External Advisory Board (EAB) Meeting CRED 2 – No 2
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Key Observations and Recommendations:

The EAB is impressed by the great work already accomplished or in progress in CRED 2. Practically all researchers are very aware of the need for a qualified integration of decision architecture, social context and technical information aspects. First steps towards such integration have been made. In addition, researchers are highly motivated to link field, modeling and lab/experimental work to a greater extent. New insights have been gained on how useful and important it is for lab researchers to go into the field and learn there, and vice versa. Being convinced of the relevance of this lab-field link, we know we will see more of it in the years to come. CRED 2 work constitutes an important international contribution to decision-making studies in general as well as to climate related decision-making.

Given this very positive overall impression, the EAB wishes to draw the attention to the following issues that should be tracked decisively during the coming months.

- CRED 2 should be aware of its important function as translator between scientists and researchers on the one hand and policy makers on the other hand. Given the distance of many policy decision-makers from academia, CRED 2 researchers should be trained more explicitly to take the lead in communicating with policy and decision-makers. CRED 2 researchers should acknowledge their role as bridge builders and be prepared for fulfilling this task. They should strive to contribute to the decision-makers’ behavioral science education and in this sense empower the relevant agents.

- The EAB underlines the importance of outreach and suggests that CRED 2 structures its outreach in a more systematic way. Until now it seems as if there was a strong ad-hoc component in the outreach activities. It would be desirable, however, to implement outreach in a more systematic way, based on outreach focused research that includes scholarly evaluation of outreach efforts. The EAB suggests therefore to integrate this systematic outreach research into the existing projects or to add an adequate new project to CRED 2. Clear priorities to topics and methods of outreach have to be defined.
• The EAB stresses that outreach should continue to be in the form of science education and aid to policy makers, not advocacy for particular positions or favoring particular groups on climate-related issues.

• In spite of the high outreach relevance, continued exposure of the project work to the international scientific community should be advocated for all projects. Some projects seem to be weaker in this respect than others. In order to satisfy the high scientific standards typically set in NSF supported projects, participating in international scientific conferences seems indispensable for all major projects and should be pushed by CRED 2 management. Positive side effects of this would be that more young scientists might be encouraged to study environmental decision-making and that CRED becomes a scientifically well known and highly esteemed label. This could help promote outreach as well as identify further (financial) supporters.

• The ethical component of CRED 2 should be integrated in a more explicit and formal way in most of the projects. Part of this integration is some sensitivity for vulnerabilities. CRED 2 researchers should use appropriate and precise language and refrain from non-respectful or ambiguous words like “manipulation of participants”.

• The contents of CRED 2’s web pages should be enriched so that more people could take important messages, decision tools and information directly from the websites. The EAB recommends posting 1-2 page summaries for decision-makers for every CRED 2 project. Right now, too many pages are “under construction”, which is of course due to the small number of persons that are in charge of many administrative, coordinating and research and outreach related activities. Hiring new personnel to replace Logg and Rosoff who will leave CRED this summer, a new layout of work packages as well as the appointment of a new associate director will hopefully help solving the problem.

• During the CRED 2 phase the principals must discuss whether and in what sense there should be a CRED 3. Given the information provided by Tom Baerwald of the National Science Foundation at the meeting, there seem to be an excellent chance for a further prolongation of CRED for another up to five years. This would open up perspectives for CRED2 projects to run longer than the projected five years which would make it possible to investigate into a bit more long-term processes. Such processes are, of course, of utmost interest for decision analysis especially in the environmental context.

• In addition, CRED 2 researchers have to ask themselves who they are or who they want to be, i.e. what should the centers of gravity be in CRED 2 as well as in a possible CRED 3. Center of gravity has to be understood in the sense of which aspects of decision-making should be the priorities for study. It seems as if it would be reasonable to diminish the size of CRED 2 and/or 3 down to fewer projects and fewer researchers and to have a few but very clear and well visible major tasks. Furthermore, center of gravity has to be understood in the sense of which researchers are or should be the key drivers of CRED. Among the four current directors, one will be on leave starting in summer, one is not at Columbia, one will soon be in sabbatical and has, as the fourth person does, a lot of non-CRED obligations. Hence, chances are not good for a successful continuation with the present team in its current form. Moreover, if there is to be a CRED 3, the currently informal leadership structure might benefit from becoming more formalized. New lead investigators who are willing and able to take on some responsibilities for the whole CRED network are needed. It is, however, not obvious who these leaders could be. This issue is even more pressing since the above mentioned recruitment issues as well as the choice of topics for in-depth analyses are not independent of the responsibilities’ question. Therefore, the EAB strongly recommends clarifying these issues during the next year. The present leaders have to work on strategic planning issues. There have to be clear future
leaders identified as soon as possible in order to shape CRED 2 and to push CRED 3 forward. In order to come to a solution in an efficient way, EAB recommends obtaining the assistance of an external strategic consultant who may be able to do some external assessments, to suggest fresh faces, to help develop an attractive business plan and to moderate and facilitate the necessary group discussions.

- Thinking about a CRED 3 brings up the question whether Columbia University or especially the Earth Institute would be willing to have CRED as key asset in their fundraising portfolios. These issues should be discussed with development officers from Columbia as well as with representatives from Earth Institute. Linked to these discussions is the question of developing a new decision-making curriculum. Given the many interesting projects within CRED 1 and 2 the EAB sees considerable potential for curriculum-building. However, curriculum activities only make sense if they contribute to the longer term future of CRED.

- It seems that the Earth Institute’s finances are neither strong nor stable. Therefore, the EAB strongly recommends looking for additional financial resources as well for the medium time perspective (until the end of CRED 2) as well as for any prolongation of CRED. It seems plausible that for specific research areas or for specific outreach purposes additional private or public funds can be found.

- The EAB believes that in case that neither the leadership question nor the financial questions can be settled in a satisfactory way, a phasing-out of CRED 2 has to be considered. Such phasing-out is certainly not the wish of EAB. However, if no chances for a sound future are visible, a planned exit seems to be more appealing than missed opportunities and unfinished projects. A phasing-out would require some last-round considerations for all current projects.

Once more: The EAB acknowledges CRED’s great achievements up to date and would be happy to see a CRED continuing in a sustainable way. We are looking forward to the next Annual Meeting of CRED in May 2012. An in-between follow-up on the various topics mentioned above would be reasonable. In fall 2011 there should be at least an update and some discussions between the Board of CRED Directors and the EAB Head.

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Zürich, California, Maryland, Arizona and Princeton, May 2011