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PAPER 3: THE RANGE OF SOURCES IN CASUALTY RECORDING
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Families of people killed in the conflict in Kosovo providing information about their loved ones, at a public presentation by the Humanitarian Law Center in Prizren. Such contributions are invited in order to make a record that is as comprehensive and accurate as possible. (© Humanitarian Law Center)

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1 This is the third paper in the collection ‘Good Practice in Conflict Casualty Recording: Testimony, Detailed Analysis and Recommendations From a Study of 40 Casualty Recorders’
www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection

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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.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is the Purpose of this Paper?

Casualty recording requires the collection of information about specific individuals and the circumstances in which they died. This paper reviews what casualty recorders have learnt about:

(a) The range of types of sources from which this information may be obtained

(b) The contexts in which these different sources are available and useful

This reflection on practice reveals emerging general principles about the functions of different sources. It also shows the specific context-sensitive experiences of recorders, working intensively with particular types of sources in different conflict settings. This paper aims to reflect the field for the benefit of current and future recorders, situating their work in a broader perspective. The analysis is illustrated with the words of recorders throughout the paper.
1.2 Two Sources of Information about Casualties: Documentary Evidence and People

ORG’s research has shown that casualty recorders draw information about deaths from a very wide range of sources. Several casualty recorders are quite explicit that they would exclude no source that contained useful information:

“*We’re collecting all information possible. Our goal is to aggregate and verify every stream of data coming out of the region.*”

This study shows that an important emerging principle of casualty recording practice is that all relevant information should be collected, stored, and assessed to the extent that a casualty recorder has the access and means to do so.

The sources used by recorders differ in their accessibility to recorders, and the type of information, level of detail, and authority that they provide. The recorders surveyed for this study have built up considerable expertise regarding how each type of source is best handled, to maximise its usefulness and to take proper account of its limitations or weaknesses.

There is a major distinction that runs through the sources recorders use. Sources of information are sometimes **people** (or organisations containing people) and sometimes the **evidence** (narratives or documentation) that those people or organisations produce.

Where **evidence** is being considered, sources can range from a book or official publication, through a news item (printed, web, or broadcast), the verbal testimony of an interviewee, to a photograph, death certificate, or piece of forensic evidence. When dealing with pieces of evidence as sources, casualty recorders are taking into account such factors as accuracy, detail, and level of corroboration, as well as the motivations and reputation of the organisation or individual that produced the document.

“*Death certificates are, in my opinion, not a useful source because the cause of death will be recorded but that doesn’t help you in relation to the circumstances. It is the circumstantial evidence that you need in order to get a decision about whether to include a death or not.*”

“*Media is weak on analysis and questioning, but factual reporting of what happened, where, when, how many killed, is good.*”

Where **people** are being considered, sources can range from a government or armed group, through an NGO or media organisation, to a family, or a single individual who has witnessed or documented something. The distinction is that these people give recorders information directly, either verbally or in documents. When dealing with people as sources, casualty recorders are taking into account such factors as how to access and gain the trust of the people concerned, and how to assess their capacities, authority, motivation and credibility.

“*[I have been assisted by] very fine NGOs that have been incredibly helpful, [they are] well-known and well-respected, and I have no problem with their credibility.*”

“*Working with medics was a great idea. They are really good at dealing with people, they’re used to taking information from them, filling in forms, so it was very natural…The smaller hospitals were very easy because staff remembered everyone. They didn’t have a lot of incidents. They knew the exact date of incidents. Some victims were even buried there.*”

Every casualty recorder must have clear means of dealing with both **people** and **evidence**: they are inseparable components of all source material. All useful evidence must originate from some identifiable person or organisation, and no person or organisation can be considered a useful source unless the information they hold can be converted into documentary evidence that can be stored and analysed. Effective and credible casualty recording depends upon the ability to make and defend judgments about the inclusion or exclusion of specific pieces of evidence from specific people or organisations.

Table 1 summarises some of the key characteristics of the two categories of sources, and the activities that casualty recorders need to engage in for the full and effective handling of each. This paper describes
the range of sources and how they are accessed; for a discussion of how sources are handled by recorders after collection see the paper ‘Evaluating Sources’ in this collection.³

### Table 1

The two categories of sources of casualty information, their key characteristics, and the key activities of casualty recorders when using them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source type</th>
<th>PEOPLE</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source characteristics being assessed</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Level of detail</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Comprehensiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casualty recorder activity when using this type of source</td>
<td>Contacting</td>
<td>Data-extraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social analysis*</td>
<td>Data-comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust-building</td>
<td>Event analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*By "social analysis" we mean an assessment of where that individual or organisation sits in relation to the conflict and to other players, so what kind of political or other pressures are likely to be influencing their behaviour.

The person/evidence distinction will form the major structural division of this paper, with evidence treated first, and people second. This ordering corresponds to the ordering of the five main approaches to casualty recording that this research has established (see section 2.3, ‘Five Approaches to Casualty Recording’ in the paper ‘An Overview of the Field’ in this collection⁴). Approaches 1 (Document-based recording) and 2 (Document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration) prioritise pre-existing documentary evidence, whereas Approaches 3 (Recording using an on-the-ground network), 4 (Multiple source investigation) and 5 (Unknown victim identification) prioritise gathering new primary data from individuals on the ground.

Additionally, even when on-the-ground investigations are central to a casualty recorder’s work, pre-existing documents – not produced by the casualty recorder themselves – often provide a baseline or orientation for follow up with more intensive investigations, including seeking individuals to provide additional documentation. The common pattern for recorders is “documents first – people later”. There are several reasons why recorders will choose to take this approach, for instance:

1. Documents created by others may be collected and assessed relatively quickly and cheaply (compared to the time and effort required to gather new primary data directly from individuals).

2. Documents may be used to identify the scope of the investigations needed, and to focus the collection of new primary data. Casualty recorders can prioritise their work in areas where pre-existing reports do not provide sufficient detail or corroboration.

3. Large numbers of documents are generated in most conflict situations, which are available for casualty recorders to collect and assess. For instance, conflict deaths are of intense interest to press and media organisations, and wherever press and media are able to operate they will tend to immediately investigate incidents and publish reports of them. Reports from professional press agencies are increasingly supplemented by informal citizen publishing (blogs, twitter, Facebook). All these documents become an early, and relatively easily collected, resource for casualty recorders.

³ For other papers in the collection see [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection](www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection)

⁴ For other papers in the collection see [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection](www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection)
4. Some casualty recorders operate after or far away from the conflict events they are documenting. Documents may be accessed across such distances relatively easily, particularly as many are web-based. Access to people requires greater effort and expense. When the work of a casualty recorder is carried out post-conflict (as is the case with a substantial minority of the organisations surveyed), it is likely that they will make use of the often large amount of documents produced at an earlier phase.

2. DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE AS A SOURCE

This section discusses evidence (documents) as a source, examines the nature and characteristics of:

- 2.1 Official Reports and Data:
  - 2.1.1 Incident-based Reports Produced by State Agencies (Police, Military and Intelligence, Hospitals and Medico-legal Institutions, Courts), and
  - 2.1.2 Incident-based Reports Produced by Inter-governmental Organisations
  - 2.1.3 Casualty Recording by Central Government: Integrative and Incident-based Reports

- 2.2 Civil Society Reports and Data:
  - 2.2.1 Press and Media Reports
  - 2.2.2 NGO Reports and Other Information from Civil Society
  - 2.2.3 Social Media
  - 2.2.4 Beyond Pre-existing Documents: Gathering Data First Hand from Local Witnesses and Informants

After the discussion of each of these major categories of documentary evidence, there is a summary table, addressing 4 key questions about each source:

1. What types of organisations used this source?
2. What contexts is it used in/what circumstances permit its use?
3. How is this source accessed?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using this source – what special insight might it bring, what might it be less useful on or not able to provide?

In the conclusion (section 5 p29) some of the major points that arise from this analysis of evidence as a source are summarised.

2.1 Official Reports and Data

Official reports relevant for casualty recording include those produced by states, or by state-funded agencies, such as the police, the national military, hospitals and morgues, and courts. They also include reports from state-mandated or state-authorised international organisations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a range of United Nations (UN) agencies, and organisations such as the International Commission on Missing Persons and international and regional courts.

Official reports are of two major kinds: **incident-based**, and aggregated or **integrative**.

The most commonly used **incident-based** reports are documents produced by specific agencies (police, military, hospitals, medico-legal institutes) as part of their own bureaucratic procedures, and designed primarily for internal purposes rather than public release. In some circumstances, incident reports are made public in the form of official statements or press releases. Many incident-based reports are generated very close in time to the incident concerned, often within 24 hours. However, these may be supplemented over time by reports that emerge from investigatory or legal processes (court proceedings, truth commissions).

**Integrative** reports provide aggregated casualty data over a given area or period of time (e.g. monthly or annual reports). Sometimes states recorded and released information specifically about the casualties from conflict, listing individual victims or incidents (e.g. as in the Human Rights Reports of the Vice Presidents Office of Colombia). When this was the case, a specific ministry or sometimes an ad-hoc committee was tasked with collating this information. However, in the experience of the recorders surveyed, reports about casualties from central government generally did not document individual
incidents or casualties, but rather provided figures on trends in different types of incident, in the context of state priorities.

2.1.1 Incident-based Reports Produced by State Agencies

**Police**

In many situations of violence, police are the first on the scene. Their bureaucratic procedures produce substantial documentation, which is particularly strong on circumstances of the incident. Occasionally, such reports are made available to casualty recorders in real time through local co-operation with individual offices.

Larger bodies of such reports sometimes become available to casualty recorders, generally some time after the period in question.

> “The government made one very important record that was secret but ... became public.... It is really important because it was made by professional police officers and although they were biased they followed some professional due process.”

**Police Documents Summary**

What types of organisations used this source?
1, 2, 4, 5

What contexts is it used in/what circumstances permit its use?
Wherever police keep records at an incident level and share information with recorders. For police records to be useful bureaucracy must be functioning and the police force must have a presence or reach in areas of conflict

How is this source accessed?
Official agreement with ministry, or post-conflict publication/release

What are the advantages and disadvantages of using this source – what special insight might it bring, what might it be less useful on or not able to provide?
Documents are bureaucratic, procedural, and comprehensive on the events they report. The type of data they were good at providing includes weapon, perpetrator, time and place. First reports by police were also useful for initial numbers of people killed in an incident. Recorders found police documents were less useful for seeking more comprehensive information about victim, and final numbers.

**Military and Intelligence**

State parties to a conflict often produce copious detailed on-the-ground records as part of their operational procedures, for intelligence purposes among others. These records are collated by military and/or intelligence personnel, and, according to the nature of the conflict and the context can be held by the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior, the State Department, and other relevant ministries. Like police reports, they tend to focus on the immediate circumstances of an incident, based on the observations and investigations of on-the-ground personnel, and so are important sources of information regarding the date, time, location, and nature of incidents in which people were injured and killed.

In a small number of cases documented by this survey there was open co-operation between government and a non-governmental casualty recorder, providing relatively free access to documentation. In some cases this occurred where strong civil society concern about casualties had given casualty recorders the authority to seek and expect such collaboration. In more than one case, government recording activity has been influenced, or improved, by the work of a civil society casualty recorder, to mutual benefit.

> “After doing this activity for 5-6 years now, our database is considered the most authentic database. The Interior Ministry ironically also relies on our data to update their figures.”

> “At first the military didn’t have a database. When they organised their own they sent people to talk to us and asked for the format of our database, so we shared our format with them.”

Over the field of casualty recording as a whole, the prevalent experience is of considerable difficulties in knowing exactly what documents are held by states, and equally substantial difficulties in accessing such documents.
"No government agencies share data on a regular basis, but there are agencies in all theatres who maintain very rigorous and systematic databases, in fact there would be multiple such agencies. They do not share their data on a routine basis."

"There is a special commission on missing people, people disappeared during the war. It’s official part of government, but this body is very closed, not open to NGOs and CSOs."

The most substantial access to military records tends to come either unofficially (when private or unofficial arrangements are made between individual government officials and casualty recorders, or through unauthorised leaks), or through official public disclosures as part of freedom of information processes, or post-conflict investigatory processes.

"We have been integrating data from compensation claims against [X] military, obtained through freedom of information requests. These detail many small incidents where [X] forces have killed someone. As these records are very legalistic they are often hard to match up with existing cases."

Despite the uncertainty about the nature of records kept by some states, or whether records exist at all, incident-based records of the sort described in this section are very useful to casualty recorders whenever they are able to access them. They contain precise, un-edited documentary information relating to the circumstances and consequences of individual acts of violence, and the individual victims of that violence. The main challenge posed by such documents is that they tend to make up a very large volume of raw documentation, without much pre-organisation or categorisation. Information about casualties is scattered throughout these data, often combined with other types of information, and so each document requires detailed inspection and processing by recorders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Military Documents Summary</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What types of organisations used this source?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What contexts is it used in/what circumstances permit its use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is this source accessed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the advantages and disadvantages of using this source – what special insight might it bring, what might it be less useful on or not able to provide?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hospitals and Medico-legal Institutions**

Health professionals tend to make extensive records on an individual-by-individual basis. Even when systems and procedures are disrupted by violence and social breakdown, considerable efforts are often made to provide and store what records are possible on the details of the injured and dead who are seen by medics or paramedics, or who are brought to hospitals.

"The information we get from the hospitals is very detailed. Their registration form is very complete. We keep it as a reference, a starting point, and investigate further."

"From hospitals we get the medico-legal reports – what was the state of the victim, when he was brought in...how many days in hospital...so there are tons and tons of fields for every single patient."

When an individual dies, death certificates are often issued by medico-legal agencies such as morgues. Even in situations of considerable social disruption there are strong motivations to provide death certificates, not least because relatives require these for a range of civil and religious purposes (burial, registration, death benefits etc.).
Sometimes casualty recorders obtained death certificates from the issuing organisations, and sometimes from families. Where available, official certification of death was often given high priority as a source by casualty recorders. Such records tended to be strong on data pertinent to victim identification, and the nature of injury. Recorders found them weaker on information regarding perpetrators and precise circumstances of the incident causing injury or death. This is because the personnel providing these reports were generally examining the victim at a place and time removed from the incident causing the violence.

“Hospital records will keep a medical record of casualties and the type of wounds, but they won’t have information on the perpetrator, what was the type of weapon which caused the injury or death of the victim or what were the circumstances, or whether the victim was insurgent or civilian.”

In some situations casualty recorders were unwilling to place too much importance on death certificates alone, because of the possibility that these can be forged.

“Death certificates are good evidence, but the litmus test is the next of kin who can really say someone has died. Sometimes death certificates are false.”

In general, the experience of casualty recorders was that where police, medical, or medico-legal documents could be accessed, their value was high. The most commonly expressed problem was lack of access due to the unwillingness of officials to share the information. This issue is dealt with further in Section 3 (p18 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hospital and Medico-legal Documents Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What types of organisations used this source?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What contexts is it used in/what circumstances permit its use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wherever institutions keep records at an incident level or about the deaths of individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is this source accessed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually through local contacts who share knowledge about casualties directly. Because of patient confidentiality regarding individual medical records, these will not necessarily be the source for recorders who use information from medical institutions. However sometimes recorders received these original records on request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the advantages and disadvantages of using this source – what special insight might it bring, what might it be less useful on or not able to provide?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents are bureaucratic, procedural, and comprehensive. They will be strong on victim data (demographics), cause of death and the type of weapon that caused the fatal injury. Medical data may be less useful for information on perpetrators, according to some recorders. Though the functioning of medical services may not break down completely during conflict, documentation by medical personnel can. Therefore, personal contact was often the most effective way of accessing this type of information.</td>
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</table>

**Courts**

National, regional, and international court records can contain specific information of relevance to casualty recorders. A major advantage of much court-produced material is that it becomes publicly available according to standard legal procedures.

Court records used by recorders tended to go deep into the evidence linking individual deaths to individual perpetrators, and as a result provided very detailed evidence on individual cases. This level detail is a characteristic of legal procedures, specific prosecutions depending on the bringing of sufficient evidence. This detail is both the advantage and disadvantage of court records. There are very large numbers of deaths in any situation that are never the subject of any court investigation and are never likely to be.

“We get documentation through international and domestic courts. We have teams of monitors of war crimes trials...We use indictments for determining the fact that some person is killed or missing.”
2.1.2 Incident-based Reports Produced by Inter-governmental Organisations

The member organisations of the ICRC (Red Cross/Red Crescent) are a major collector of information that is of use to casualty recorders. As well as running medical services, member organisations of the ICRC document the missing, to assist the searches that allow final determination of whether the missing person is dead or alive. It is not the role of ICRC to document all casualties, but a number of casualty recorders have made use of ICRC-produced lists of missing people. The ICRC database of missing persons is accessible to family members where the organisation is helping them search for their loved ones, but in some contexts the ICRC also made its lists of the missing available to the public (e.g. on a website) and to casualty recorders.

“The most relevant source for missing persons is the ICRC. We have information about some other people whose families never registered their missing to ICRC, so we gave that to ICRC and they are very grateful. We get data from ICRC every 6 months, they are very co-operative.”

Some UN agencies also compile, and sometimes publish, incident-level casualty data. Information from UN agencies was mentioned as a source only by a small number of the casualty recorders surveyed, suggesting that this work was not widely practiced by UN agencies, not widely shared, or not widely known to casualty recorders if it was.

2.1.3 Casualty Recording by Central Government: Integrative and Incident-based Reports

In some contexts, states issued reports relating to casualties covering a particular period of time or category of victim. During a conflict, for instance, states sometimes issued monthly or annual figures. Casualty recorders often saw these reports as problematic. Where totals were given without an incident-by-incident breakdown, there was no meaningful way to check them against other more detailed data. Even when detailed data was released, it was often judged incomplete or issued in the service of some political end, and thereby suspect.
“There are frequent ministry announcements of figures, e.g. health, interior, however they only release cumulative data. Individual incident death data are rarely released. Ministries have made more detailed but these are rarely seen.”

“When I get a consolidated table from the government, that is all I am getting. It is completely opaque beyond that. I can’t go back to the incident. We could ask governments to list every incident, and if they started doing that we wouldn’t be needed any more. I think that’s not going to happen, so we will remain relevant.”

“Lists of killed are published by the [human rights office] on their website. They’ve been doing this for the last 10 years. We don’t use these records. We have checked them and found them very incomplete. Their records are geared towards showing that the government is mastering the situation.”

After a conflict is over, recorders reported that some states engaged in detailed and publicly transparent work leading to reports on casualties, including from truth commissions. These can be of use to casualty recorders, although sometimes the information was not in the most useful form for casualty recorders.

“The government published official data, soldiers and civilians...names, dates of birth, some general data. It was from a special commission and the Ministry of Defence.”

“The truth commission archives are not exactly organised. You have to swim among loads of documents to be able to find what you need. They collected 17,000 testimonies. This refers to loads of things from forced disappearances to extrajudicial killings. You have loads of interviews in various languages, narratives from which you have to try and link one testimony with another. The commission also had a lot of narrative reconstructions based on these testimonies. So you have two things, the raw testimonies, and the elaboration of those testimonies.”

Among those surveyed, the most frequent observation was that there was a lack of relevant government or official work being carried out. Or, where casualty recorders knew or suspected that there was work being done, governments did not release it, or did not release a level of detail that was useful to casualty recorders.

“There is no organised system for casualty monitoring. Sometimes a government official will give a number, but not comprehensive data, [there is] no proper mechanism, no institution. The dilemma is that there are so many government institutions. When you contact the Interior Ministry you will get something different from the [counter terrorism forces]. We see that lack of co-ordination. And huge differences between numbers, how many attacks, deaths, casualties, everyone has his own numbers. The local police will say something else, and intelligence agencies...To bring all these things together, to give a comprehensive picture of casualties, this is something the government needs more than anything else.”

**Casualty Recording by Central Government: Summary**

- **What types of organisations used this source?**
  - All

- **What contexts is it used in/what circumstances permit its use?**
  - Anywhere it is being produced

- **How is this source accessed?**
  - By public release or statements

- **What are the advantages and disadvantages of using this source – what special insight might it bring, what might it be less useful on or not able to provide?**
  - States have privileged access to a lot of data, and the resources to investigate comprehensively. Incident-based casualty reporting by central government produced records that were seen as useful, and even close in their results to recorders’ own work in some contexts. Other casualty recorders were suspicious of politicisation in government recording. Opinions on government data varied between recorders operating in the same countries of conflict. Integrative reports were hard to use for casualty recorders, whoever produces them.
2.2 Civil Society Reports and Data

2.2.1 Press and Media Reports

The world’s press and media organisations together make up a global information collecting and dissemination network that is probably unrivalled in its capacity and reach, with hundreds of thousands of personnel deployed worldwide on a 24 hour a day basis.

Disaster is always “high value” news, and so reporting on conflict and its human consequences commands very large investment of human resource by press and media organisations. Journalists operate wherever there is the basic infrastructure to allow for the rapid movement of people and information, including places where journalists’ own personal security is at serious risk. Such infrastructure is necessary because often events happening more than 24 hour ago are “old news” and have rapidly diminishing commercial value to the organisations that report them. The key imperative for most press and media organisations is to “be among the first” to publish news of an event, ideally the very same day it happens, and certainly no later than the next day.

The consequence of these characteristics of the media was that a great majority of casualty recorders made extensive use of press and media reports. Some casualty recorders depended on them almost exclusively. This tended to be in cases where:

(a) The organisation was operating remotely from the conflict;
(b) Where a small organisation was covering a wide geographic area;
(c) Where the infrastructure of the country of conflict was reasonable, enabling media access;
(d) Repression or restriction of access by those controlling the territory was not too great.

“In the absence of any other kinds of sources, media are the best possible set of sources. They have so many people out in the field, the newspapers, the multiplicity of newspapers, it would be impossible for an individual organisation to replicate that kind of reportage, and while there are distortions, we have found the trends are fairly accurate.”

“The biggest work going on was by media, so it was the obvious source to use, for accessibility and availability.”

Two key obstacles to media reporting are a lack of roads or transport infrastructure (for access), and a lack of services such as electricity (to power communication devices such as computers and telephones). Where these barriers are present, the press and media may not make a significant contribution to the casualty record. Conflicts in remote rural areas with few roads or services are those that are generally not adequately reported by press and media. Recorders often reported geographical biases in media reporting – urban areas or those that were an editorial priority were reported on more. There were few conflict regions, however, that were reported to be completely inaccessible to journalists.

Another barrier to media access is the deliberate exclusion of journalists from a conflict area, usually by a party to the conflict with control of territory. It is difficult to prevent all information leaving a territory. However, in some cases recorders reported government conflict parties established a monopoly on information about casualties in certain areas, where the government was the only source of statements on deaths. Due to an inability to reach these areas to investigate, recorders could not independently confirm these statements.

“In specific battles there was prevention of press and media access...This means they are poorly reported, through some information got through from medical sources on total deaths – not much detail but some information on how many died.”

A major distinction made by many casualty recorders was that between media organisations with international reach and those whose focus was regional or local.

**International Press (Including Major Agencies)**

International media commonly reported to be particularly useful were the major international press agencies, and internationally oriented national organisations such as the BBC (UK) and Xinhua (China).

“The top 7 are AFP, AP, CNN, DOA, Reuters, Xinhua, and Press TV.”
Two main reasons for prioritising international media were given by recorders. First was accessibility. These organisations generally make their reports available online and open-source, and some translate them from local to international languages (mostly English).

The second reason was because of their standards. International media organisations were often seen as more impartial than some local sources, and their capacity to rapidly assess and integrate information from a wide variety of primary sources was seen as high, which was valuable to recorders.

“The most popular media source...is the BBC service, because people say this is free, not located in country, and what they say is true. Media located in country may be involved with different factions or groups in conflict...they are either very anti-government or very pro-government. That is why there is more confidence in outside media. Voice of America is also working here. Their verification is good.”

“The mainstream media have done a pretty decent job of tapping into all these different sources and reporting simultaneously on what is happening in the Twittersphere or what's happening in the blogosphere and kind of aggregating all this information into a live blog that is updated throughout the day.”

On the other hand, several recorders noted that the international media was not always impartial. Recorders reported that all types of media organisations could favour one “side” or narrative, distorting their reporting of casualties accordingly. Sometimes this was seen as due to the priorities or interest in the conflict of the government of the country where the media organisation was based. The information provided by any media source could of course never be taken for granted by recorders.

National Press and Media

In some countries, national newspapers and media were well established and were judged by casualty recorders to operate according to high reporting and verification standards.

“We use the largest circulation national magazines and newspapers. They are the most trustworthy and we know they are doing responsible journalism. They are not like other newspapers who just want to sell their copies.”

In some countries, detailed international coverage of the conflict was poor, and the main source of press and media reports were from national media organisations.

Sub-national Press and Media

Particularly where a casualty recorder was based in the country of conflict, local press and media were an important resource. Some recorders expressed concern about professional standards and political bias in local media, but others considered local media to be a better source for the access and knowledge that they could achieve (e.g. more accurate location information).

“Regional newspapers are very important, because they report smaller or less intense, less lethal events, which make less impression and impact and are not considered by other sources. They are also more accurate when it comes to location.”

“We are more biased towards local news than international. If you find a paper in... the local language, we would prefer that resource over news coming from Huffington Post or WSJ or CNN. Because that is the local people.”

The view that recorders expressed regarding local media sources depended on the context – perceived standards of local media varied globally. However, it was also the case that different organisations documenting casualties in the same country of conflict had various opinions over whether the views of the local or the international media should be prioritised.

When using a mixture of local and international media, some casualty recorders explicitly prioritised local media, using international media as a secondary check.

“We have four filtered stages of print-media monitoring. Initially we rely on local/regional newspapers. For this purpose monitoring of more than 30 local newspapers is carried out by the
database section. Afterwards we check the same casualty figures in mainstream/national newspapers to reconcile any discrepancy.”

A useful practice by local media organisations in one country was to pool their reports on a web-based platform that the recorder had access to and could easily collect reports of violence from.

“The first record is the journalist’s report, the media coverage about the situation is of high quality, because local journalists will go to the place where the incident of violence happened and they will write the record to the editors in the capital. All publications pool information on the news internet. It’s a core system just for the journalist input. Every day we print the system to get the information about the incidents of violence.”

Press and Media: Uses and Limitations

The characteristics of press and media reports, including their advantages and limitations, were well understood by casualty recorders. A fairly universal characteristic of media incident reporting is a concentration on factual information that is useful to recorders (e.g. date, place, how many killed, weapon/person causing death):

“Media is weak on analysis and questioning but factual reporting of what happened, where, when, how many killed, is good. Because we monitor a range of media sources we get a fairly good representation of particular events.”

However in the absence of any agreed standards for incident reporting in the journalistic profession as a whole, published reports often did not have all the details that recorders wanted to document, such as names. This is one reason why many casualty recorders saw press and media reports as only a starting point, though a very valuable one.

“Given the limitation of our sources, which are mainly media reports, the information we have is only as good as they report, which is sometimes quite vague.”

Several casualty recorders highlighted the importance of press and media as an early source of data in ongoing conflicts. More detailed investigations can be built from this later.

Some casualty recorders highlighted the usefulness of commercially aggregated global press and media databases. However, these are costly to access, and casualty recorders with few resources could not make use of these, relying instead on free (but less comprehensive) methods such as Google alerts. A very valuable and immediately practical advance to media based casualty recorders’ work could be made if commercial organisations including major agencies, and database aggregators such as Lexis-Nexis and Factiva, were willing to make their databases available to casualty recorders at reduced or zero cost.

“The very high cost of subscriptions to search engines such as Factiva and Lexis Nexis means that we’ve opted to rely on free software.”

Not all the work on press and media reports was done with electronic documents. Many casualty recorders collected paper copies, for accuracy (because paper and electronic versions differed) or by necessity (electronic versions did not exist).

“We record both web pages and physical articles in the actual paper, because sometimes things are reported in one that are not in the other.”
2.2.2 NGO Reports and Other Information from Civil Society

In many conflict areas a wide range of NGOs operate, and many of these collect and publish information that is useful to casualty recorders. Several casualty recorders across the range of approaches reported using information from a large number of local and international NGOs.

“How 80 organisations: labour unions, peasants, [minority] groups.”

Some took a more selective view of NGO data, particularly where media coverage of NGO activities was strong, and so independently gathering information from NGOs was not necessary.

“There are not too many other organisations that bring us data, but on particular incidents which have become extremely controversial then we obviously look at the analyses of various organisations. But we find that they would probably be reflected in the media discourse, so we don’t find it of extraordinary utility to keep on looking at other NGOs. None of them is consistently doing this kind of work.”

Reports from the types of civil society groups below were very frequently mentioned by casualty recorders, so are discussed specifically:

Human Rights Organisations

There is a wide range of human rights organisations operating in and across many conflicts. The two international organisations most frequently mentioned as producing useful information were Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

“We had a problem with access in some cases, and in territories where Human Rights Watch was active, they had some researchers in some villages, and could provide information, pictures, video materials.”

In most conflicts there were also local organisations operating, sometimes in quite extensive organised networks. Casualty recorders reported using the outputs of these NGOs. Access to the databases of these organisations was particularly useful, as information on specific individuals or incidents could be compared.

“There are human rights organisations operating in the area and we have a partnership with one of them and we will be incorporating their database.”

Victims, relatives, and veterans organisations also frequently provided useful information to casualty recorders.

Other Casualty Recorders

In some conflicts more than one casualty recorder was operating. A small number of those surveyed reported comparing their casualty information with that of other recorders. A small minority of recorders
did this with the information of government agencies that recorded casualties, but more commonly the
comparison was done with the records of other civil society casualty recorders.

Some used the data of other recorders by comparing their database or lists, case by case, with the public
incident or victim lists that others had created. Where this was not possible because the other recorders
did not publish lists that allowed individual cases to be compared, just giving numbers for example, some
recorders privately shared lists, databases or information on specific cases with each other.

“We just sat down and went through each list and cross-compared and investigated where there
was inconsistency and spot checked where there wasn’t and worked from there.”

Where the published reports of other recorders did not break down information about casualties case
by case, and where no private access could be arranged, the work of other recorders could not be used.
Crosschecking at the level of incidents or individuals is an essential characteristic of casualty recording.

“Sometimes we get access to other organisations’ databases but usually it is just what they have
published. They are very jealous/careful with their own information that they collect and build so
most of the time they don’t give very specific information and they send a very general report from
their information, so we cannot register it in our database.”

Occasionally casualty recorders rejected the reports of other recorders documenting the same conflict
because of concerns about the quality of their work or possible bias, for example if there was a lack of
detail given about cases, or apparently exaggerated claims.

Religious Organisations
In various countries of conflict, recorders identified religious communities and leaders as a particularly
important source of information about casualties. Religious communities tended to be trusted as non-
belligerent and non-political, so had access sometimes denied to other parties, and provided testimony or
data that was seen to be unbiased. One source of information came from the close involvement of
religious organisations in funerals and burials, which meant that data relating to victims was often
recorded in the official documentation of that religious body.

In conclusion, there are many civil society groups and NGOs operating in conflict zones that collect and
disseminate documentary evidence that is useful to casualty recorders. This information is useful to
recorders because of the data collected on specific incidents and the effects on individuals. The main
difficulty experienced by casualty recorders is lack of access to the incident level information held by other
NGOs, which would allow crosschecking and the integration of this information. This was possible for some
recorders, either through using published information or through private sharing. The field of casualty
recording would be strengthened if common principles and practices of data sharing could be established
between organisations collecting casualty data. We recommend collaboration on developing principles and
guidelines for data sharing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO and Civil Society Documents Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What types of organisations used this source?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What contexts is it used in/what circumstances permit its use?</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| The diversity of NGOs and civil society groups means that these sources almost always exist in a
  conflict and after it |
| **How is this source accessed?** |
| From published material, or through bilateral data-sharing (formal or informal) |
| **What are the advantages and disadvantages of using this source – what special insight might it bring, what might it be less useful on or not able to provide?** |
| Advantages: High level of detail in reporting when this is done at incident level - particularly date, time, place, identify of victims and circumstances of their death. Local civil society sources give increased coverage and local knowledge. They were generally seen as highly trustworthy by recorders. |
| Disadvantages: Several NGOs only published aggregate data, which cannot be integrated into casualty records. |
2.2.3 Social Media

New social media (Facebook/twitter/blogs) have recently emerged as playing a significant role in information flows in some countries of conflict, when used by individuals and organisations for micropublishing about incidents of violence. These reports can be searched for and collected by casualty recorders. Increasingly, press and media organisations are incorporating social media outputs into their own data collection and dissemination processes.

An exponential growth in the use of social media for micropublishing has occurred within the last two to three years, and has been particularly central to the conflicts arising from the Arab Spring. Such conflicts have been characterised by restrictions on the free movement of journalists and other data-gatherers (e.g. human rights monitors) on the ground, meaning that social media have become a critical means for informants to get data out of the conflict zone.

“Citizen journalism has been a huge component of the information flow out of [X]. Up to 100 tweets for each reference, two people killed here, five there, rather than rely on some kind of government bureaucratised summary of events. When we actually had the granular data so to speak you feel it is more accurate, and we’re getting it from the sources, so there’s no reason to believe that it has been sanitised in any way or altered in any way.”

Of those surveyed, very few used social media as a source. This is unsurprising as it is an emerging trend, and will not be relevant in every country of conflict – for example where these media are not yet popular. Those that did use social media were aware of the advantages and limitations of this kind of information.

“People that are tweeting and making posts are not experts necessarily in whatever they are reporting on. So you’ll find a lot of incompleteness, a lot of inaccuracies. For example a popular one will be the use of “missiles” in describing the weapon. We triangulate and find, no they are actually grad rockets. People don’t understand the distinction.”

Because social media use is rapidly evolving and is not yet a central resource for many casualty recorders, a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in casualty recording has not yet emerged, and should be the subject of further investigation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Documents Summary</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What types of organisations used this source?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What contexts is it used in/what circumstances permit its use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where on the ground investigations/movement is difficult. Where mobile internet technology is widespread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is this source accessed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the advantages and disadvantages of using this source – what special insight might it bring, what might it be less useful on or not able to provide?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantages: Immediacy - data available within minutes or hours of incident. Disadvantages: documents derive from different individuals so can be highly variable in content and quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2.4 Beyond Pre-existing Documents: Gathering Data First Hand from Local Witnesses and Informants

Of the recorders surveyed who used only pre-existing documentation as a source, only a very small number believed that their records provided a complete and detailed picture of every casualty. For these recorders, the circumstances in the country of conflict of a highly bureaucratised, urbanised state and a large uncensored media presence were very specific.

Most casualty recorders, even those who can get a lot of data from other documents, will need to make a decision regarding if, when, and how, to supplement that data with the direct testimony of individuals who have witnessed the fatal incident directly, or who have a particularly close relationship to the victim and knowledge of the circumstances of his or her death. There are various issues surrounding this decision,
including the need to consider how to reach and protect informants. This is covered more fully in section 3 (p18) and in the paper ‘Evaluating Sources’ in this collection.\(^5\)

A summary is provided here regarding the information to be gained from such sources, received as documentary testimonies (in written, audio or visual form) or completed questionnaires or forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents resulting from interviews with primary informants: summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What types of organisations use this source?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What contexts is it used in/what circumstances permit its use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where there are insufficient alternative sources of the detailed information needed. This type of information can be easier to access post-conflict, but is possible to access during conflict where the security situation or the structure of the recorder’s organisation permits it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is this source accessed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face to face meeting, or telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the advantages and disadvantages of using this source – what special insight might it bring, what might it be less useful on or not able to provide?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantages: Primary witnesses can have an authority and detailed knowledge unmatched by other sources. Disadvantages: This is by far the most costly source of data to collect, placing considerable resource demands on a casualty recorder. Documentary sources can be more accurate on certain pieces of information e.g. information from military records will be better on weapons, families on personal details</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. PEOPLE AND THEIR ORGANISATIONS AS A SOURCE – ACCESSING INFORMATION THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

Section 2 of this paper focused on the reports and documents produced by different organisations and individuals, and the advantages and disadvantages of these different types of documents. This section focuses on the relationships recorders have with the people producing these reports, and the organisations they work in (where relevant). These people and relationships are sources of formal or informal information flows, verbal or documentary. The issues discussed here are:

- How best to contact such people
- How to assess their usefulness and credibility
- How to build productive relationships with them

The information recorders used that was held by organisations or institutions (as opposed to individual witnesses or family members, which recorders accessed by different dynamics), varied in how openly it was released or shared, and the official status of this release. Four different levels were reported:

1. Open source/public domain documents
2. Documents that were received after official request or through a regular information sharing relationship
3. Documents that were shared more informally from personal contacts in institutions/organisations
4. Knowledge that was informally/secretly given from inside institutions as tip offs or checks to information the casualty recorder already had

Where organisations or individuals voluntarily place documents in the public domain, the issues are different than when a request has to be made in order to access the data. That request must be directed towards an individual, and an understanding of the organisational and political constraints on that individual will be needed.

In many cases, the ideal situation for recorders would simply be for all those with information about casualties to publish it (option 1). Where this is not possible or advisable (for example because of specific safety concerns), the most straightforward way for recorders to access information in many cases would be

\(^5\) For other papers in the 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)
through receiving information on official request or through establishing consistent and regular data sharing (option 2).

The actual experience of recorders, particularly with state or other official institutions who have relevant information, is of a failure to admit the fact that data is being collected; or, if collection of information is acknowledged, a failure to publish or release it (or to publish in enough detail). Some NGOs also do not publish enough detail for their reports to be useful to recorders. This forces casualty recorders to use informal and ad-hoc arrangements under options 3 and 4 to get information. Information collected in this way is not likely to be comprehensive.

There are political and other obstacles to more transparent and open information sharing about casualties, especially by official institutions. However, recorders reported overcoming these barriers in some circumstances, following a better understanding on the part of the institution of the work of the casualty recorder, and the importance of information sharing to both.

This section, discussing the types of information that recorders accessed through their connections with people or their institutions, looks at recorders relationships with:

- 3.1 Official Sources
  - 3.1.1 State Agencies
  - 3.1.2 Inter-governmental Organisations
- 3.2 Civil Society Sources
  - 3.2.1 Press and Media Organisations
  - 3.2.2 NGOs and Other Civil Society Groups, International and Local
  - 3.2.3 Individuals

### 3.1 Official Sources

#### 3.1.1 State Agencies

The experience of the majority of civil society casualty recorders in relating to governments was negative. Casualty recorders often reported governments as being closed to dialogue and information sharing. There was a perception among these recorders that governments would prefer if casualty information were not published.

> "The hardest part is that everything has to be done very low profile and very discreetly. Government, armed groups, [other participants to the conflict], none wants information about civilians caught in the crossfire coming out, or that are killed due to their bombs. It’s been really difficulty collecting such information under such discreet form."

In some cases, governments have tried to actively suppress or rubbish the activities of casualty recorders.

> "We have had problems with some military commanders, political leaders, for 30 years, and we have also had harassment from the last president of the republic."

> "The [X] military called our work ‘anti-[X] propaganda’. Documenting...civilian casualties is not propaganda."

Casualty recorders sometimes found that the way to successfully change government willingness to share data was through public pressure in the press and media.

> "Its not easy to have access to state-held information. We try to involve media to have some noise and highlight issues."

> "The government was forced to accept that it has to share information with us. Otherwise they might get some disadvantage from our report...so they were pressured by the public to open the source to us. But we are cautious that we might get misinformation or distortion from the authorities, so we keep our primary source of data as the journalistic report."

In cases where states did issue or provide information, some casualty recorders expressed the need to be cautious of politicisation of the information.
“Most information about mass graves comes from the government...so they provide a schedule of what they want to exhume and we try to exert some influence over these exhumation schedules so as to prevent an overly politicised scheduling task. Every time there are elections suddenly there is a new mass grave and we don’t like that too much.”

A very small number of the recorders surveyed worked across a range of different countries under internationally supported frameworks that mandated or recognised the recording of specific types of casualties. These recorders had formal arrangements with governments under the international frameworks that these states had chosen to support. The experience of these organisations suggests that an explicit international framework could be part of what governments need in order to engage systematically and productively with casualty recorders.

**Organs of Government**

Despite a general lack of engagement by governments at the highest levels, some casualty recorders reported successful collaborations at sub-government level, for example with particular ministries, or agencies such as the military, the police, or the government-run medico-legal system. These were both official and unofficial relationships.

“Sometimes the government is hostile and doesn’t want to be monitored. You have to get the trusted sources within government that can give you more information on specific issues.”

“The second source is the report from the authorities. This is called the early report of the security people working on the ground. The authorities report back to the local headquarters. The authorities send this daily report to us. We have a connection with them.”

**Medico-legal Institutions (Hospitals, Mortuaries)**

In terms of accessing information, special mention should be made of the role of health institutions. These were reported to be one of the parts of government that was more open to casualty recording, and most consistently able to provide information. Dealing with and recording information about casualties is integral to the work of these institutions, and in many circumstances they may be more impartial than other official institutions. Health institutions can also be the most consistent source of official information available to recorders because, when all other organs of state have broken down, the humanitarian impulses of medical and health staff tend to mean that hospitals remain functioning to the extent possible.

“We work very closely with major hospitals, they provide us with admissions data on a monthly basis.”

This research identifies health and medical personnel and institutions as among the most vital collaborators for effective casualty recording. Effective advances in the policy and practice of casualty recording will need to take particular account of the positive role that health and medical institutions and personnel can play.

3.1.2 Inter-governmental Organisations

Some casualty recorders reported productive relationships of data sharing at a local level with UN agencies and missions who were engaged in data collection. Sometimes UN personnel were able to gain access to areas that were not accessible to civil society groups.

“We have a good level of relationship with [UN agency]. They have committed to sharing data with local and international NGO’s after seeing the effectiveness of the work being done by these organisations.”

On the other hand, organisational constraints within UN agencies could make it hard for data-sharing agreements to be reached. Casualty recorders reported the need to find sympathetic officials at a local level and work to build trust to overcome caution.

“There are also legitimate security concerns in these organisations regarding how data is utilized and made public. It’s been a long process in building trust and relationships”
These agencies experience difficulties in relating to casualty recorders in the absence of formal frameworks. On the other hand, sympathetic mid-level officials exist within individual agencies that can initiate local data-sharing agreements and advocate upwards for greater institutional co-operation.

3.2 Civil Society Sources

3.2.1 Press and Media Organisations

Productive contacts with specific organisations and individuals in press and media were reported to be important by several casualty recorders. Press and media were used effectively to publicise the work of some casualty recorders and make widely publicised requests for witnesses to come forward.

“We make announcements in the media and ask people if they have knowledge of particular incidents, to come forward.”

“We run public information campaigns, we tell them there is an office you can come to and we explain what kind of information they would be expected to provide.”

Several casualty recorders reported productive personal relationships with individual trusted journalists. This allowed access to their primary data, including unpublished details, and also the possibility of these journalists making additional targeted investigations on behalf of the casualty recorder. This is a relationship reported most frequently by recorders using the 'Document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration' approach (for a description of the five approaches to recording, see 'An Overview of the Field').

“When we came across inconsistencies we would contact journalists directly and ask them to go back through their notebooks and to examine those discrepancies to see if they can help us clarify them.”

“We have local journalist connections, so we check back to that source – journalists have connections to the village of communities, they can check back. In one example, military said the death was drug related. But from our source, what we heard from the locality, the situation of the violence, the techniques, the process of the bombs, it is insurgency, not drugs war. Later on we checked back with the communities and confirmed that this is not drug war, and it cannot make any connection with the drug dealers.”

Apart from helping with public campaigns for information and facilitating information exchange, relationships with press and media organisations can also help protect casualty recorders by exposing threats and intimidations.

“Threats to our work. Death threats. If they happen we go to the media. That is the best protection we can have. Sometimes perpetrators are ashamed to be named, they get cold feet.”

3.2.2 NGOs and Other Civil Society Groups, International and Local

Special mention was made by quite a few casualty recorders of co-operation and data sharing (as well as information exchange at an individual level) with major international NGOs such as Human Rights Watch.

“We have had a problem with access to some cases, and territories where HRW was active, and they had some researchers in some villages, they can provide information, pictures, video material.”

Most involvement between casualty recorders and other NGOs is through relationships with those operating at a regional or local level. Casualty recorders valued local NGOs both for the information they provided and because they helped recorders to reach individuals who could provide more information.

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6 For other papers in the collection, see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection
“In every region we had local partner organisations, on human rights and reconciliation – there were substantial sources of information and were very useful for field work because they have their own contacts in the local community so they help us reach the people.”

Engagement with victim or survivor groups (such as widows’ organisations) was particularly frequently mentioned as helpful for reaching witnesses or victims’ families.

“When you have large numbers of missing persons, the missing are for the most part men, women are not very frequently missing. So these women are usually organised, they have associations and umbrella organisations...more formal or informal...they can be contacted practically everywhere.”

Religious groups and personnel were important for their knowledge about victims’ funerals, and because their non-partisan stance sometimes gave them access to information that others could not collect. Relationships with individual priests and imams, and their institutions, were important to several recorders.

“The church was very active – priests...were not targeted from either side, so it was easy for them to cross the border.”

“The information we collect is either from the family, or if that is not possible for security reasons we will go with a local community leader...a very good source are the Imams, the Mosque Imams who conduct the funeral processions. We talk with them and we collect the name and as much information as they have.”

Not all civil society organisations were co-operative or possible to establish relationships with, for example if they did not agree with the recorder’s principles. Recorders did not report this as a significant barrier to their work however.

“[There was] political opposition from veterans groups who wanted to keep a special status for military deaths. We have to explain [our work] and persuade [them]”.

The general experience of the casualty recorders surveyed was that productive and collaborative relationships with key local NGOs were a very important component of building the necessary understandings and trust for collecting information from local informants.

3.2.3 Individuals

Despite the importance of relating productively to organisations and the individuals in them, the key individuals for many casualty recorders were not connected to any organisation, but were those who hold specific information because they are a family member of a victim, a witness to an incident, or a citizen with specific local information to add.

Several casualty recorders identified the immediate relative or the direct witness to a death as the primary and most important source, the “gold standard”. Collecting from this source of information usually involved an interview to collect a testimony that the individual signed, stating any restrictions that they wished to place on the testimony’s use or publication. In most cases this involved a physical face-to-face interview, often held in the witness’s home, but sometimes in the central office of the casualty recorder. For those using the ‘Unknown victim identification’ approach7, forensic samples were taken with testimony.

Not all civil society organisations were co-operative or possible to establish relationships with, for example if they did not agree with the recorder’s principles. Recorders did not report this as a significant barrier to their work however.

All of the casualty recorders in categories 3, 4, and 5 and many of those in category 2 (see p5 for a reminder of the names of the approaches) use such individual informants as key sources of data. A very large body of experience has thus been accumulated about how to optimise the quantity and quality of data provided by these individuals. This is covered in section 4, below.

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7 For a description of the five approaches to recording, see ‘An Overview of the Field’ – for other papers in the collection see
www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection
4. SPECIFIC PROCESSES AND ISSUES WHEN ACCESSING AND DEALING WITH INDIVIDUAL INFORMANTS

This section concentrates on the specific issues related to obtaining and dealing with information from individual informants. Collecting information from individuals required considerations and procedures from recorders that the collection of other sources did not. It also had specific challenges. For the consideration of recorders who use or intend to use the testimonies of individuals, the detailed treatment given to the issues here aims to draw attention to this.

Firstly, this section discusses how recorders’ data-collectors were selected, recruited, and organised to locate and interact with individual informants. Then, it examines how casualty recorders went about locating appropriate informants. Thirdly, it discusses the processes of gaining agreement and trust from individuals to provide data to the casualty recorder’s representatives. Fourthly, modes of data collection and storage, particularly relevant to on the ground information collection, are described. Fifthly and finally, limitations and difficulties of this kind of work are identified and discussed.

4.1 Selecting On-the-ground Data Collectors

A recurring theme across many different contexts was the importance of field-workers or information providers who were deeply knowledgeable about and embedded in the local community, and sensitive to its history, culture, and politics.

“We prefer to work with journalists because we believe they are more in touch with local people, and they are the ones that could be able to collect information more quickly than an ordinary person would.”

“Work must be tailored to the local context, needs deep knowledge of the local situation, and the co-operation/mediation of local NGOs that are trusted by the population.”

Field workers with particular qualifications or professions were often favoured, particularly journalists and health/medical workers. This was for their privileged contacts or in some cases their ability to move freely and relatively un-noticed in the conflict area. Especially for the purposes of keeping a low profile however, sometimes recorders prioritised training ordinary citizens to work on recording in their own communities.

“Local reporters work for us, we pay them part-time. When we need further details we contact them and ask them for a report.”

“We use medical sources and medical personnel. We have a wide network with hospitals, doctors, medical personnel. We have a list of contacts. If we don’t have a medical contact in the area we find one via other doctors who are in different areas who put us in touch with them. We now have lists of more than 200 all over the country.”

“Initial volunteers were all hospital staff…. Working with medics was a great idea. They are really good at dealing with people, they’re used to taking information from them, filling in forms, so it was very natural.”

Geographical spread across the area being investigated is important, and several casualty recorders reported the use of locally based field-workers, sometimes in quite large numbers. In some cases these researchers worked together as coherent teams, travelling together to a given area, and collaboratively meeting with individuals. In other cases individuals worked independently, and their connection to each other was indirect, via their relationship with the central organisation.

An important point raised by one casualty recorder was that the act of taking part in the documentation of casualties can in itself be a transforming and even healing activity for people in a fractured community, offering new opportunities for them to engage in an empowered and cross-society way.

“I thought I can create an opportunity for young local men and women to participate in this kind of civil society work, that is not based on one’s political party or religious affiliation, or gender affiliation. It is an important healing experience for them to work together and tell the story of the dead while collaborating with the people who live there.”
4.2 Locating People as Informants
Casualty recorders used a range of strategies to find the appropriate people to get information from.

Public Campaigns for Information
Especially post conflict, some used public campaigns, promoted through press and media.

“We use our networks, we have a legal aid centre….We have hotline and get phone calls, we react on different incidents...different human rights NGOs, local newspapers and TV.”

“We have a campaign...on billboards, newspapers, bus stops. Commercials. We also have a hotline.”

Building Trust and Knowledge Locally
Casualty recorders reported that over time their field workers became well known to local people, who came to them with information and contacts without the field worker having to seek these (though this did not mean that field workers would not actively seek information as well). This highlights the importance of long-term stability in both organisational identity and of individual field-workers. Knowledge and trust takes time to build.

“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.”

“We are a very well known organisation working on casualties, so people contact us. We go into a process of our researchers on the spot or in the nearest area – they will contact a community leader. They will collect family phone numbers. If possible they would go to the spot and talk directly with the family, or if not possible, by phone and collect information.”

Another consequence of having field workers who have built up local knowledge and credibility is that they know who to go to for reliable information, and can expect co-operation when they do approach individuals. This is particularly important in on-going conflicts, or where post-conflict tensions remain high, both for a recorder to be able to collect information, and for the safety of field workers.

“If someone new went to a region and tried to get back with this information, its putting their lives at risk and people would not speak to them openly. It’s a really big risk for them to go to a different area and report from there. So all we try to do is have our volunteers that are based from there.”

4.3 Gaining Agreement from Informants to Provide Information

The Risks to Informants
Several casualty recorders reported that they always took care to give clear explanations to potential informants about who they were and why the recording work was being done in order to build trust, so that these individuals could make an informed choice about whether they wished to give information.

“When we find an eyewitness, we invite him/her to our office, and say that this is recording for the future – for benefit of future generations, not now, and this gains the trust.”

However, it was universally acknowledged by casualty recorders doing this direct data gathering from individuals that no pressure should ever be placed on any individual to provide information. Whatever frustrations and setbacks this caused had to be absorbed by the recorder.

“We don’t talk with people unless they are willing to talk. We don’t put pressure. If a source is not willing or we just feel by phone they are afraid we just end it all and look for someone else. The information is generally not lost – you just need to find new sources. Sources are always there – it is just a matter of finding them. Sometimes it is frustrating because it take two or three hours or two days just to confirm one case, but as we have it in our pending for verification list we will not
drop it until we know... otherwise their name will be there and we have to continue looking for them.”

Recognition of the potential risks to informants of giving information were well recognised by casualty recorders.

“[There is] a lot of fear in our country. We ask people whether they want to keep this confidential.”

“Journalists, academics, lawyers, have all been killed for their involvement in this. So there is always risk and people fear being identified as a sources.”

“The perpetrators might seek retaliation against the victim for talking to us. They check with us, just to make sure why we are collecting the information, but there’s a lot of insecurity in the fact that they feel it might get back to them.”

Some of the risks were seen by recorders to be associated with the publication of specific pieces of information, such as the name of the victim, which informants feared could put them at risk.

“Family members sometimes don’t want names to be published. They think they will face problems, from different law enforcement bodies or special services. They have friends and family on the other side and they think they may face problems if names are published.”

“There are generally very few cases where the families don’t want the name to be released, only when they have a son in arbitrary detention or disappeared so they feel that any publicity would compromise the safety of that person.”

The willingness of families to have certain kinds of information released might change over time as the political context changed. What may not be possible or acceptable immediately after a conflict can become the norm in the years to follow.

“We didn’t use names at all. It’s interesting because I’m now doing work in [the country of conflict] again and many, many more people want their names used. Because the culture is at a different stage, but also people see participation in this kind of research as a form of acknowledgment...[before], acknowledgment was pie in the sky frankly.”

In the rare cases that a casualty recorder was operating under national and international mandate, they could sometimes offer a heightened and more specific reassurance to informants regarding data security.

“We have agreements with governments that we have diplomatic immunities, and privileges, and that our premises are immune from search, and data cannot be seized and so forth.”

However, most recorders reported that they could do nothing to protect informants apart from to apply the strictest measures of confidentiality and data security that they could (see p28), and to emphasise to informants that there was no obligation to give any information. Recorders who encountered these safety issues took them very seriously.

Reluctance by Informants to Give Information Again and Again to Different Agencies

A difficulty of a different nature came about when informants had already given information to other agencies and felt that nothing positive had come of it, so were reluctant to give the information again.

“Some people are very tired of giving information 15-16 after the war; they’ve already given information in many different groups and nothing has happened, so now they are tired of discussing what happens...[However], the fact that the government has not published civilian lists helps our work. It improves cooperation from the people we interview.”

“The survivors are very tired of being interviewed and recorded information over and over. It takes longer doing negotiations and not all lead to a happy conclusion. Sometimes people tell you to get lost.”
One strategy for dealing with respondent reluctance was to take sufficient time and care over the interview process, to build trust and respect from the informant towards the field researcher. This included providing information to the informant about one’s own position and background with relation to the conflict, but also listening deeply and respectfully to what the informant had to say, not only about the incident of direct interest, but also about their general condition and context. Casualty recorders suggested that these processes needed to be measured in hours rather than minutes. Recorders also reported that it was important to establish links not just with individuals but whole communities and other parties where necessary.

“It is psychologically difficult for families. When our researcher goes to their home it is not just taking a statement. It’s always a long conversation before and after taking statements trying to make a deeper connection with them, not just – we want to make them confident in our work, that we will not misuse their information, so its always three or four hours conversation, and people are calling us after that to express their gratitude because we are interested in their loved ones, because nobody asked them before. So it is one very sensitive connection and one very emotional connection.”

“I have been around a long time. I know everybody on both sides of the conflict and I’ve been doing this kind of work for a long time...I have direct lines of communication with all the armed groups. It’s helped that I’m female. People tolerate me because they think I’m harmless. I can ask lots of questions without raising suspicion. I have a track record of doing this kind of stuff, and people know I’m not standing for election, and I’m not going to run and tell the other side what they’ve said.”

“Despite the fact that people are really tired of giving information again and again, somehow people are really happy that someone still wants to hear what happened to their family member and are still interested to collect all the data. When we talk with members of minority groups [especially], they’re really happy. We had a situation where we were the first people who asked one old guy about his son in 15 years, so he was crying, but crying from happiness, just the opposite of what we expected.”

“We are not simply going around asking people what they know, but we rather concentrate on communities, because the issues about entering a community, you have to be very strategic in that respect. People have been quite used and over-used by a number of governmental and non-governmental bodies regarding information or extracting information from them so people are quite fed up. So you have to establish a link with the community, talk to the community, see whether the community is interested in remembering what actually happened, and from then on if they accept you, you can start collecting the information. From that information you get to the event, to the victim.”

4.4 Data Collection and Storage

Prioritising Cases

The first stage in the process of gaining information from direct sources was often the prioritising of which sources to approach, given multiple possibilities and limited resources. This sometimes involved crosschecking incoming information from a number of sources before sending out field investigators:

“There are a lot of claims...if it is credible we investigate it. But sometimes some sources we are looking at, they don’t sound credible. Yesterday we had two calls that the 100th person was killed in [X] and by two phone calls we know that it is not true.”

“We mainly ask our network to verify incidents we’ve already heard about rather than asking them to proactively investigate, because it’s a big risk to them as well, and also we cannot do that ourselves.”

“If we find a trend of large numbers of civilian casualties recorded by other NGOs and not by us, we do independently investigate, to figure out why we did not come across this information.”
Arrangements for Conducting Interviews or Collecting Testimonies

The preferred mode of data gathering for the majority of casualty recorders was a face-to-face interview with the informant. This was either in the field, or where feasible, in the office of the casualty recorder.

“If it is possible [our researchers] would go to the spot and talk directly with the family, or if not they would talk by phone and collect information. [They] scan a copy of an ID of the person who was killed if possible, [find out] the circumstances of killing and how it happened.”

“On a daily basis we meet people who come into our offices, we are receiving 13,000 – 20,000 per year [on different human rights issues]. We are very well known.”

This also allows the taking of direct physical copies of relevant documentation and precise geo-location information where casualty recorders collected this. Face-to-face contact with the informant was required to collect forensic evidence.

“When we are working in the field we have small portable scanners, so if we find any useful documents with our witnesses we can scan these documents immediately.”

“Our field researcher frequently goes to the region to speak to as many witnesses as possible in affected regions. This includes affected victims, local religious leaders and government officials.”

When direct face-to-face contact was not possible, a phone conversation was the next best alternative.

“Some people who are living abroad are contacting us through our website. If they agree we make a telephone call and record their audio statement. We write it on our form and send it to them for signing.”

Casualty recorders reported that they could not use information sent by correspondence without further investigation, particularly information sent electronically through a website or email. The ability for an informant to fake their identity or to fabricate information was considered far higher with written submissions.

“We do not accept comments through email. It is not a reliable source – anyone can mimic an email account and send anything.”

“When we communicate with families we just call them on their numbers, but we don’t trust an email, we have experiences where people with claims make up names of people who are killed just to increase that cause. Therefore we need to know we are talking to the right people. If we fail to communicate by phone we are happy to send someone to the area.”

The Use of Forms and Questionnaires, Confirmation and Consent

The process of information collection for individual testimonies often involved filling in a form or other document. This was created with and in the presence of the informant, and generally shown to them for checking or signing. Several recorders mentioned asking informants to confirm how they consented to the information being used at this point. The informant could, for example, put restrictions on which parts of their testimony could be used in public materials, which could be shared on request from certain institutions, and which should never be shared.

The use of a form to guide the questioning of the field worker was mentioned by a number of casualty recorders. Forms assisted the consistent collection of specific points of information, increasing the consistency and reliability of the information collected. Developing such forms to be as complete as possible was a priority. Failure to gain all the information that was needed on the first encounter could lead to costly additional work that could have been avoided.

“Sometimes we receive forms that are incomplete and require more information which could have been collected the first time round but was not specified in the form. With a developed standardised intake form it would be much easier to get the required information.”
Data Security

Information about sources was important to record, but casualty recorders were well aware of the security risks involved in doing this, and so sometimes took precautions such as never writing the name or contact details of an informant on the same physical sheet of paper as other information.

“Each source has to be recorded, but on a separate sheet for security reasons. So a local Imam, who he is, what is his phone number or if it is the family whom we did talk with, is it the brother, sister, mother, what is the contact information…. But we can’t have the name on the list without a very clear source or sources.”

Casualty recorders operating in hostile environments were aware of the need to take extra data-security precautions.

“[X] is a very totalitarian regime, so our website gets hacked, or we get thousands of spam emails. We work behind proxies and firewalls [but] we feel especially sources we just keep on paper, we don’t upload it to the computer. It is very primitive, but that’s how we do it.”

Casualty recorders were sensitive to the fact that sometimes information collected from witnesses had to be held for some time until it was safe or judicious to release it.

“Material is limited where it comes to mass graves and mass killings in certain areas. We just keep a record of primary testimonies and then we wait for circumstances to change in order to be able to investigate or make it public, otherwise we fear they would remove the bodies to other areas.”

4.5 Limitations and Difficulties in Collecting Information from Individuals

Inaccessibility of Informants

Casualty recorders frequently mentioned difficulties of geography as a challenge to collecting testimonies from individuals. These difficulties included remote communities separated by mountains, and/or with a lack of road and infrastructure contact. These difficulties were sometimes highlighted by recorders in comparison to other areas they covered where these difficulties did not exist, to demonstrate the challenge of covering the whole country of conflict.

“Its really hard with remote rural locations. We had to walk 5 or 6 kilometres through the snow. We went to the top of the mountains bordered with [X] just to reach some abandoned village where we heard that one old lady lives, and we reached her after a couple of hours walking, but she gave us very useful information since she was the only one left in that village, where 15 of her family members were killed. So sometimes it’s really hard, sometimes it’s impossible to reach by car.”

“[X] is a very mountainous country, so it is quite difficult to travel from one place to another. People have to face walking enormous distances where there’s no roads, and also lack of having proper transportation.”

Translation and Language Issues

Multi-lingual conflict areas presented another difficulty that some casualty recorders had to face. A minority of recorders reported that they had staff fluent in all local languages. Some others used interpreters or translators. This had its own issues – recorders were not necessarily sure of the accuracy of translations every time.

“There are 23 different ethno-linguistic communities in the country. We have to hire temporary translators and it is difficult to monitor how right they are.”

Resources Limitations

Access to informants and the information they have is not impossible under the circumstances described above, but the resource implications of completing the task are considerable. It is not surprising therefore that lack of funding for the work was raised as a significant problem by several recorders.
“Funding is the main thing. Nobody gives us any for these kinds of things. Nobody is interested regarding this. [X] is not a country that pops up as a priority country in any respect. We are a fast growing economy and we are not considered even as a post-conflict country.”

Context and Timing
Not all the problems faced by casualty recorders when attempting to collect information from individuals could be easily resolved with more resources. Many challenges reflected more intractable facts of history or politics. A lack of living witnesses was sometimes a problem, particularly if a recorder was working post conflict.

“You’re talking about annihilating entire provinces, everyone from unborn children to the elderly. We have one case where there were 336 dead, and one witness survived. He fled to another country. We found him, he gave his interview and then he died. I mean that’s it, there is nothing else. Who are these 336 people? The census didn’t have the, covered, the records were burned, I mean these people were literally erased...Also, it’s so long ago now, many of the witnesses are dead.”

This is an argument for information to be collected as early as possible, even if it is not complete.

Political interference, or a lack of political will from governments was another issue that restricted the access of casualty recorders to specific individual informants.

“[The challenges are] first if there is an on-going conflict, second the lack of political will to investigate in the local government, third the presence of perpetrators who are still free, four the lack of interests of what is called first world countries to investigate or to invest resources.”

Such difficulties require advocacy and political will to be overcome. Such advocacy may require the assistance of countries and agencies outside the conflict area.

5. CONCLUSION: KEY OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Casualty recorders used a wide variety of sources in their work. The sources that recorders used depended on what was available to them given the context in the country of conflict, and what they had the capacity and resources to collect (for a model of approaches based on these factors, see “An Overview of the Field”8). It is good practice for recorders to collect all information from any source that is available to them and gives relevant information, even if it is not complete or they cannot process it in the short term. This will help to create a more complete record of casualties in the long term.

The key findings of this paper and recommendations for good practice are summarised below:

5.1 Documentary Evidence as a Source

Incident level documentation, detailing the circumstances of events of violence specified by date and location, is required for casualty recording. The most useful official documents are those produced close to the time of the incident by “on the ground” agencies. Some international agencies also collect relevant data. Limited access to such data is a challenge for casualty recorders. Casualty recorders make intensive use of civil society documentation, especially from press and media, but also documentation from NGOs and other civil society groups or organisations (particularly locally-based ones). Press and media specialise in publishing the incident-based documentation that is of most use to casualty recorders. NGOs have more variable practice in what they publish or share. Social media are emerging as a valuable documentary source of “breaking news”. Limitations in documentary evidence collected by others means that many casualty recorders supplement such evidence with direct data collection from individual informants on the ground, to develop a more complete record.

The following is a summary of the observations and reflections in this paper on the usefulness of different documentary sources to casualty recorders:

8 For other papers in the collection see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection
The following is a summary of the observations and reflections in this paper on the usefulness of different documentary sources to casualty recorders:

1. Official incident-based documents are produced close to the place and time of fatal violent incidents by three major agencies, police, the military, and medico-legal organisations. These all contain detail of high value to casualty recorders, regarding identity of victims and perpetrators, nature of the weapons used, and date, time, and place of death. Policies and procedures that facilitate better access by casualty recorders to this documentation are a high priority for the field (see section 2.1.1 p7).

2. Local, regional and international courts also publish official incident-level documentation. These become more widely available post-conflict or when the rule of law is functioning in low intensity conflicts. These documents are useful to casualty recorders both for giving more detail about known victims and giving information on previously unknown victims (see section 2.1.1 p7).

3. Some incident-level data is collected by international agencies, including agencies of the UN. Casualty recorders often find it hard to access this data, and often do not know if it is collected or not (see section 2.1.2 p10).

4. States and state-run-agencies sometimes produce reports specifically about the casualties of conflict, such as monthly summaries during a conflict, or within the context of post-conflict processes such as truth commissions. Where these reports are integrative, only giving aggregate figures, recorders find them hard to use. Where they are incident-level (which was rare in this survey), these were sometimes useful to recorders. Sometimes recorders were suspicious of the politicisation of these records and found them unhelpful, however (see section 2.1.3 p11).

5. Civil society was a vital source of casualty documentation for recorders. Press and media and civil society groups (NGOs, religious groups) generally provide far more detailed casualty documentation to casualty recorders (either through publication or by direct formal or informal communication) than states and interstate institutions (see section 2.2 p12).

6. Press and media organisations worldwide prioritise the collection and early publication of documentary reports of violent death, and as such provide a fundamental resource (sometimes the fundamental resource) for the many casualty recorders. Casualty recorders saw various media organisations both local and international as having high professional standards and trustworthiness. Local media was sometimes seen as having unique reliability through access and local knowledge, though recorders did not consistently report this. However, the way in which media organisations reported details about incidents was not standardised, which sometimes made it difficult for recorders to use reports (see section 2.2.1 p12).

7. Access by casualty recorders to press and media reports was sometimes limited by practical considerations (e.g. local newspapers were only published in hard copy, the recorder did not have access to commercial press databases). Improvement of access to and ability to comprehensively and strategically search press and media documents is a key priority for many casualty recorders (see section 2.2.1 p12).

8. A great deal of relevant information is collected by NGOs in most conflict situations, and post-conflict. NGOs collecting relevant information range from international organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch through to local associations of various kinds focused on victim and community need. Where documentation was provided at the level of individual incident or victim by NGOs, this was highly useful for casualty recorders (see section 2.2.2 p15).

9. A range of concerns limits the degree of data sharing that takes place between NGOs (including casualty recorders) operating in a particular conflict zone. Developing principles and guidelines for data sharing is a high priority for NGOs concerned with the effects of armed conflict on local populations (see section 2.2.2 p15).

10. An important newly emerging type of documentary evidence is that provided by social media such as Facebook and Twitter. A greater understanding of how to maximise the utility of this rapidly
evolving form of documentation is a priority for the field of casualty recording (see section 2.2.3 p17)

11. Documentation provided by primary witnesses in relation to specific violent incidents has a privileged place in casualty recording because of the authority and detail of the evidence provided. Practitioners are agreed that pre-existing documentation can almost never suffice to provide a complete and detailed account of the casualties caused within a zone of armed conflict, and that individual testimony will always be needed at some stage to fill the gaps left by pre-existing documentation. However, because such primary data-collection is costly, maximising what can be learned from pre-existing documentation is a sensible strategy for many casualty recorders (see section 2.2.4 p18)

5.2 People and Organisations as Sources

For many recorders the most productive relationships were with local civil society groups, who shared information and helped them reach witnesses. Relationships with groups associated with victims and those who directly supported them (e.g. religious groups) were vital to casualty recorders in many conflicts. The engagement of state-supported organisations was more difficult and sporadic. The state agencies that offered the most consistent help to casualty recorders tended to be situated in the health and medical fields. Where support from other state or inter-governmental institutions was found, this tended to be with individual agencies where a local agreement of trust has been established. The comprehensive and lasting involvement of states and inter-state bodies with recorders was rare, and in most of the few examples we encountered was backed up by an international instrument or agreement applied across a range of states and conflicts. This survey found one example of a full and on going data-sharing agreement between a local civil-society based casualty recorder and the government of a country of conflict.

The following is a summary of the observations and reflections in this paper on interacting with people and their organisations as sources:

1. Voluntary publication of casualty data, or routine release of such data following formal request, is the standard that casualty recorders request of states and other organisations holding information about casualties. Currently this practice is only widespread among press and media organisations and some NGOs. (see section 3 p18)

2. The general experience of casualty recorders was that state agencies capable of collecting and disseminating casualty information either do not systematically collect this data, or having collected it did not release it. Some states were actively obstructive or hostile towards casualty recorders (see section 3.1.1 p19)

3. Before suitably collaborative activities can more generally occur between states and the casualty recorders that operate within conflict, a substantial positive global shift in the tone of these relationships is likely to be needed (see section 3.1.1 p19)

4. Explicit international frameworks whereby states and non-state actors commit to joint action may be part of what governments need to give them the confidence and motivation to enter into productive casualty data sharing agreements with casualty recorders (see section 3.1.1 p19)

5. Despite lack of engagement from governments at central levels, some casualty recorders have reported successful data-sharing collaborations at sub-government level, through official or (more often) unofficial relationships (see section 3.1.1 p19)

6. The strong professional humanitarian ethic of medical organisations, coupled with a well-developed documentation culture, suggest that effective advances in the policy and practice of casualty recording will need to take particular account of the positive role that health and medical institutions and personnel can play in casualty recording efforts (see section 3.1.1 p19)

The following are specific observations on good practice when working with people and organisations, including individual informants:
1. Productive and collaborative relationships with key local NGOs and community organisations are a very important component of building the understandings and trust to prepare the ground for data collection from local informants (see section 3.2.2 p22)

2. Building relationships of trust with individual journalists and media organisations can provide access to documentation beyond that which they are able to publish, and can also mean press and media organisations will offer appropriate public support to the work of casualty recorders (see section 3.2.1 p21)

3. Field-workers should be knowledgeable about and embedded in the local community, and sensitive to its history, culture and politics (see section 4.1 p23 and 4.2 p24)

4. A range of means for finding informants is needed, from recommendations by trusted community leaders (particularly in conflict), to media appeals (particularly post-conflict) (see section 4.2 p24)

5. All participation by individual informants should be voluntary. No pressure should be placed on individuals to offer information (see section 4.3 p24)

6. The purposes and benefits of giving information should be clearly explained to informants, so that they can make an informed decision about whether to do so (see section 4.3 p24)

7. Because collecting data from individual informants is the most costly casualty recorder activity, strategic selection of who to interview is important, e.g. where pre-existing documentary evidence is inadequate (see section 4.4 p27)

8. Face-to-face interviews are the preferred mode of data gathering from individuals. Phone is a less preferred, but still usually adequate means. Least preferred is correspondence, because of the difficulty of verifying the identity of the author (see section 4.4 p27)

9. Data security issues must be given special consideration in field research (see section 4.4 p28)

10. Good practice is to use a form or questionnaire for recording key data points from interviewees. This minimises the possibility of missing important information. However, recorders should take care to interview sensitively and not just ask a list of questions where this would be more difficult for the informant (see section 4.3 p24)

11. It is advisable to attempt to collect data from informants as soon as possible after the incident about which they have information to give (see section 4.4 p27)

12. Some limitations on the activity and access of casualty recorders to informants and other sources are not resolvable by the application of more funding or more staff, but require political advocacy at a national or international level (see section 4.5 p29)
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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