-conflict, though many started collating information during conflict using other models as listed above. This provided a starting point for more in-depth work. This approach benefits from the availability and accessibility of a wide range of official and other documentary sources. In less heavily documented contexts, those operating this model might rely on having a high profile as an organisation to reach all those with information. One recorder using this approach operated in a country where the state was hostile to such documentation. Some of their work had to be clandestine. Others suffered threats and intimidation from state and other parties. However, all recorders using this approach engaged their governments on the results of their casualty recording, and achieved some kind of response or dialogue. Some political space for recording may be necessary for this model to operate.

Recorders using this model during conflict may release information on casualties as they record it. However, given the depth of investigation involved, this will likely be in terms of weeks after an incident rather than days or hours. Information generated by this approach was used for memorialisation, to
contribute evidence on individual cases or regarding patterns of harm to domestic and international courts, to make submissions to processes in the UN system, and by governments to allocate war benefits.

5. Unknown victim identification

This type of recording is separated from the other approaches by the use of forensic techniques to confirm the identities of the dead. The record of the dead created will be made up of these identified victims only: those who were missing, or buried in mass or clandestine graves.

As part of the process of investigation leading to the identification of unknown victims, recorders operating this model will investigate various sources. They will work with eyewitnesses and family members to collect ante-mortem data, and with communities to investigate where and how incidents happened and where graves are. They will establish comprehensive lists of the missing and their characteristics. Confirmation of cases is through the identification of unknown victims by forensic techniques including DNA identification. Their remains are then returned to their loved ones. These recorders will also generate detailed evidence on causes of death.

All those using this model of recording were operating post-conflict (though one operated in a situation of widespread organised criminal violence). An official request or permission from the state was needed by recorders using this approach to carry out certain key functions, such as undertaking exhumations. The work could not be done in a way that these recorders would consider ethical or legal without this cooperation. This approach therefore depends directly on some agreement from state bodies in order to function. Despite such agreements, recorders using this model often reported hostility or obstruction to their work from states, and from other actors unhappy with the threat that recorders’ work posed to them.

The core goal of this model is to end families’ uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones. These recorders invariably contributed their records to legal processes. Their work also contributed to truth and reconciliation commissions, and to memorialisation.
### 2.4 Each Approach to Casualty Recording in Relation to Key Themes in Recording Practice: a Summary Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Used during and after conflict. During conflict, the most important source was media. Records were often made in close to real time. After conflict, recorders reviewed all available documents including central and local state-owned and other archives (e.g. police, military, hospitals) and casualty lists produced by other recorders.</td>
<td>Used during and after conflict. During conflict, this model was used to supplement limited documentary sources e.g. media with information direct from the field. Records were often made in close to real time. The point of using this model was to help alleviate variable quality of existing documentation for recorders with limited resources, during or after conflict.</td>
<td>All surveyed operated during conflict, though the model could be used in challenging and repressive post conflict environments, and in poorly documented post-conflict contexts. Some made records in close to real time to share with humanitarian organisations and media. For others, channels of communication were slower due to danger.</td>
<td>Slight majority working post conflict, most of who started their work during conflict to collect what information they could at the time. Projects were long term, prioritising accuracy over speed. A wide range of source material (from official documents to interviews with witnesses) required that it might not be possible to collect during intense conflict.</td>
<td>All operated post conflict. One recorder worked during a situation of widespread armed violence. However for most recorders this work was by nature a post conflict activity relating to accounting for the past.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Coverage and level of detail given | Information collected during conflict will generally represent a baseline. Sources available mean level of detail may be low (e.g. media do not give much information on individuals). Post conflict, greater comprehensiveness possible depending on the state of documentation/bureaucracy in the country of conflict and the archives available. | Similar to document only. In most but not all cases, not much extra coverage was given by on-the-ground sources, which mainly provided better confirmation and more details. | Coverage depends on the extent of the recorder’s network. All were concerned with documenting a full set of personal details, but this was not always possible in chaotic situations. | All recorded a comprehensive set of details about victims and circumstances of death. The core of the approach is the aim for comprehensiveness. Many reported they felt the project would never be closed – new information can always be discovered. | All collected a detailed set of information about victims and incidents to facilitate investigation into the fate of individuals. These details were also important to a public accounting of victims. Coverage restricted to the missing or those buried in mass or clandestine graves. |

Table continues...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source availability and access issues</th>
<th>Relationship of recorder to country of conflict</th>
<th>State attitude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased online access to documents, especially media, facilitates document based work. Limitations to the availability of documents available (media, official, NGO etc.) will affect whether model is used. These limitations may be due to poor coverage, secrecy/censorship, or poor capacity for official documentation.</td>
<td>Recorders were based in and out of country – online access to documents was an important factor here. Being based in country may be useful for building information sharing relationships. Being based outside may be useful if the environment is dangerous but documents are available.</td>
<td>Use of this model depends on some openness, toleration or inability to suppress the sharing of documents from states and conflict parties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These recorders face the same issues with documents as document based recorders – but an on the ground presence can in some cases help address these e.g. a recorder’s informants might be able to overcome the blocking of access to mainstream media in certain areas.</td>
<td>Similarly to document only, it is not necessary for the central organisation to be based in country; online media were a major source. However, it is necessary to have some connection to the country of conflict in order to recruit on-the-ground corroborators and for these to be effective.</td>
<td>As document only model, depends on some openness, toleration or inability to suppress information flows, as documents are the major source. On the ground corroborators can help recorders get round a limited amount of censorship or information suppression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These recorders did use some documents, but their biggest source was their network. The model can be used in poorly documented environments, whether due to restrictions on information or poor bureaucracy. The only restrictions are the reach of the network and the quality of fieldworkers’ reports.</td>
<td>Organisations were based inside, outside and partly inside the countries of conflict. For recording in repressive countries of conflict, being based partly or fully out of country was an advantage for data security.</td>
<td>Most recorders using this model operated in particularly hostile, dangerous and repressive environments. Use of the model was often a response to this environment. Secure channels of communication are essential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every existing source was pursued and used by these recorders. They sought to exhaust all possible stores of official and unofficial info – access to archives was a major advantage. Families and witnesses were a crucial source. The balance of sources used varied by context. Information loss where no witnesses survived was a problem.</td>
<td>All were based in the country of conflict; one also recorded casualties of conflicts their state was involved in abroad. Strong connection to the country or status/recognition there was needed in order to access witnesses and official documents.</td>
<td>One recorder worked in a state that was hostile to documentation; others suffered threats and intimidation. However, all engaged their governments in some dialogue about casualties, so some political space for recording may be necessary to use this model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some used DNA identification, others did not – facilities and trained staff were crucial. Access to families for forensic samples was also crucial, as was access to witnesses. Information loss where no witnesses survived was a problem.</td>
<td>Some were locally based, some worked in different contexts worldwide. A local presence, good knowledge of the context and engagement with communities is essential.</td>
<td>Request or permission is needed from the state for key functions such as exhumations. Some level of cooperation or agreement with the state is necessary in order to function – though this did not mean that these recorders did not face hostility or obstruction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continues...
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|================================================|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| **Resources needed**        |                                               |                                               |                                 |                                 |
| Can be low cost – many documents are free to access – depending on the volume of documents to be processed, the number of people needed to work on them, and whether these people were paid. | The potential difference in cost to the document only model is in number of on the ground contacts or fieldworkers and whether they are voluntary or paid. | Varies according to the structure of the network – whether network members are volunteers or paid fieldworkers and how extensive the network is. Non-monetary resources such as community trust and contacts, and the ability to train fieldworkers, are crucial. | Recorders reported relatively low levels of staffing at the time of the survey, though projects were at different stages. Most had sophisticated information systems. Field trips to interview witnesses require resources. Partnerships, community trust and a public profile were also needed. | Requires the most specialist expertise and technical resources of all approaches. All had complex information systems. Organisations were generally large in terms of staffing, though some were not. |
| **Goals or motivations of recorders using this model** | Full range of motivations. Some recorders’ goals were limited by this methodology; others chose this model specifically for their purposes – e.g. real time recording for risk assessment. | Similar to document only approach. | Most had strong motivations relating to the recognition of victims and their families, and justice. This linked to the close connection they had with communities through the network structure. | Strong motivations relating to the recognition of victims and their families, and the creation of a historical record. Focus on redress for harm and links to legal processes. High standards of proof link to goals. | Primary goal is the identification of victims and the return of their remains to their families. All contributed to legal processes. All had motivations around truth seeking/creating a historical record. |
| **Data format of records produced by this model** | Just over half were primarily incident-based in their recording. Source limitations (what was available was often poor on personal detail e.g. media reports) dictated this. | All surveyed based their recording around incidents – this is not an essential feature of the approach, but was dictated by the sources available to these recorders. | Most based their recording around individuals. Some based it around incidents because personal details were not available in every case. | Recording centred on individuals. | Recording centred on individuals. |
| **Uses** | Advocacy on violence reduction policies, risk assessment, academic analysis, informing humanitarian response planning, informing official counts of the dead, used as contextualising information in legal processes. | Advocacy on violence reduction policies and monitoring the effectiveness of existing policies, risk assessment, use by governments to inform policies, informing humanitarian response planning, academic analysis | Used by humanitarian organisations, in legal processes for reparations, by recorders to make submissions to ICC and Special Rapporteurs in UN system | Memorialisation and education, influencing public discourse around casualties, contributing evidence on individual cases or regarding patterns of harm to domestic and international courts, to make submissions to processes in the UN system, used by governments to allocate war benefits | To contribute to truth and reconciliation commissions or similar, as expert evidence in individual cases or to show patterns of harm in domestic and international courts, to contribute to memorialisation. |
2.5 A Spectrum of Casualty Recording

This study has shown that there is a spectrum of casualty recording. That is:

- There are different ways to record casualties that are possible under different circumstances, including at different points during or after a conflict;
- These will give different levels of certainty or confirmation;
- They will also give different levels of detail about victims and the circumstances of their deaths;
- However, all these different types of recording have their different uses, which will be necessary at different points in time;
- And, work done at different stages of conflict or through different methods can provide a starting point for, or feed into, other types of investigations, which may be done later, towards a more comprehensive record of all individuals who were killed by conflict violence.

Given this interrelation of different types of recording work, for a more comprehensive record to be achieved it is crucial that whatever is possible under the circumstances should always be done. Further to separate approaches having their own uses, as well as providing a starting point for further investigations and a foundation for a more comprehensive record, collecting and recording all available evidence at any given time will also help prevent information loss. Witnesses or documents may become unavailable, or memories become vague, if documentation is not started as soon as possible.

Others with different capacities or expertise, or working at a different point in time, might create this more comprehensive record building on earlier work. If a robust and comprehensive record is to be achieved, it is also important that casualty recording should continue for as long as necessary. Especially in the case of the identification of unknown victims and the search for missing, the work of recording can continue for many years. More exact information on victims, perpetrators and circumstances can take years and the search for missing, the work of recording can continue for many years. More exact information on victims, perpetrators and circumstances can take decades to emerge into the public domain. However long it takes to discover, this information will still be important to families, communities and legal processes.

This principle of the interconnection and value of different types of recording was seen in the work of the casualty recorders we surveyed. For example, most of those using a ‘multiple source investigation’ approach after conflict (see section 2.3 above p17), made efforts to collect what information they could whilst violence was going on. This was done in order to make sure information was not lost; to give a starting point for more in-depth research or confirmation; and in some cases as part of work to raise awareness of the situation and bring about action at the time. Other recorders using a ‘document-based recording’ or ‘document-based recording with on-the-ground corroborations’ approach (see section 2.3 p17) expressed the idea that their work could provide a baseline or starting point for others to build up a more comprehensive record. Alternatively, they stated their intention to expand their work in the future to make this more detailed record themselves.

“[From] a human rights perspective our database... I would suggest it can only be a starting point. A listing of incidents is available, but... individual cases would require independent investigation and... confirmation and we don’t pretend to do that. Our database can only be a starting point for something like this. You [can] see how many incidents of civilian fatality there are or how many incidents of so-called terrorist fatalities there are. Then you can, as a human rights agency, someone can go out and [investigate].”

It is therefore important to consider casualty recording as a spectrum of approaches that can be and are often linked, including across the time period of a conflict. This is another reason to consider casualty recording as a unified field. The way these links, between different types of work done under different circumstances, can function is demonstrated in a diagram in section 2.5.2 below p26. This diagram is a simplification of the field and recorders’ work: it serves as an illustration. Not all types of recording work are included, and neither are all the connections or consequences that exist. We also do not intend to claim that the links or effects in the diagram always occur, but that they can. The purpose is to demonstrate the idea of a spectrum.

One important aspect of the spectrum of casualty recording is the extent of confirmation or certainty that different types of recording can give. This is also simplified in the diagram in section 2.5.2; the idea of a spectrum of certainty is explained in the next section 2.5.1.
2.5.1 Different Levels of Confirmation or Certainty in Recording

There are different degrees of certainty that can be achieved in casualty recording. This should not be considered a simple distinction between records of deaths that are verified and those that are not: again, there is a spectrum or scale of confirmation of casualty information that is possible.

Within the range of approaches to recording there are different degrees of certainty about casualty information that can be achieved. This should not be considered as a simple distinction between records of deaths that are ‘verified’ and those that are not: There is a scale of confirmation or certainty.

Whether a recorder has robust procedures to weigh up different sources and cross-check information is the first crucial factor in the level of certainty that their records should be considered to give. More certainty is given by records based on corroborated information and the systematic evaluation of contradictions between different sources, grounded in good knowledge of the context (for a detailed discussion of the issues and nuances involved in evaluating sources, see the paper ‘Evaluating Sources’ in this collection).

The amount of certainty provided by different casualty records will depend to a great extent on the source material that a recorder had access to. In terms of the quality of information given by a source, there are two important factors:

- The level of detail given and the closeness to events of the source; and
- The standard of proof that the authors of the source required in order to produce the documents or statements that are then used by a recorder.

When similarly robust evaluation procedures are applied, a record of the death of an individual that is based on a death certificate (in a context where these can be considered trustworthy), the testimony of eyewitnesses and family members, and the judgment of a court, gives more certainty than a record of an incident that is based on the independent reports of two news agencies stating that three individuals died in a certain place on a certain date, for example.

This does not mean that records offering less certainty will not be useful or should be considered ‘unconfirmed’. The highest standard of proof is not needed for every purpose that casualty recording can contribute to. For example: Continuous open-source document-based recording during conflict that contributes to humanitarian response planning by giving indications of conflict dynamics does not need the same level of certainty that records contributing expert testimony to legal cases do. The former can also be produced in close to real time, which is necessary for the purpose of response planning, whereas the latter cannot.

With the five approaches to casualty recording described in section 2.3 above p17, there is variation between but also within the models in terms of the degree of certainty about casualties that their records give. Within ‘document-based recording’ for example, a recorder with access to a wide array of official records (e.g. hospital, police, death certificates) in a well-documented context will be able to produce records that have more certainty than a recorder using media-based casualty recording. However, both these approaches will provide less confirmation than the ‘multiple source investigation’ approach or (where this is relevant) the forensic identification of victims.

Though this scale is not straightforward, of the approaches above the last two (‘multiple source investigation’, ‘unknown victim identification’) in general produce records that offer more certainty than the first three (‘document-based recording’, ‘document-based recording with on-the-ground corroborations’, ‘recording using an on-the-ground network’).

Recorders expressed the idea of a scale of certainty in their work, for example by deliberately using terms such as ‘reported’ incidents.

“Each information system is very much geared towards the practical purposes for which it was created...[if we needed] more detailed information on violations, we [would] need a team of on the ground verifiers, for example, and then you’re talking about a whole other mechanism. Relying to the extent that we are on citizen journalism, I don’t want to say that we have to relax our standards, but we have to maintain realistic standards for verification.”

“‘It’s not only about the sources, but using our own judgement, our own understanding of the situation, the culture, and the conflict that we have experienced.’

Question for standards and standardisation: Is a scale of confirmation or certainty, to help others understand different records better, a useful idea?
instead of ‘verified’ incidents where the confirmation given cannot be considered to be at the highest standard of proof, or through using verification scales. As part of the question of developing standards and standardisation, casualty recording practitioners may wish to consider whether it would be helpful to develop this idea of a scale of certainty in recording. For example, different categories could be created that would express different standards of certainty or confirmation, and these could be applied publicly to the work of different recorders. This could be a helpful tool in expressing to others what a recorder’s work represents.

2.5.2 A Diagram to Demonstrate This Spectrum

The explanation on the following pages builds up, step by step, a diagram (Figure 1) that illustrates the range of casualty recording practice and how it is connected, according to the results of this study. As mentioned above, the diagram simplifies the field of recording, and is hypothetical as it does not include all casualty recording practice. However, it does reflect real approaches and connections. It shows known uses of casualty recording from the work of those surveyed for this project.

The discussion describes the variables in the spectrum, then different scenarios in recording, and how these can link up. The complete diagram illustrates the idea described above that there are different types of casualty recording possible under different circumstances, all of which can be valuable and can contribute to each other in a connected range of practice. The explanation below should be read by numbered step with reference to the numbered areas on the illustrations.
Figure 1A: The variables in the spectrum

- At different stages during and after conflict, (1) different types of recording, which offer different levels of certainty, will be possible. (2)
- What recording is possible will depend on the context, including the types and quality of sources available and types of investigations that recorders can do. (3)
- These will produce different types of results (4), and so different uses or benefits. (5)

Figure 1B: A scenario during conflict

- During intense periods of conflict, certain sources might be available. (6)
- A recorder may not be able to independently investigate the information given by these sources, but can aggregate and corroborate them, (7) and so produce a database of conflict incidents. (8)
- Combined for example with mapping technology, such information can be useful to humanitarian response planners and conflict-affected communities for risk and needs assessments. (9)
- Such a database can also provide analysis that is useful for formulating policies to reduce violence, examining the limitations of current policies, and for academic/wider research purposes. (10)
Figure 1C: When the context changes

- With a change in the context (for example violence has decreased or stopped, or a recorder’s capacity to investigate has improved) different sources and possibilities to investigate will become available (11). Work that has already been done, to corroborate information and create a database of conflict incidents from the sources that were available, can provide a baseline or starting point for new investigations. For example, this previous work (along with tips-offs or rumours) can provide indications about where further investigations should be directed, and gives records that can be built on and added to. (12)

Figure 1D: More detailed investigation

- These new investigations may be detailed, on the ground investigations, which use new sources, or seek more detailed information from existing sources, to build a more detailed and certain picture of the human losses from a conflict. (13)

- The result of such investigations could be a more comprehensive, detailed database about conflict casualties, which might build on an existing database of conflict incidents. (14)

- Such records can contribute to more detailed academic and policy analysis. They can also contribute to procedures that require a greater standard of proof or level of detail, such as assigning compensation, or the evaluation of the conduct of participants to conflict. (15)
Post-conflict, previous detailed on the ground investigation into conflict incidents can assist work to search for and determine the fate of missing people, investigate graves and correctly identify unknown victims. (16)

This work is needed to end families' uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones, and to return their relatives remains to them. (17)

The identification of unknown victims also contributes back to a more comprehensive picture of the human losses from conflicts, which are not limited to the missing. (18)

Information from a comprehensive and detailed database of victims or from unknown victim identifications can contribute to memorialisation. (19)

Such information can also form the basis for expert evidence that contributes to investigations and prosecutions for crimes committed during conflict. Casualty records will not provide legal analysis, but they will provide information either on individual cases or on patterns of harm that can be used by others to make legal determinations. The level of detail given and standard of proof achieved by these records will be important for legal purposes. (20)
3. KEY ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN DEVELOPING A CASUALTY RECORDING SYSTEM

Following the discussions so far in this paper, and based on a consideration of the recording work we have encountered in the survey, this section sets out some key issues that would-be casualty recorders (and others) should consider when developing systems to record. A ‘casualty recording system’ in this section refers to the set of processes and tools that are used to do this work: the methods to collect, process, confirm and analyse information about casualties and the way in which the information is stored (for a full discussion of how recorders handled information, see the paper ‘Evaluating Sources’20). The purpose of this section is not to give a definitive set of instructions on developing a casualty recording system, but to indicate some of the key principles that can guide the construction of a system suitable to the context in which a particular recorder is operating.

The recommendations given in this section are based entirely on the work of casualty recorders in this survey. Each idea or principle comes from the work of at least one recorder.

3.1 Three Components to the Design of a Casualty Recording System

Based on the information that we have collected in this study, we propose that in order to create a casualty recording system, it is important to:

- **Construct a data model before starting recording.** That is, set out the pieces of information to be collected, the categories, and the links between different pieces of information.

- **Construct a codebook before starting recording.** A codebook can define the pieces of information to be collected, categories within them, and the definitions of these for the benefit of those using the system, as well as for others who are interested in the recorder’s methodology. A codebook will also indicate which details are compulsory or optional to record, and how information that is uncertain should be recorded (e.g. with an ‘unknown perpetrator’ category). A codebook will also set out the recorder’s inclusion criteria. Such codebooks should be dynamic, so that developments such as key decisions on difficult cases can be integrated consistently into future work. (For a discussion of issues relating to definition and categorisation, see the paper ‘Definition and Categorisation’ in this collection21).

- **Develop a procedure.** This will be a detailed description of the way that information about casualties will be processed, from collection, to confirmation, to analysis. This description will be useful to those working on the system, and can also to explain the system to others.

The form and content of these three components will be influenced by the approach the recorder uses (see section 2.3 p.17 for the five approaches to recording). **Two key factors for recorders to consider when deciding which approach to use, and when determining the contents of the data model, codebook and procedure, are the purpose of the system and the sources that are available.**

3.1.1 Constructing a Data Model

What details might be collected and how these might be stored can be modelled or designed using one or more tables in a spreadsheet format. In some casualty recording systems, information is divided up according to different areas: incident; victim(s); perpetrator(s); source(s) of information; state response or any other follow up to an incident. Some recorders will store this material in databases that link these different areas, so that information on an incident is clearly associated with information about its victims for anyone using the system. For example, incident and victim pages might be simultaneously displayed in their system in tabs and carry a common code. An area on sources can include both information about the sources of information (e.g. names of witnesses, dates interviewed) and the source documents themselves (e.g. transcripts of testimonies, video files, scanned documents).

Who is using the casualty recording system and for what purposes will be important to the data collected. If for example a system is set up to analyse trends in the levels of violence suffered by a civilian population, it might be unnecessary to collect detailed information about individual victims. On the other hand, a system

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20 For other papers in this collection see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection
21 For other papers in this collection see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection
whose aim is to contribute to the identification of human rights violations will collect as much information as possible on individual victims and the circumstances in which they died.

There is a practical case when designing a casualty recording system for trying to collect and input as many units of information as possible: a more detailed analysis of the conflict can be given, and collecting more details can help when crosschecking different sources and decrease duplication in records. However, this must be balanced with the recorder’s capacity, which might be limited. As mentioned in section 2.5 p25, collecting all available information is crucial to building a more comprehensive record of casualties and preventing information loss. If the recorder cannot process or code all the information they have gathered at the time of collection, they can still store all source material that they encounter in the course of their investigations for processing themselves or by others later.

For recorders who will use software to perform analysis on their casualty data, the information must be expressed in a way that can still be understood by this software. It must be formalised, that is converted from narrative to standard, consistent units of information that can be processed to give results on trends, produce statistics, and so on (for a short discussion of dealing with vagueness when formalising data, see section 3.2 of the paper ‘Definition and Categorisation’ in this collection22). To show the range of pieces of information collected by recorders, which must be formalised for this purpose, the following is a list of details that recorders in this survey collected (some details have not been included in this list as they were very specialised):

**Incident details:**
- Date of event; Location of event; Numbers killed; Groups or people taking part in violence; Groups or people that caused death, injury or harm (perpetrators); Group or people that claimed the attack; Weapons used or other means of death, injury or harm; What led to or followed the incident or what other incidents it is connected to; Are war crimes/IHL violations suspected – if so type of violation; Whether the incident was a combat incident or not; Satellite or aerial images

**Perpetrator details:**
- Perpetrator group e.g. military unit involved; Number of perpetrators; Names, ranks of perpetrators; Location of the armed groups/people causing harm

**Victim details:**
- Name of the victim; Nicknames, nom de guerre, alternative spellings of names, pseudonyms or aliases assigned for victim anonymity; Name of victim’s father, mother, or grandparents; Age (either in years/age range/whether the victim was a child or adult); Sex/gender; Occupation or place of work; Marital status; Whether they were a parent or not, if so number of children; The location of their hometown or place of residence; Place of birth; ID number; Military unit/rank (where relevant); Nationality; Ethnicity; Religion; An image or a photograph of the victim; Personal stories or descriptions of the person; Membership of any group or organisation, or any public positions held; Relationship to other victims

**Details about individual victims’ deaths:**
- Status of victim i.e. were they a civilian/combatant; Was the person detained; Group or person that caused their death; Weapons used; Cause of death; Place of injuries on the body; Date of death; Date of injury causing death, if different; Date of hospitalisation, if different; Date of discovery of a body; Date victim was last seen alive/of disappearance; Date of burial(s); Date of exhumation; Location of death; Location of injury causing death, if different; Location of hospitalisation; Location where body was discovered; Location of burial or grave; Location where victim was last seen alive/of disappearance; Further details of how a victim was buried (e.g. photos of gravesite, was it a mass grave, was religious ceremony observed); Who was the death reported to and what follow up was there e.g. inquest, post-mortem, court case etc.

**Source details:**
- Type of source; identifying details of eyewitnesses (e.g. name, address, etc.); Locations of eyewitnesses at the time of incident

Some databases used by casualty recorders used tags or flags to help with analysis as part of the formalisation of information. For example, recorders might flag cases that were difficult to confirm, or

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22 For other papers in this collection see [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection)
involved particularly vulnerable groups. By running a report on all cases that had a certain flag, a recorder could analyse that topic.

See section 3 of the paper ‘Definition and Categorisation’ for further discussion relevant to constructing a data model\(^{23}\).

3.1.2 Producing a Code Book

The details available in a recorder’s source material will ultimately limit which pieces of information a recorder can try to collect, and which details can be made compulsory to collect. The source material will also affect how different details can be recorded or described. For example: systems relying on media systems sometimes chose not to use categories that used legal terminology, such as ‘protected person’, because the recorder considered that the source material could not support such a categorisation to a degree that would satisfy audiences. A system whose aim was to contribute to the identification of human rights violations might use sources that can give more detailed and in depth information, and will use such categories, as this is important to the system’s purpose.

The kind of specific issues that a recorder might have to consider in the design of a codebook include:

- How will categories be generated and defined? Will it be relevant or possible to use the work of other organisations or bodies (especially those that may use the data produced), or sources such as International Humanitarian Law? (See the paper ‘Definition and Categorisation’ for discussion on this theme.)
- How can locations be described in a standardised manner? Are GPS coordinates available? If not, is there a standard map that could be used for designations of district, village etc.?
- How will spellings from other scripts be transliterated in a standard way? Spellings of details such as villages/districts/areas must be consistent.
- How can the age of victims be described if dates of birth are not widely available? (e.g. through age ranges, using the categories of child/adult only)

See also the paper ‘Definition and Categorisation’ for discussions relevant to constructing a codebook.\(^{24}\)

3.1.3 Developing a Procedure

Figure 2 is an illustration of the way in which many casualty recording systems operate. It is common for

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\(^{23}\) For other papers in this collection see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection

\(^{24}\) For other papers in this collection see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection
recorders to divide up the process of recording into separate stages that are done by different people. The intention of this is to simplify (by breaking up an often complex task into manageable steps) and to minimise human error (at each stage, the work of the previous stage will be looked at and mistakes or disputes in interpretation of data can be identified). Some recorders also kept track of which people took which steps in the system so that work could be traced back to individuals, for quality control (see the paper ‘Evaluating Sources’ for a discussion of how recorders processed information).

The purpose of a system, and the sources and investigative possibilities available, will affect the types of confirmation that are/can be attempted in stage 3 of Figure 2, as described in the spectrum in section 2.5 p25.

Information security is important to consider in developing a casualty recording procedure. Key questions that recorders considered included:

- How and where will information be stored (i.e. where will servers be for a database, where will hard copy files be, how will they be protected)?
- How will information get safely from the field where it contains sensitive information e.g. about witnesses and perpetrators?
- What information will be shared and with whom?
- How will victims and witnesses be protected if sharing data?

### 3.2 Key Standards for Effective Recording

As a result of analysing the work of those who took part in this study, and looking at what recorders mentioned was helpful to them, ORG has developed a list of key standards for effective recording. These standards are important both to the process of recording and for building trust and credibility with target audiences. The standards are that a casualty recorder’s work:

1. Is, and is seen to be, impartial and reliable,
2. Has clear, transparent definitions and inclusion criteria,
3. Has a transparent methodology with robust, multiple-stage checking procedures,
4. Is connected to local communities,
5. Uses multiple sources,
6. Publishes disaggregated incident/individual level information,
7. Is open to correction, or the addition of new information.

Casualty recorders may postpone the implementation of some of these features for safety reasons. In order to protect sources or others, sometimes it will not be safe to publish comprehensive casualty information, or detailed information about methodologies. However, it may be safe to share these privately with some key users of casualty data such as humanitarian responders and courts.

All the features explained in detail below are generally achievable, and recorders in this study have expressed their value to casualty recording work.

#### 3.2.1 Impartial and Reliable

By impartial we mean that in the process of collecting, categorising and assessing information a recorder has no bias. There will be no discrimination regarding the victims that are included, and the categories a recorder uses to describe victims or incidents will not reflect any political prejudice.

“You have to be very objective, you have to be very neutral... for research purposes being very objective is always helpful.”

Being, and being seen to be, objective, independent and professional was important to many recorders for building credibility with others. It was important:

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25 For other papers in this collection see [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection)

• In order to for their work to be accepted by their intended audiences as a trustworthy representation of the situation;
• In order to decrease the credibility of attacks or smear campaigns by hostile parties on the recorder and its work. This is important for maintaining authority with the public and other audiences;
• So that recorders can operate more freely and without the suspicion of the state or other parties to a conflict, who might be wary of recorders’ motives or agendas. Also, in order to build contacts to share information with those who might otherwise have been suspicious or hostile;
• In order to build trust with victims’ families and witnesses, as both an audience and a source of information.

For most recorders, it was important to be seen as impartial and reliable as an organisation, as well as in their casualty recording work specifically. Some recorders reported that being affiliated to an academic or research institution helped them with establishing these credentials. Others depended on the hard-won reputation their organisation had built: nationally or internationally, in relation to casualty recording or other work that they did, sometimes depending on the previously established expertise of key members of the organisation.

For some in this study, being seen as impartial as an organisation was not important, and they were very clear about having strong political motivations to their work. However, professionalism and objectivity in producing their data was crucial for these recorders in order to be able to use their casualty records credibly for their goals. These recorders gave examples of academics, courts, media and government bodies using their work. There is not enough information in this study to meaningfully compare how the impartiality (or not) of organisations interacts with how their work is used and seen by others. This is another issue for practitioners to debate in relation to standards: if a recorder conforms to certain professional standards in their work, will and should their possible political motivations be important to others?

Whether in relation to the production of data or the organisation itself, the question of building a professional reputation as an impartial and reliable recorder is not a simple one. This is an issue that practitioners might wish to consider within the question of standards and standardisation in casualty recording. According to those surveyed, some of the other features listed here might help a recorder to build such a reputation.

3.2.2 Clear, Transparent Definitions and Inclusion Criteria

As discussed in the paper ‘Definition and Categorisation’, if casualty recorders state their definitions and inclusion criteria publicly, this can increase others’ understanding of their work, and ability to use it. It can also help build credibility and acceptance by following principles of transparency and openness.

Without knowing who is counted in casualty records (e.g. are they just civilians; are only direct deaths from violence included or are other deaths listed), it is hard for others to know what the records represent. It will also be difficult for others to determine how the records might relate to other counts or estimates of human losses from conflict.

This is the same for definitions. Different interpretations of the term ‘civilian’ can explain differences between lists of casualties produced by different organisations in the same context. However, without explanation, these differences can affect the credibility of casualty recorders. A lack of clear definitions can also affect the ability of different people or organisations to integrate casualty information into their own records, or use it for their own analyses and other work.

3.2.3 Transparent Methodology with Robust, Multiple Stage Checking Procedures

Transparency in methodology again allows others to draw their own conclusions about how casualty records should be understood, and to evaluate how useful they are. For example: How comprehensive are

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27 For other papers in this collection see [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection)
these records likely to be? What level of certainty can be attached to them and the numbers a recorder produces from them? This can be important for building trust in, support for, and acceptance of a recorder’s work among different audiences. Such transparency can help build trust and neutralise attacks on credibility by allowing recorders to clearly show the standards that they have been using in their work.

“When our data was politically attacked, people who came [journalistically and academically] to our defence were able to cite our transparent methodology and sourcing. The transparency is critical.”

Robust confirmation procedures are important to all recorders and to the value of the information that they produce. Approaches to confirmation are elaborated in ‘Evaluating Sources’. As described above in section 3.1.3 p32, a multiple-stage procedure of confirming information, involving different individuals, is an approach that many recorders use in order to reduce errors in their work. It is good practice in recording to develop written guidelines in the form of a codebook and procedure containing the recorder’s definitions and methodology. This should be kept updated, e.g. with decisions on difficult cases.

Recorders may not find it safe to openly share their methodology under certain circumstances. For example, publicly revealing the existence of an information network could put sources in danger. However, under such circumstances the methodology might still be shared, where safe, with certain key individuals or organisations that used a recorder’s information to benefit conflict-affected populations, in order to establish trust and credibility.

3.2.4 Connected to Local Communities

Having a connection to local communities – from having knowledge of the local context, to close collaboration with local people and organisations – is important to effective recording.

A detailed knowledge of the local context helped recorders to interpret information about casualties better. For example, the credibility of information given by different sources about who the perpetrator of an incident was better evaluated with the knowledge of the possible biases of different sources or the plausibility of the scenarios they were proposing. This can only come from knowledge of the context and its actors.

For many recorders, individuals and organisations on the ground were key sources of information. To collect information effectively from such sources, a strong connection to local communities was crucial. For example, the importance of local partnerships with other organisations for source information was emphasised by many of recorders. These partnerships were both with organisations that documented casualty information and those that worked with local communities in other capacities. These could provide either information or connections/access to families or witnesses.

The importance of knowing local languages, cultural sensitivities and awareness of the difficulties and traumas that might be experienced by families and witnesses in giving accounts were also noted.

Trust was frequently brought up as key for recorders in gathering information, and was built from making connections with local communities. This might be done through building a national reputation with outreach and public awareness activities, having local workers build up relationships and reputation, or building relationships with local figures of importance such as religious leaders.

“With the field workers, not only do people know them very well but they also know their environments very well and they have great access to a lot of sources of information. [They] have relations with people in the media who contact them, and they have sources from [officials] sometimes.”

Where a recorder counted local communities as one of their audiences, a well-established connection or relationship helped with feeding back information, especially to marginalised groups. A connection to the community was also a source of credibility for some recorders.

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28 For other papers in this collection see [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_andReports/casualty_recording_practice_collection](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection)
3.2.5 Use of Multiple Sources

Using a variety of independent sources to document the same case is a basic feature of recording. Recorders considered the use of multiple sources important in order to overcome the possibilities of bias or inaccuracy should any one source be taken in isolation. Multiple sourcing gives recorders more robust information by enabling crosschecking or corroboration, and is something all recorders attempted (for a discussion of confirmation procedures, see ‘Evaluating Sources’). 

Some recorders reported that different types of sources gave different areas of coverage or were better at giving different types of information: No one source or organisation comprehensively covered the entire conflict. Therefore, a more complete picture could only be created through combining as many different types of information as possible. For this purpose, partnerships or information exchange with other organisations or institutions that had access to different areas or types of information were crucial, especially where the information was not generally published.

"Each kind of source has a different strength so [one NGO] has a very strong regional presence in rural areas, the press has much more information in the nearby urban areas. We don’t know if the state has a real presence in [certain areas]"

On the different kinds of information that different types of sources might contribute, recorders gave various examples: Family members might be better at giving personal information, such as a victim’s profession, than an exact cause of death; military press releases may be very accurate on the weapons used in an incident, but less trustworthy regarding the combat status of victims; hospital records will be accurate on the cause of death but cannot necessarily give information regarding perpetrators.

Figure 3, based on the work of the recorders surveyed and examples they gave, illustrates these simple but important points. In a fictional country X, there is a non-international armed conflict, with a non-state armed group in control of a portion of the territory. State records therefore cannot provide comprehensive information. However, a UN agency may operate in part of the area out of state control. Both conflict parties will also have information to contribute to recorders that may not be accessible to others. Collecting from these sources will be important for the recorder in order to build a comprehensive picture.

X also has a mountainous/forested area in which the reach of state institutions is poor. However, here, local NGOs and religious institutions can contribute information from the people they work with. This will again increase the coverage and detail of casualty records. Where information can be exchanged with medical sources, these can give both increased geographical coverage, for example in the areas not under state control, and different types of information, to build a more detailed picture. Where the operational areas of all these different types of sources overlap, the information can be corroborated for a more trustworthy record.

For other papers in this collection see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection
3.2.6 Publish Disaggregated Incident/Individual Level Information

How recorders treated the release of information is discussed in detail in ‘Evaluating Sources’ and ‘Why We Record Conflict Casualties’. ³⁰

An important principle for many recorders was transparency in their work. For over half of those surveyed, this extended to transparency in the information that they released about casualties: these recorders shared, or intended to share, lists of incidents or individuals with others, as well as numbers.

“The transparency and openness was very important for influence, for impact and also people then were ready to accept the project, because it was totally open...if you want to eliminate manipulation with numbers, you have to open your research for everybody...if my results are wrong then what are your results?”

Some did not share this type of information due to a lack of capacity: For example, they did not have the technical knowledge or time to post information on a website. Or, they felt that including all the data in the reports they published would make these reports too unwieldy. Some did not publish because of safety or confidentiality.

Those who did publish disaggregated information often kept certain details private for safety reasons. The names of victims were not released if this could put families in danger, for example. Certain information such as the names of witnesses was never released.

Some of the reasons why recorders felt it was important to release disaggregated information were:

- For the recognition, public acknowledgment or memorialisation of victims;
- For the purpose of building a historical record, which must be public and open;
- To build trust with audiences by showing what their numbers were based on, and that they were committed to openness and transparency;
- To counter accusations of bias or smears on the recorder, by showing all the information and how it was researched as fully as possible;
- So that, in principle, it was possible for others to verify the information, compare it against different records, or evaluate the conclusions a casualty recorder came to. This extends to families, who will be able to confirm the name of their loved one in a list, but would find it hard to know if that victim was included in aggregated figures.

“When you ask me about my own database, I can identify details of incidents. Each number on my table would have a linked incident...and I would be able to track the whole process. But when I get a consolidated table from the government that is all I’m getting. It is completely opaque beyond that, I can’t go back to the incident. [It is] take it or leave it”

Several recorders stated that information that was not disaggregated was almost impossible to use as a source. As recording works by documenting separate cases, data such as monthly figures could not be integrated by recorders in most circumstances, as it does not provide the level of detail that is necessary for comparison on individual cases.

“[When you] don’t have precise dates of an event, you don’t have the precise location of the event, I mean you just have block statistics...you can’t really use it.”

Recorders are themselves a source for others. Disaggregated information is important to those who use the results of casualty recording. The usefulness of casualty recording to others will often be in the granular information about different incidents and individuals that it can give, showing cases across location and time. Releasing disaggregated information is also important:

- For those recording in the same context to compare information with each other. Such exchange can help to build a more robust and complete record;

³⁰ For other papers in this collection see [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection)
• In order for others to use the information for further recording or for the integration with other lists, as per the range of connected approaches to recording described in section 2.5 p25.

3.2.7 Open to Correction

Openness to correction has two components:

• As part of a robust recording methodology, new information should always be integrated into previously documented cases, so that the record is as accurate as possible. Some recorders had systems to actively seek corrections or additional information from others. For example, some invited people with information or queries to contact them via their website, or had other public outreach activities.

• Openness to correction and about the limitations of a recorders’ data is also part of the transparency and openness principles described above.

Most recorders dealt with new information and updates as a standard part of their procedure of seeking and collecting casualty information. Several recorders remarked that the recording they did could never be finalised: New information and details would always emerge. To acknowledge this and make corrections was reported as a strength, not a weakness.

4. WHAT NEXT FOR THE FIELD: GOOD PRACTICE AND STANDARDS

Many of the recorders interviewed for this study remarked that they started from scratch in developing their methodology; they were not aware of any previous projects doing this kind of work, nor were any other kinds of guidance available. Some thought that they might have been the first to attempt recording.

“To my knowledge, at that time, there wasn’t a documented methodology around this kind of thing...So we were kind of having to make the road as we walked...you were having to figure it out.”

One aim of this project is that recorders in the future will have a stronger basis for the development of their work. We have found that projects working in different contexts across the world and at different times developed very similar principles in how and why they recorded casualties. This allows us to speak of a field of casualty recording. By describing general approaches, some common problems and how recorders address these now, we hope that those working on these issues in the future will have better guidance in their work.

As discussed throughout section 2 p10, the field of recording as documented through our survey is diverse. The results of the recording projects we surveyed ranged from establishing a baseline dataset of conflict incidents with minimal details about each case to comprehensive projects who judged their records to cover almost every victim in great detail.

It is a core argument of this paper that all recording is useful. Being able to achieve a lower level of certainty does not mean either that no recording can be done or that such recording will serve no function. Our study has found that recorders produce data that is of a sufficient quality to be useful to other actors irrespective of the range of sources available or the environment that they work in.

However, if it is a goal that every casualty should be recorded, it is vital that the investigations started by baseline approaches can be built upon. It is also important that recorders have the opportunity and resources to develop this comprehensive record: This was not the case for the majority of the recorders we surveyed. ORG makes recommendations in the policy paper produced from this project31 to states, inter-governmental organisations and global civil society for the improvement of this situation.

This collection is a starting point for recorders to consider how the field can be developed. It is a guide to the field recording practice more than a handbook of methodology, and the number of topics it could cover was limited. We hope to build on it with future research and the input of casualty recorders, towards a more comprehensive and practical resource. How this work develops will depend on the way in which casualty recorders answer two questions:

• Should professional standards in practice be developed for the field, and if so, how?
• Should casualty recorders worldwide attempt to standardise the data they produce, and if so, how?

4.1 Professional Standards in Practice for the Field

One of the approaches to recording described above in section 2.3 p17, ‘unknown victim identification’, already has its own professional standards as a field that we believe is part of, but also exists separately from, the field of casualty recording. This is not the case for the other approaches.

We propose that casualty recorders may wish to discuss how professional standards in practice for the whole field might be created. From our analysis of practice for this study, we believe this will involve addressing the following issues, among others:

1. What would be the purpose of developing standards? Would it be to give guidance to recorders in how to do their work, to increase the credibility of recorders’ work/help others better understand it, or both?
2. If one purpose of developing professional standards is to increase the credibility of recorders’ work with others, should one goal be to help recorders build reputations as impartial and reliable? How can this be done?
3. Are there any basic standards that it is possible for all recorders to adhere to, no matter what approach they are using or the limitations of the context they operate in? Are the key standards proposed as a result of this study in section 3.2 p34 a suitable basis for these?
4. The level of certainty and detail that a recorder can achieve in their records, and the approach that they will be able to use, will depend on the context they operate in (among other factors). This is discussed in the sections 2 and 6. Should different standards be developed for different approaches? How should these approaches be described – is the model of five approaches given in section 2.3 sufficient?
5. What aspects of recording should the standards cover? For example, should standards be about definitions and categories, how information is confirmed, how it is released, how source material is collected, etc.?
6. Should the concept of a scale of confirmation or certainty be included in these standards? How could this be developed?
7. How would standards, and adherence by casualty recorders to them, be expressed to others?
8. Different recorders’ work has different uses, and is used by different people and institutions. Standards may need to be developed partly with end users in mind – for example, recorders who aim for their information to be used by courts may need to achieve certain standards of detail and verification, and this should be considered in discussions. How can this be done effectively?
9. There were very few state or official institutions in this survey. How could professional standards be developed in a way that would allow state and non-state organisations to collaborate on casualty recording through, and using, common standards?

4.2 The Question of Standardisation of Data

A slightly separate issue from that of setting standards in the practice of casualty recording is the matter of whether information about casualties should be standardised across the field. Some organisations that use the information produced by recorders have expressed their desire for this to Oxford Research Group, for example in the interests of creating a global database of deaths from conflict. It is for recorders to discuss and decide if this is possible or desirable to do. During this discussion the following issues, among others, would have to be considered (see also section 3.3 in the paper ‘Definition and Categorisation’ for a discussion of the possibilities for standardisation in definitions and categories):

1. What would the purpose of standardisation of data be? Again, would it help recorders (especially new projects) to develop their work, or give recorders credibility with others?
2. This study has shown that the level of detail collected by recorders varies widely, from those collecting basic details about incidents to those collecting comprehensive information about victims, perpetrators and circumstances of death. The level of detail collected about different pieces of information (e.g., types of weapons) will also vary. How can this be taken into account for a global standardisation of data?
3. As mentioned above, information produced in different ways will offer different levels of certainty. Should this be taken into account in a global standardisation of data, especially if this will contribute to a global database? If so, how?

4. Definitions and the use of certain categories vary between recorders and are determined to some extent by the context and the information that is available to recorders. For example, as discussed in ‘Definition and Categorisation’\textsuperscript{32}, some recorders reported that they did not use the category ‘combatant’ as they had insufficient information to determine this status, so used local terms regarding the membership of armed groups to differentiate civilian from other casualties instead. Is a harmonisation of definitions across all recording possible, or is context too important? How could this be done, and what existing theory or frameworks could such a standardisation draw on? Can human rights, international humanitarian and criminal law be used as the universal source, as some recorders proposed? Are there other frameworks, e.g. from humanitarian agencies, that could be useful?

\textsuperscript{32} For other papers in this collection see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection
5. CONCLUSION: A SHORT SUMMARY OF THIS PAPER

This overview has aimed to give a summary of the field of casualty recording, as represented by the forty organisations interviewed. It has proposed a model of five approaches for considering the range of recording, and a spectrum to demonstrate how different approaches are linked. It has shown how different types of recording can serve different purposes and data users. It has also identified and discussed some key factors that affect how recording is done, for the sake of demonstrating the possibilities for recording under different circumstances, and also some of the constraints that recording faces. This overview also analysed the good practice of the recorders interviewed in order to recommend the key components needed to develop a recording system, and key basic standards that help recorders in their work. Running through all of the discussions in this paper is the importance of context to casualty recording.

The purpose of this paper has been to give casualty recorders and others a sense of the field, its strengths and its challenges. Along with the other papers in this collection, this overview should assist those who are new to recording in considering how they might develop their work. It should also give ideas to existing recorders about what our next joint steps for the development of the field of casualty recording should be. Following the first conference of the International Practitioner Network of casualty recording organisations33, overseen by Oxford Research Group, it is clear that the questions of standards and standardisation are of crucial interest to casualty recorders. Analysing the practice of those interviewed for this study has raised questions and provided information that will be valuable to addressing these.

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33 See www.everycasualty.org/practice/ipn. For more information about the network, or if you are a casualty recorder and would like to join, contact Hana Salama hana.salama@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk
6. APPENDIX: A DISCUSSION OF KEY THEMES IN AND CONTEXTS OF PRACTICE IN RELATION TO EACH APPROACH TO RECORDING

The purpose of this appendix is to give a more detailed sense of how context interacts with the way casualty recording is approached, and the results it produces. The information here is summarised in a table in section 2.4 p22.

A general observation of this study is that context is highly important to what can be achieved in casualty recording. This is shown in the discussions relating to the different individual approaches below. Context is also fundamental across the whole range of approaches to casualty recording. For example, one recorder mentioned the difficulty of determining age in a country of conflict where birth certificates were not widely issued and the actual birth dates of victims were not known (including by close family). Issues like this can be present no matter the resources of a recorder or which approach to recording is used, and will affect the level of detail and confirmation in recording that is ultimately possible in different places.

There are several factors that influence the approach to recording that a recorder will use, and how comprehensive, detailed and certain the records they produce will be. Some of these factors will be more internal to the casualty recorder, such as their objectives or the resources at their disposal. Important contextual factors that influence casualty recording include:

- Geography and infrastructure in the country of conflict, for access to information;
- The capacity and will of the state and different agencies to collect information of use to casualty recording;
- Whether those who have this information about casualties share this;
- How much political space there is for recording: whether there are restrictions on information flows, repression or danger for recorders, and whether the rule of law has broken down (if it was strong to start with).

ORG’s policy paper produced from this research gives recommendations for how states and others can improve the state of casualty recording worldwide, to ameliorate some of the external challenges to recording. The themes discussed in this appendix in relation to different approaches to recording, as in section 2.4 p22, are:

- The conflict context in which different types of recording are or can be done;
- The coverage and level of detail achieved by recorders;
- Source availability and access issues that affect recorders;
- The relationship of the recorder to the country of conflict;
- The attitude of the state in the country of conflict;
- The resources needed for different approaches to recording;
- The goals or motivations of recorders;
- The data format of recorders’ results – incident or individual based;
- The different uses of recorders’ results.

6.1 Conflict Context

This study suggests that some approaches to recording might only be possible to implement effectively post-conflict.

The opportunity to investigate unknown human remains in order to identify victims may only be possible in post-conflict circumstances, when the conflict and political environment has changed sufficiently to allow the examination of past crimes, and access to graves. One recorder using an ‘unknown victim identification’ approach worked in an area that was experiencing widespread organised criminal violence.

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34 See ‘Towards the Recording of Every Casualty: Analysis and Policy Recommendations from a Study of 40 Casualty Recorders’

www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/recording_practice_policy_paper

Violence itself may not necessarily physically prevent the implementation of this kind of recording, though it could. However, the political context during conflict, including a lack of the rule of law necessary to carry out exhumation and identification activities, and of course the will of parties to the conflict to search for the missing rather than suppress their existence, will affect recorders’ ability to carry out this kind of work.

Recorders using a ‘multiple sources investigation’ approach depended on the availability of and ability to gather a wide range of documentary source material from official and other sources, as well as detailed information from witnesses or family members. Conditions of intense conflict can affect recorders’ ability to do this because of issues of access and danger. Because of the detailed processes of investigation involved, such conditions could also mean that recorders find it hard to keep up their documentation with the conflict. For one recorder using this approach during conflict, when violence became more intense for a period, their work to document casualties from this period extended long after the intensity of violence returned to previous levels.

Of the seven recorders using a ‘multiple sources investigation’ approach, four were recording post conflict. Three of these began their work to record during the conflict, collecting some evidence from eyewitnesses or documentation wherever they could. This information was then followed up with more detailed investigation after violence had ceased.

“During the war we collected some data but it was also important in post-war areas to confirm. The main focus of this research was in the peace period. I knew everything more or less about potential sources of information [from war time work].”

For some, the process of recording continued for many years after the conflict. This was a consequence of the level of coverage, detail and confirmation that this model aims to achieve. The public release of records for consultation and correction was an important part of this process of building accurate records. Some of the recorders using this model, further to making a comprehensive record of the dead, spent or intended to spend considerable effort on producing public representations of this information, such as various forms of memorial, public databases and maps.

The nine organisations surveyed that used the ‘recording using an on-the-ground network’ approach all operated during conflict. It is possible that this model could be used post-conflict. Challenges such as: the costs of field investigations; the physical accessibility of certain areas; repression, and suspicion of recorders from the state or former conflict parties; and the difficulty of investigating as an outsider to a community, can all apply and be somewhat addressed by this approach post-conflict as well as during conflict. This is because the model relies on people or organisations that are locally based to contribute information, and the approach can operate in a clandestine way.

The ‘document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration’ approach was implemented during conflict by all but one of the recorders surveyed who used it. Use of this approach was more likely to be determined by either a lack of resources to undertake other forms of investigation or because this approach was the most efficient way to get the information needed. One recorder using this approach studied different conflicts worldwide, some of which were on-going and some of which were terminated. The use of this model was a result of the variable quality of documentation in different contexts worldwide. In some places the recorder was able to rely on state records or a combination of state and NGO records. In others where state record keeping was poor or the context repressive the recorder used fieldworkers. Their information was sometimes used in combination with media sources, or used to check official records. This experience demonstrates a key general point about casualty recording, which is that the context will always be very important to the approach and sources that can be used, and the confirmation of information that will be possible.

Of the 11 casualty recorders in the survey who used the ‘document-based recording’ approach, 9 were recording during a conflict and 2 post-conflict. Most of the organisations working on a current conflict named conventional media as their largest source of information. For one their main source was social media (primarily twitter). Other than media, with a few exceptions, continuous, public, documentary sources with good coverage were not generally available to these recorders.

“This methodology [could work in] other areas where you can find continuously some reports, whether from the press, or humanitarian organisations – but it just has to be continuous.”
The relatively free production and flow of information – from official or unofficial sources – is key to this approach both during and post conflict. The attitude of the state to recording and the presence or otherwise of the rule of law will therefore be important factors, as will the effects of violence on data gathering. During conflict, if some areas are inaccessible to those who generate the documents used by recorders due to violence or the deliberate actions of parties to the conflict to conceal information, the effectiveness of this model will decrease.

### 6.2 Comprehensiveness: Coverage and Level of Detail

Different levels of coverage and detail were broadly associated with the five different approaches to casualty recording identified by this study:

During conflict, the information produced by ‘document-based recording’ mostly represented a baseline. In one context of a low intensity conflict with high media interest, low media restriction and a well-established professional press covering the whole conflict area in a bureaucratised and urbanised state, it was possible for recorders using this model to generate an almost comprehensive record of casualties during conflict. The details they were able to collect systematically included the names, age and sex/gender of victims (they did not attempt to collect other demographic details such as victims’ occupation or hometown).

However, most recorders assumed that because of the restrictions to, limitations or inaccessibility of documents during the conflict, an undercount of cases was inevitable.

“We don’t have the capacity and we don’t have access to the region. Just because of these limitations, we had to focus on the media. Relying on the media reports is a big challenge and it has a lot of limitations.”

Some using this model did not try to collect any information about victims, as such details were not consistently reported in their source material (this especially applied to media sources). Some of these recorders did not collect victim information because this was not essential to their aims. Others attempted to collect information such as names, but stated that in the majority of cases this was not complete.

After conflict, the change of context may mean the greater availability of documents and the possibility of greater comprehensiveness – depending of course on the quality and range of the source documentation that was originally created, and the willingness to release it. Document based recorders in these circumstances considered their work to be capable of creating near-comprehensive registers of the dead. They also attempted to collect more details about individual victims than most of the recorders using a document-only approach in an on-going conflict.

For those operating a ‘document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration’ approach during conflict, documents produced by others made up the majority of the source material. The coverage and level of detail that recorders felt was achievable was similar to the document-based approach, therefore. One of the organisations operating this approach did not try to collect any details about individual victims, and 5 did not try to collect names, though they collected some other basic demographic details about victims like age and sex/gender. This related to the limits of information consistently available in the source material, and for some also to their objectives. For recorders of on-going conflicts the main added value their field investigators could give was in terms of better confirmation or certainty for some cases. The extra coverage given was generally considered quite small. Where the quality of documents available is decreased due to factors such as access for media being restricted to certain areas, a small on the ground presence could in some circumstances plug the gap in information, especially if the number of victims is small. This model might also offer a more thorough approach where the documents used by a recorder do not give a high level of certainty about the information. In this case an extra layer of direct corroboration can be valuable to the strength of the casualty records.

Key to the operation of the ‘recording using an on-the-ground network’ approach is the contribution of people or organisations that are already living or working in a particular area. For some organisations this has the function of offering a coverage that the recorder would not otherwise have had if it relied only on its centrally based staff. For others, especially those operating in a dangerous and repressive environment, local workers were essential in order for the recorder to collect information without arousing suspicion from conflict parties. They were also important in order to gain the trust of witnesses, who would be wary of speaking to an outsider to the community.
“If we cannot have people based there, the amount of information we can get is very limited. If somebody new went to a region and tried to get back with this information, it’s putting their lives at risk and people would not speak them openly. It’s a really big risk for them to just go to a different area, and then to report on that kind of stuff. So all we try to do is have [people] that are based [there and] from there.”

Three of the organisations surveyed only covered limited areas of the countries of conflict, as they were unable to extend their networks beyond these. The assessment recorders gave of the comprehensiveness of their records varied: this depended on how extensive they felt their networks to be. All these recorders were concerned with documenting an extensive set of personal details about individual victims including their names. Most mentioned the principle of humanising the victims of conflict or giving them a voice as a goal, which is linked to the pursuit of this level of detail.

“All those using a ‘multiple source investigation’ approach recorded a comprehensive set of details about victims. One, for example, recorded over 20 different pieces of information for each individual. The recorders using this model mentioned as their motivations humanising and giving dignified memory to victims and their families, and a concern for human rights. This can be linked to collecting this level of detail. Most of the recorders using this model also linked their information into legal processes, either contributing evidence to individual cases or regarding patterns of harm. A high level of detail and confirmation was needed to contribute this expert evidence. Some recorders also noted that having a high level of detail about each case or victim was useful to the process of confirmation: it could make duplication less likely, and crosschecking more robust.

The core of the ‘multiple source investigation’ approach is the aim for comprehensiveness. Those who had completed their recording (or, for recorders working during conflict, those who were able to keep up with events) felt that they achieved a near comprehensive record of deaths. However, many noted that the project to record was never closed, as new information could always be discovered.

“I think that we have clearly a very good and exhaustive, comprehensive archive...[but] it is not a closed project, we will never close this. If somebody in the next ten years brings something to the archive it is welcome.”

All the recorders using an ‘unknown victim identification’ approach that we surveyed collected a detailed set of information about victims in the course of their investigations. A major function of this was to facilitate the identification of victims and the return of their remains to their loved ones, which was the core goal of these recorders. However, these recorders were also concerned to contribute to a public accounting of victims (though not where this breached promised confidentiality). Some for example published the results of identifications or contributed to truth commissions. A high level of detail was important for publicly recognising victims at this individual level.

In terms of coverage, the records of these organisations were restricted to identifications of the missing or those buried in mass or clandestine graves (who will not be the only casualties of a conflict). One recorder noted that a full accounting of these victims may not be possible: for example, if a family buries somebody who they think is their relative but is not, the actual body of their relative will be unidentified because they do not think they are missing, and the family whose relative they have buried will not have their case resolved. The organisations surveyed were working either towards as full a record as possible or to building others’ capacities to do so. It was noted that resolving a missing persons situation can take a very long time, often decades, due to the complexity of the task of finding and identifying victims.

“Even though there is going to be a big problem as far as information goes, you know people want the bodies of their loved ones back, even if this is you know across generations, and especially when they were executed or they were victims of political crimes, or victims of forced disappearances.”
6.3 Source Availability and Access Issues

Source availability and access issues in the country of conflict will affect different approaches to recording in different ways. These issues may prevent the use of one approach in favour of another.

The increased access online to different types of documentary sources, especially media reports, has facilitated ‘document-based recording’ from both inside and outside countries experiencing conflict. Limitations to the availability of documentation decrease the effectiveness this approach, and affect the choice to use it in the first place. Approaches relying on or using pre-existing documentation heavily, depending on what combination of documentary sources is used, may be less useful if, for example:

- Conventional media is: deliberately restricted, censored or intimidated; or, is under-resourced, lacks coverage, or cannot access areas of the country due to violence or other reasons such as remoteness or bad infrastructure; or, the media that does cover the situation is not seen as having professional standards of investigation;
- Social media is not widely used, or its use is deliberately restricted in the country of conflict;
- There is restricted or no access to official records either publicly or by request. It is not possible to establish relationships at a local level to get access to such documents (e.g. hospital records);
- Where official documents and archives are available, they do not give a comprehensive record regarding casualties. Whether or not they have the will to collect and publicly release information about casualties, some states do not have the capacity to do this. It was reported in some contexts that states did not have the bureaucratic capacity or reach, especially in areas of conflict, to collect and share information. In less bureaucratised or less urbanised states, or those with worse infrastructure, access to police, health or even military records are not likely to give a comprehensive record, for example. This might be because these types of services are limited across the country or to different populations, or because documentation is not routinely done. Even in states with strong bureaucracies, systems may break down during conflict, and the fate of missing people will not be documented;
- The state or conflict parties have sole access to some information about casualties, for example because public or media access is restricted in certain areas. The state may make public statements about deaths, but there is no independent corroboration of these in other documentary sources, and the state has a conflict of interest in making these reports so the information cannot be considered reliable;
- It is not possible to establish information sharing with inter-governmental and humanitarian organisations;
- NGOs cannot operate and report openly.

A small on the ground presence can in circumstances help to address some of these issues, which is the value of the ‘document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration’ approach. However, given that on-the-ground information is only a small component of this approach, the widespread unavailability of documentary sources would mean that only very limited records would be produced, or that recorders could not use the approach at all. The number and quality of on-the-ground contacts that a recorder can establish and the areas and information these contacts can get access to will determine the usefulness of the model over a document-based approach. For example: if the recorder’s contacts cannot get any access to areas where statements from the state are the only source of information, then there may be little difference; if the recorder does not have contacts across the whole conflict area for the function of checking information, the quality of their records will not be consistently improved in comparison to using documents only.

The ‘recording using an on-the-ground network’ approach can be and was used where there was not widespread availability of good quality documentary evidence about casualties (for example because of restrictions on information, or because of factors such as poor official record keeping or the collapse of record keeping systems). Recorders using this model often used documentary sources; however, the largest part of their source material was directly from their network. Restrictions on the availability of documents such as those listed above may mean that for practical reasons a recorder will use the on-the-ground network approach. The approach was also used where organisations already had networks for other reasons or because of they held strong principles regarding civil society participation.
In order to use this model, recorders needed either:

- To already have a network of partners or workers across the conflict area, for example because of other activities such as the delivery of certain services; or
- To be able to build such a network. Depending on the context (including how low-profile the work needs to be), the network might be built from those already doing some kind of investigation or documentation work, such as journalists or NGOs. Or, it might be developed from local communities. To develop such a network from communities, the recorder would need to build a considerable amount of trust, which takes time and energy.

Those using a ‘multiple source investigation’ approach sought to collect and use every existing source in their investigations, seeking as much information as possible on every case. These recorders took whatever information they could access, including rumours, hearsay, and incomplete information, in case this assisted in the process of investigation.

“It is also very important that we get a clue at all. That is also very important otherwise...if we don’t hear a rumour we most probably - we won’t be able to be committed to investigate.”

Where other approaches might concentrate on certain types of sources for reasons such as their resources or capacity, or safety, recorders using this model attached a key importance to gathering comprehensive source material. A crucial source for recorders using this approach, for many the most important, was testimony from victims’ families or from witnesses. Issues such as the difficulties of reaching remote areas, or the fact that surviving witnesses might be old or sick and must be reached before the information is lost forever, are relevant to this model.

“It’s really hard sometimes...with really remote areas, and well we had a situation...when 2 of us had to walk 5 or 6 kilometres through the snow...just to reach some abandoned village where we heard that one old lady lives...She gave us very useful information since she was only one left in that village and I don’t know 15 of her family members were killed.”

In cases where a recorder is working after conflict, there are few or no surviving witnesses, and there is no official documentation or other reports about the victims, information loss is inevitable. This may be mitigated if recording started during conflict, but only insofar as witnesses or information might sometimes be more traceable in the immediate aftermath of events.

“It was very important to have all this information from the very beginning of the conflict. If you start ten or twenty years later then a lot of information will be forever lost, so it is very difficult to confirm.”

In different contexts the balance of sources available were different. In some places an extensive collection of official records like police reports or death certificates may not be present due to weak state capacity, or the breakdown of these systems during conflict. Official records are important to the ‘multiple source investigation’ approach for the confirmation they can give, and the ability to gather official or bureaucratic documentation either openly or informally was important to these recorders. Based on those surveyed, conditions such as a highly bureaucratised state or culture of recording, a small conflict area or population, or a conflict of lower intensity, will increase the ease with which this model can be used.

Some recorders using the ‘unknown victim identification’ approach used DNA identifications, though others did not. Access to such facilities and to staff with the appropriate training is a key consideration for the use of this approach. Access to families for DNA samples and information is also crucial, and can be affected by the difficulty or cost of reaching remote areas. It can also be affected by the possibility of information loss where surviving relatives or witnesses who know the location of graves are old, sick or scared to share the information they have. As with the ‘multiple source investigation’ approach, when working post conflict where there are few or no surviving witnesses, no or poor official documentation or other reports about victims or graves, information loss is inevitable.

“A case we have 336 dead, one witness, one guy survived and fled...We found him, he gave us his interview and then he died. I mean that’s it, there’s nothing else, that’s it. Who are those 336 people? I mean the census didn’t have them covered, they didn’t even exist, the records were...burned, I mean these people were literally erased.”
The presence of official documentation about victims from either before or during the conflict such as health and dental records facilitates the work of these recorders. It can make their work less reliant on the testimony of witnesses or families to investigate cases.

“The main tool for our documentation process methodologically speaking is our ante-mortem form which is a form that tries to gather information on the victim...I’m sure in the United States...or in Europe wouldn’t need a form like that because you have so many records of pretty much everyone that you could probably, with a name, gather most of the information without bothering the family.”

6.4 Relationship to the Country of Conflict

As discussed in section 2.1 p10, recorders had different relationships to the country of conflict, with many recorders based partially or totally outside the country. However, connection to the country of conflict, whether in the form of knowledge of the context or an on-the-ground presence, was always important for effective recording.

Many of those using a ‘document-based recording’ approach were not based in the country of conflict. This was primarily due to the global availability, especially online, of the most important source to document-based recording: the media.

“I felt that given the incredible growth of information technology it was going to be possible in the early 21st century to put together a detailed account, and I think I was right.”

In some contexts, being based in country could hold certain advantages in terms of access to sources: for example, for the sake of making official requests for data, or for establishing relationships with institutions to access records. In other contexts, being based out of country may have advantages. For example, where the country of conflict could be dangerous to a casualty recording organisation due to the high intensity of the conflict or high levels of repression, but there is a good availability of documents accessible internationally (for example if there is heavy use of social media to report incidents by local communities), a document-based recorder may work more effectively out of country.

As with the ‘document-based recording’ approach, several recorders using the ‘document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration’ approach were based outside the country of conflict. Most were using globally available media sources as their main source of information. Four of the nine recorders using this model were based outside the country of conflict. Two had regional or global focuses, but were based in one of the countries that they were recording the casualties of. Being based in the country of conflict, or having an in-country presence of fieldworkers belonging to the organisation, could help recorders with building information sharing relationships. As with the document-only approach, being based out of country can assist recorders operating this model where the context is very repressive or dangerous, but it is possible to make contact in the field and the flow of documents is good.

Six of the nine organisations using the ‘recording using an on-the-ground network’ approach were based wholly inside the country of conflict. One recorder was an exile organisation operating its network from outside the country of conflict. The other two were based both inside and outside the country of conflict. These organisations based wholly or partly out of country all recorded in particularly dangerous and repressive environments. An out of country presence had advantages in terms of improving data security, and helping the central organisation to operate more easily.

Five of the seven organisations using the ‘multiple source investigation’ approach were based wholly inside the country of conflict. One recorded casualties of conflict their state was involved in abroad and one was based both inside and outside of the country of conflict. While it might not be essential to be based in country to pursue this approach, recorders will need a strong connection to or status in the country of conflict in order to reach witnesses and access sources such as official documents.

Two of the recorders using the ‘unknown victim identification’ approach were based entirely inside the country of conflict. One was based in a variety of different countries worldwide. The other organisation was based in one of the countries of conflict it recorded in but ran projects in various locations worldwide. Again, it might not be essential to be based in the country of conflict to use this approach, but a large local presence and good knowledge of the local context is needed, given the engagement with and sensitivities to communities that are necessary.
6.5 State Attitude

The actions and attitude of the state can be crucial to the work that a casualty recorder can carry out.

The ability to do ‘document-based recording’ will depend on some openness, toleration or inability to suppress the sharing of documents by the state and other conflict parties. For document only recording that relies on sources such as official records or conventional media, hostility or repression will generally seriously limit the effectiveness of the approach.

“Of course, the type of regime that you have in command in [country of conflict] does help to have access to the data...it plays an effect on the press of course, which is the main source of the data.”

Where recording uses documents which the state or conflict parties find harder to suppress (this might be the case in some places for reports from social media) document-based recording can be successful in a hostile environment.

Similarly to document-based recording, ‘document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration’ depends on some openness, toleration or inability to suppress the sharing of information by the state and other conflict parties.

“If the authorities get serious about law enforcement in terms of the emergency decree or the martial law we cannot work. I think we can work so far under these strict laws because the authorities give us some kind of leniency – we might be controlled in the future”

The recorders surveyed who used this model did not operate in especially repressive environments. Operating this model in a hostile environment would be possible to do if, for example, violence was widely reported in social media without censorship and the recorder could establish safe channels of communication with on the ground contacts.

Most of the recorders surveyed that used the ‘recording using an on-the-ground network’ approach operated in particularly hostile, dangerous and repressive environments. The structure of the network was often a response to this environment for these organisations. Where documentary sources such as media are restricted and it is necessary to operate with a low profile, this approach has clear advantages for recorders. Secure channels of communication and the ability of network sources to collect information inconspicuously are needed for this model to work. These will be possible in many if not most contexts. For some recorders, the channels of communication from field networks to the central organisation were slower, sometimes on account of danger or repression. Not all of those using this model could publish or share within hours or a small number of days: some prioritised producing larger reports over releasing continuous information on incidents.

One of the recorders using the ‘multiple source investigation’ approach operated in a country where the state was hostile to the documentation that was being done. Some of their work had to be clandestine. Others suffered threats and intimidation from state and other parties. However, despite this, all recorders using this approach engaged their governments on the results of their casualty recording, and achieved some kind of response or dialogue (with some having quite a positive relationship). Some political space for recording may be necessary for this model to operate.

An official request or permission from the state was needed by recorders using the ‘unknown victim identification’ approach to carry out certain key functions, such as undertaking exhumations. The work could not be undertaken in a way that recorders using this model would consider ethical or legal without this cooperation. Of all the approaches considered here, this one depends most directly on some agreement from state bodies in order to function. This is not to say that recorders using this model did not suffer hostility or obstruction to their work from states, or indeed from former state or conflict actors unhappy with the threat recorders’ work posed to them.

States participating in conflict will often have access to information that few or no other organisations will. For example, armed forces will sometimes be the only witnesses to events. Because of this, if a comprehensive and robust record of casualties is to be achieved, all parts of the state from local to central institutions must contribute information. Data should also be shared across borders where conflicts were or became international. Several casualty recorders reported that greater transparency from governments
over casualty data would both be highly beneficial to their work and was important in principle (see ‘The Range of Sources in Casualty Recording’ for a discussion of state sources and their use by recorders).

Some casualty recorders across the range of approaches experienced positive information relationships with the central governments of the country of conflict. Where these positive relationships existed, recorders noted a connection to the exercise of the rule of law. In some cases the governments concerned were interested in developing progressive policies for violence reduction. The sharing of information by states with recorders is possible where the public interest of recording is accepted.

Most casualty recorders that we surveyed however reported secrecy from states, a lack of recording, propagandistic statements about casualties (seen as reporting an interpretation favourable to the state, rather than the facts about deaths), or having no way of finding out if the government was recording or not. The general observation in these contexts was that the state did not see the release of data as in its interest. These concerns were present even in states which otherwise considered themselves open and democratic. There were fears that soldiers might be discouraged from military action, that compensation cases would be generated, or that the state's image would be harmed in other ways. There may also be concern regarding data protection and laws on the release of archives. States are not impartial observers to conflict in many circumstances, and will sometimes have a conflict of interests between the benefits of releasing and the benefits of withholding or distorting casualty information. However, some recorders noted that by withholding the information they had, states damaged their image and credibility, and opened up a space for propaganda that others could then fill.

6.6 Resources Needed

The resources needed for casualty recording generally increase from approach 1 (‘document-based recording’) up to approach 5 (‘unknown victim identification’):

‘Document-based recording’ can be a low-resource model of recording. Access to information for most recorders was low cost. Media was often accessed for free online, though in some cases hard copy editions or subscriptions for media databases were purchased. The cost of this approach will mainly be down to the number of people needed to keep up with the information flow, and whether the work is done by volunteers or paid workers. Of the eleven organisations surveyed, the largest number of paid employees was eight and the smallest zero, the average between two and three.

The cost will also depend on the systems recorders use to process and store information, for example whether they buy or develop custom-made software and databases, or use freely available platforms or methods of storage. Seven of the eleven recorders using this model did not buy or develop any software for their casualty recording.

The number of paid workers stated as working on recording for those using a ‘document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration’ approach ranged from zero to twelve, with an average of four. The potential difference in cost between this model and a document-only approach lies in the number of and relationship to the recorder of the on-the-ground contacts or fieldworkers. In some cases these will be volunteers or informal contacts of the recorder, but they were often paid, either regularly as fieldworkers (in which case they will be included by the organisation in the number of workers given) or by piece of information. Storage or software costs will be similar to those of a document-based approach.

The cost of the ‘recording using an on-the-ground network’ approach can vary widely, depending on how expensive the recorder’s network is to maintain. The number of paid workers recorders using this model had ranged from zero to sixty, with the average around 17. At the lower end were entirely voluntary, community efforts, with costs of communication and storage of data only. At the upper end were networks of paid, professional fieldworkers. Recorders using this approach often obtained information about casualties from those who could or were already collecting it in the course of their work. With this approach, maintaining an information network will require fewer resources. To build networks, the non-monetary resources recorders required included community contacts and trust. The ability to train network members in order to assure the quality of the information provided was also important.

The number of paid workers stated as working on recording for those using a ‘multiple source investigation’ approach ranged from zero to 15, with an average of six. This referred to the size of the recording effort at the time of the survey, when some organisations had finished their main documentation effort. Some organisations were also dealing with quite small areas and numbers of casualties. One
recorder was a project by a group of individuals investigating casualties on their own resources. Around half of the recorders had sophisticated custom-built database systems for the processing and storage of their information. Recorders operating this model also benefited from resources such as: partnerships to help them access information; a public profile which meant that witnesses knew to come to them with information and trusted the recorder enough to do this.

Of the five models, the ‘unknown victim identification’ approach requires the greatest specialised expertise and technical resources. Highly trained staff and specialised facilities are required, especially if DNA identification is used. The paid workers stated as working on recording for these organisations ranged from four to 220 with an average of around 88. Mostly these were large efforts in terms of staffing, though this was not true in all cases, and it should be borne in mind that two of the recorders were international in their efforts.

6.7 Goals or Motivations

Recorders using the ‘document-based approach’ had motivations ranging across the reasons to record set out in section 2.2. For some, especially those with broader goals, the choice of document-based recording was determined by a lack of resources or their physical remoteness from the countries of conflict. For others, to whom resource issues may also have been relevant, document-based recording was judged sufficient for what they wanted to achieve, e.g. close to real-time information that could support analysis of trends or risk assessment. These types of goals prioritise information about incidents over information about individual victims as they are more concerned with ‘what, where, when’ information than with identities. This type of information in many contexts will be gathered at the lowest cost through using freely available documentation.

The range of goals and motivations of recorders using the ‘document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration’ approach was similar to those using the document-based approach. A wide range of principles and intended outcomes were mentioned. Again, for some of the recorders, incident information that could provide the means to analyse trends for the sake of making policy recommendations and risk assessments was prioritised. Like document-based recording, this approach is suited to this kind of analysis, given that it is based mainly on the same source material that can be obtained at a low cost and accessed in close to real-time.

Those using the ‘recording using an on-the-ground network’ approach all had strong motivations relating to humanising the victims of conflict or giving a true picture of their suffering, giving recognition to their families, and justice. There is a natural link between this sort of motivation to record and the use of a model that heavily involves and relies on local communities for its information. Others had strong ideals relating to civil society participation. It is not necessary to have these kinds of goals or motivations in order to use this approach: a humanitarian organisation might record casualties in this way by collecting information its staff and partners routinely encounter in the course of their work. A close concern for and connection with the community will always be helpful in building information networks with them however.

Recorders using the ‘multiple source investigation’ approach all had strong motivations relating to recognising the victims of conflict and the suffering of families and communities, and creating a historical record. They all also had a focus on redress for harm and accountability and justice procedures. There is a link between these kinds of motivations to record and using a model that involves and relies on communities and seeks a high standard of proof.

The primary goal of recorders using the ‘unknown victim identification’ approach was the ending of families’ uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones, and the return of victims’ remains. All these recorders also either sought to contribute expert evidence to legal processes, or a demand for their work came from courts or prosecutors. These recorders also had motivations relating to the need for truth seeking by societies that had experienced conflict. The specific record and high standard of proof that this approach gives is necessary to these goals.

6.8 Data Format

Recording using models 1-3 might be either primarily incident or individual based. For models 4 and 5, detailed information about individuals was present for every case.

Just over half of the recorders interviewed who used the ‘document-based recording’ approach based their recording of casualties around listing incidents (though many also recorded information about individuals).
This was informed by factors mentioned above in this section such as the details that could be consistently recorded given the source material available, and the goals of some recorders using this model. Six of the recorders interviewed released comprehensive incident-level information freely on their website, either as a list, map or database.

For some of the recorders using this model, the arrangement of their casualty data within their database system centred on documents (the source material), as opposed to incidents or individuals. In such a system, a document would be associated with any incident or individual that it mentions, creating in effect a series of lists that are related to each other within the database, and track back to the fundamental unit of the source material.

The recorders surveyed who used the ‘document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration’ approach all based their recording of casualties around listing incidents (though some also recorded information about individuals). This was informed by factors such as the level of detail that they felt could be consistently recorded given their source material, and for some their focus on numbers and trends. Five of the recorders interviewed released comprehensive incident-level information on their website, either as a list, map or database. For one organisation this was only available on subscription.

Most of the organisations using the ‘recording using an on-the-ground network’ approach based their records around the listing of individual victims. Those who based their record around incidents always tried to record personal details about victims, but the information was not always available. The data format these recorders used likely relates closely to their goals and motivations, which generally featured the need to humanise and recognise victims. One of the organisations using this model released comprehensive individual level information on its website. Three others released comprehensive incident-level information to media organisations and other partners. At least one of these recorders’ databases was based around source documents.

Recording for organisations using a ‘multiple source investigation’ approach invariably centred on individuals. For around half of the recorders using this model, the arrangement of their casualty data within their database system centred around the fundamental unit of source documents, as described above. Two recorders published comprehensive individual based information on their websites in the form of lists or databases. Others published this comprehensive information in the form of books, and made it accessible through public presentations.

The records of recorders using an ‘unknown victim identification’ approach revolve around individuals. The database systems or collections of records that they used however were complex, recording and combining more technical information with standard details about victims, witnesses and events.

### 6.9 Uses

For a full discussion of the uses of casualty recording, see the paper ‘Why We Record Conflict Casualties Conflict Casualties’ in this collection.

The work of document-based recording was used, among other things:

- By recorders themselves for analysing risk, looking at trends in the conflict and assessing and advocating on policies for violence reduction;
- To inform humanitarian response planning through the indications given by recording about areas of danger and need. This was possible because those using this model produced records continuously and in close to real-time;
- In academic analyses;
- To inform official counts of the dead;
- In legal processes as contextualising material, and for assessing the need to investigate possible crimes;
- By by media organisations.

The work of those using a ‘document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration’ approach was used, among other things:

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36 For other papers in this collection see [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection)
• By recorders for analysing risk, looking at trends in the conflict and advocating on policies for violence reduction, including by challenging official accounts. Again this was possible as records were produced by many in close to real time;
• By recorders to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of government policies related to conflict;
• By governments to inform policy, where there was a positive relationship with recorders;
• By international organisations such as the WHO, UNDP, World Bank and EU for research and assessment of conflict dynamics;
• To inform humanitarian response planning and community early warning;
• In academic analyses;
• By media organisations.

The work of those using a ‘recording using an on-the-ground network’ approach was used, among other things:
• By humanitarian organisations for their assessment of the conflict situation;
• In legal processes and to seek various forms of compensation;
• By recorders to make submissions for investigation by Special Rapporteurs in the UN system and by the International Criminal Court;
• To contribute information to the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict (which collects information on grave violations of children’s rights, including killings, for action by the UN Security Council);
• By media organisations.

The work of recorders using a ‘multiple source investigation’ approach was used, among other things:
• By recorders for memorialisation (through books and online portals), to recognise and dignify victims and their families, and for the education of communities;
• By recorders to try and influence political discourse around casualties;
• To contribute evidence both on individual cases and to show patterns of harm in conflict, in domestic, regional and international courts;
• To make submissions for investigation under various processes within the UN system;
• By governments to allocate war benefits.

The work of recorders using an ‘unknown victim identification’ approach was used, among other things:
• To end families’ uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones, and to recognise and dignify victims and their families;
• To contribute to memorialisation;
• To contribute to truth and reconciliation (or similar) commissions;
• As expert evidence in individual cases and to show patterns of harm in domestic, regional and international courts.
ABOUT OXFORD RESEARCH GROUP

Oxford Research Group (ORG) is a leading independent think-tank, non-governmental organisation and registered charity, based in London. ORG has been influential for thirty years in promoting the idea of sustainable approaches to global security as an alternative to violent confrontation, through original research, wide-ranging dialogue, and practical policy recommendations.

ORG is committed to the principle that every life lost to armed violence should be properly recognised. For this to become possible, every casualty of armed violence, throughout the world, must be promptly recorded, correctly identified and publicly acknowledged. In support of this goal, the Every Casualty programme at ORG (www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/rcac) works to develop an improved understanding of the range of available casualty recording practices, along with guidance for their implementation. This work has included extensive research into existing casualty recording practice, research which is contributing towards the identification and development of standards and good practice that can be implemented by a range of actors, including non-governmental organisations, states, and intergovernmental organisations alike.

In addition to carrying out research, ORG facilitates an International Practitioner Network of casualty-recording organisations (www.everycasualty.org/practitioners/ipn) and is at the forefront of integrating policy goals into existing policy frameworks at the national and international level.

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