

Data quality and information management in DRC

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Forced migration creates special challenges to collecting data and monitoring responses in fragile states where infrastructure and systems are weak or non-existent. These states often lack the statistics registries needed to measure the basic demographic information that is essential to planning when emergencies happen. As key building blocks in the process of state reconstruction, valid demographic data are required to conduct robust needs assessments and to measure and demonstrate progress. When migration takes place, whether forced or otherwise, the poor data from weak state systems can become almost unusable, necessitating the need for costly external assessments.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the data problems resulting from poor state information management have been a persistent issue for years. The last nationwide population census in the country took place in 1984, before the major conflicts of the 1990s and 2000s, and today's population figures are often calculated by multiplying this 1984 baseline by a 3% growth rate regardless of changes in fertility, mortality (conflict-related and otherwise) or displacement, resulting in sometimes wildly inaccurate population estimates, and making it extremely difficult to prepare for or respond to the actual needs of both displaced and stable populations.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) conducted a series of nationwide mortality surveys to better understand the impact of the wars, which was at that point grossly underestimated.¹ Though

at the time these surveys were key to bringing attention to the conflict's devastating impact, they were also demanding in terms of the time, logistics and the technical and financial resources required to conduct them. Nevertheless, the mortality surveys did little to directly reinforce the Congolese state's ability to measure mortality.

As a result, since 2008, IRC has been helping the Congolese state improve its ability to collect valid demographic information and to measure and respond to displacement and emergencies. IRC is also supporting community-based solutions to strengthen data quality. Yet, as conflict again erupted in North Kivu in early 2012, many of the Community Health Workers included in the data-strengthening project were displaced themselves or had the cell phones they used to send data stolen or lost. Months of lost data show the weakness of even innovative solutions to improving data collection in fragile states.

If states are to escape fragility through the establishment of functional institutions capable of delivering services, good quality data and monitoring can help measure changes that result from displacement and are therefore important parts of the process.

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1. www.rescue.org/special-reports/congo-forgotten-crisis