

STANDARDIZED MONITORING & ASSESSMENT OF RELIEF & TRANSITIONS (SMART)
An Inter-Agency, Global Initiative
Collaborative approach to determine needs, monitor & report

BACKGROUND

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), in collaboration with the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (State/PRM) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), initiated SMART. It includes all humanitarian organizations: donors, international/UN agencies, PVOs/NGOs, universities, research institutes and local partners. SMART is built on USAID's work on reporting on humanitarian assistance using two benchmark indicators, Crude Mortality Rate (CMR) and Nutritional Status of Children Under-Five. These indicators were adopted by USAID (1999), then State/PRM (2000) and later by CIDA. SMART resonates with the wider community as it addresses issues of common interest to all organizations dealing with humanitarian crises:

- The need to standardize methodologies for assessing needs based on nutritional status, mortality rate, and food security.
- The need to establish comprehensive, collaborative systems to ensure reliable data is used for decision making and reporting.

These are longstanding issues that the international community had identified as critical to address years ago, but had not been addressed. Although the need for a systematic approach to improve data collection and analysis has been obvious for some time, forging a consensus on how to do this had escaped policy makers who need reliable data for decision making. SMART built multi-partner support through an international network of technical experts and organizations committed to harmonizing and improving humanitarian response.

SMART uses the following approaches.

- Implementing the concept of a *collaborative approach* for determining needs, for monitoring and reporting at a global level. While this is not a new concept, SMART is establishing systems that will be shared by the community, and initiating system-wide changes to share technical resources.
- Establishing collaborative systems for the *long-term* that will be sustained by governments, organizations and institutions that are committed to improving humanitarian assistance assessments and monitoring.
- Building on the two benchmark indicators on mortality and nutritional status, SMART will (by request of donors and organizations) *incrementally review and collectively address other issues* such as chronic food security indicators and vulnerability assessments, and HIV/AIDS. It addresses issues faced by long term, chronic instability, as well as acute emergencies and those facing imminent crises (such as those at high risk of civil strife or rapidly deteriorating conditions).
- Drawing from a multi-sectoral team of nutritionists, public health specialists, medical epidemiologists, food security specialists, and demographers, it taps from a *pool of technical experts from all sources*, including donors, UN, international organizations, PVOs/NGOs, host governments, universities and research institutes.
- Coordinating is done by various partners *organized around specific activities* with Expert Panel and Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meetings organized to ensure a broad consultative process and the highest technical standards for SMART products.

Why is SMART needed?

- The use of various methodologies and measures for determining nutritional status, mortality rates and food security does not *enable comparisons or coherent understanding* of needs.
- *Poor quality data is often used* for making decisions or reporting.
- *Implementing partners and host countries lack technical capacity* to collect reliable data.
- The lack of comprehensive technical support does not facilitate the *strategic and sustained capacity building needed at all levels* to ensure the community has quick access to reliable, standardized data.

SMART responds to the question: how do we accurately determine needs or report on performance with various methodologies and unreliable data? As agreed at the SMART 2002 workshop, mortality rates and nutritional status “are considered the most vital, basic public health indicators of the severity of a humanitarian crisis.” They monitor the extent to which the relief system is meeting the needs of the population and the overall impact and performance of humanitarian response – thus, these indicators are appropriate for monitoring global trends as a collective effort.

The First SMART Workshop, July 23 – 26, 2002, with representation from 45 humanitarian organizations, established a broad base consensus on the use of Crude Mortality Rate (CMR) and Nutritional Status of Under-Five Children as benchmark indicators for humanitarian assistance. There was overall agreement on the importance of ensuring that data is timely and reliable for policy and program decision making. The SMART Workshop Summary (dated August 9, 2002) is available at www.smartindicators.org.

Since the 2002 workshop, follow-up meetings and consultations with donors and participating organizations have led to the continued evolution of SMART and its activities. The recent inclusion of SMART in the G-8 Action Plan on Famine¹ highlights the need to expedite priority actions, especially on the development of the generic, standardized SMART Methodology.

ACTIVITIES

Goal: Institutionalize evidence-based policy making and reporting on humanitarian crises.

Improving the quality of data to determine needs, program design and resource allocation will improve aid effectiveness.

SMART will provide:

- ✓ A standardized methodology for assessing needs that will facilitate comparability between countries and emergencies to *prioritize resource* allocations.

¹ Acting individually and collectively, G-8 members will take the following actions: “Support improvement of international needs assessment initiatives such as the WFP/FAO common approach and the Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions (SMART) initiative. The G-8 will support further activities to improve needs assessment and monitoring of famine and food security. This will include the establishment of a multi-partner experts’ panel to review standards of practice for vulnerability assessments and food security and the development of online information systems to disseminate information on vulnerable areas, needs assessments, and the impact of assistance operations.”

- ✓ Technical support to build capacity and coordinate systems for real time, standardized and reliable data for decision making. This will facilitate *timely, appropriate assistance* to those in need.
- ✓ Reliable, validated data will be available for *performance and results* reporting – as well as for trend analysis of humanitarian crises by country/region to improve understanding of the effects of our assistance, and the drivers of crises.
- ✓ *Quick access to reliable data critical for decision making* through the establishment of a global, shared, searchable database on complex humanitarian crises.

PRIORITY ACTIONS

I. DEVELOP THE STANDARDIZED SMART METHODOLOGY - Nutritional Status, Mortality Rate, and Food Security

The priority need is the development of the “SMART Methodology” which is envisioned as a complete package of survey protocol, guidelines and windows-based analytical software for standardized data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting. The SMART Methodology will be a comprehensive tool to determine needs, monitor and report on overall progress and trends. It will triangulate Nutritional Status (Under-5 Children), Crude Mortality Rate (CMR) and Food Security data in an integrated survey manual. The SMART Methodology will be iterative, with continuous upgrades as research findings validate hypotheses for alternative methodologies or other indicators. SMART Methodology Version 1 is under development, to be reviewed by an Expert Panel in July 2004, and pilot-tested in one or two countries in Africa.

Partners active in the development of the standardized SMART methodology include, amongst others, CIDA, USAID, State/PRM, UNICEF, The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Save the Children UK, with the technical coordination undertaken by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) of the Université de Louvain in Brussels.

2. ESTABLISH COMPLEX-EMERGENCIES DATABASE (CE-DAT) - A Global Searchable Database on the Human Impact of Conflicts

A core function of the SMART initiative is a multi-sourced, searchable database that is being established by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), Brussels. This will produce an online, publicly accessible database that is a compilation of quantitative and qualitative information from numerous credible sources, linked to existing conflict databases. The database will provide information on the human impact of conflicts by compiling and ranking (based on data source and reliability) all available data related to the health status (mortality, morbidity and nutritional status) of conflict-affected populations. A special emphasis will be placed on collecting data reflecting a conflict’s long term health consequences on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Refugees. CE-DAT will serve as SMART’s primary data source for trend analysis, policy recommendations, monitoring and reporting, and impact briefings.

3. DEVELOP COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING & TECHNICAL SUPPORT - Tiered training system: graduate MS/MPH, short certification course, to long distance learning

Once the SMART methodology is developed and field-tested, a sustained, comprehensive training and technical support will build capacity at all levels. The SMART methodology will be

tailored to meet various training needs: incorporated into existing graduate program (MS or MPH), offered as a short-term certification course, or a long-distance electronic course. Initially pilot tested by Tulane University, a French version will be developed in conjunction with the University of Louvain (Brussels) and interested African universities.

Comprehensive technical support will include a virtual library on health, nutrition, food security and related topics; a listserv service and rapid response system served by a technical expert group to guide and review surveys, and respond to other enquiries from implementing partners.

4. ESTABLISH STANDARDS FOR VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENTS
- Expert independent panel to undertake comprehensive review

There is no harmonization on vulnerability assessments and food security indicators. This compromises comparisons and confuses understanding of the real needs. An expert panel will review existing statistical data systems (census, vital statistics, rural and agricultural statistics, rapid assessments, household panel surveys, etc.) and develop standards of practice and recommendations for reform. To ensure objectivity, the panel will be comprised of a multi-sectoral group of experts outside of the organizations that normally undertake food aid and food security needs assessments.

5. ESTABLISH OPERATIONAL RESEARCH GROUP TO FURTHER IMPROVE GLOBAL SYSTEMS
- Advance and simplify methodologies, integrate emerging issues

Follow up on the July 2002 workshop recommendations to undertake operational research on several issues. Illustrative agenda items: develop a Household Economy Approach “lite” (easier to implement) methodology; review HIV/AIDS issues; test the use of geo-spatial mapping to determine malnutrition prevalence; test the use of alternative methods for determining mortality rates.

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