

## Introduction

For each CERF grant, the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator submits a narrative report to the Emergency Relief Coordinator, via the CERF secretariat. The reports provide information on the results and added value of the overall CERF grant, as well as on the results of individual projects. All reports are available on the CERF website, at <http://www.unocha.org/cerf/partner-resources/grant-reports/grant-reports-2013>.

The new CERF reporting framework launched in 2013 includes a dedicated section in the “chapeau” of the reporting template (Section V) to capture the Humanitarian Country Teams’ reflections as lessons learned in the CERF process. Lessons are presented separately as observations for the CERF secretariat and for the country partners. CERF recipient countries are encouraged to provide lessons learned but this is not mandatory.

This note summarizes the lessons learned listed in the CERF narrative reports submitted by the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs) on the use of CERF funds in 2013. Only those lessons that are explicitly noted in the relevant tables of the reporting template are considered for this summary, i.e., only those which the Humanitarian Country Team (or equivalent) decided were important enough to pass on to the CERF secretariat. The note focuses on observations made for the CERF secretariat and describes the CERF secretariat’s response and possible actions to address them where relevant. In total, the CERF secretariat received 83 reports for rapid response and under-funded allocations in 2013, of which 63 reports included lessons for the CERF secretariat. This analysis is therefore based on 166 lessons drawn from these 63 reports across 41 countries.

This note complements two other documents prepared by the CERF secretariat about 2013 CERF narrative reports: an analysis of the quality of narrative reports and the reporting process, and an analysis of key performance data from the reports (e.g., with regard to people reached, sub-grants, and CERF’s added value).

## Lessons Learned

For analysis purposes, the lessons are grouped into three phases of the CERF process: (1) application, (2) implementation, and (3) reporting. They are further mapped by topics relevant to each of these phases to identify common themes shared by different countries. A lesson can apply to one or more of the CERF stages, depending on the complexity of the issue expressed. This note captures the key themes and experiences of the country partners in the CERF process, both positive and critical, and does not describe all details.

### Phase 1: Application

As a general observation, a large proportion of the lessons referred to the application stage. The three top areas, in terms of the number of lessons, were funding policy and criteria, application approval process, and application guidance and templates.

#### Funding criteria

The highest number of lessons in the application phase related to the CERF funding criteria. Many elaborated on the need to allow more flexibility and to better consider preparedness elements in CERF’s funding policy. Countries like DPRK, Niger, and Sudan appreciated the flexibility of CERF in allowing the use of pre-positioned stocks to respond quickly to an emergency and then replenish later with stocks purchased with CERF funds. Others such as Afghanistan, Lebanon and Jordan, however, believed that preparedness elements require further consideration in CERF’s criteria to allow more impact. Examples given were to integrate pre-positioning (and not only replenishment) for specific situations and to build prevention capacities while responding to a disease outbreak in the health sector. On the life-saving criteria, many countries such as Bolivia, Malawi, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia (interestingly mostly RC countries)

wanted to see more flexibility so activities in resilience building and risk mitigation could be considered. oPt was nevertheless positive about the breadth of the life-saving criteria in the protection sector including psychosocial support and legal assistance that allowed a wide range of protection response in a “non-traditional” setting.

### *CERF Response*

CERF has a narrow focus to ensure comparative advantage and increase its added value. CERF only funds life-saving humanitarian assistance to people in need. A clearly prioritized and coherent allocation of funds focused on the most urgent life-saving needs and underfunded crises keeps this sharp focus on the needs of affected people. The CERF life-saving criteria define which activities are and are not eligible in each sector, while maintaining a degree of context specific flexibility.

Recent studies<sup>1</sup> on the added value of a reformed CERF confirmed that the vast majority of its partners (UN agencies, donors, NGOs, and others) want CERF to keep this narrow focus and not to expand its funding criteria. Other funding mechanisms, such as bilateral donor contributions, country-based pooled funds or the Peacebuilding Fund, are available to support activities beyond life-saving humanitarian aid.

Within the life-saving focus CERF does support elements of early action<sup>2</sup> to mitigate the risks of deepening crises, and early interventions aimed at mitigating the impact of shocks on the lives and livelihoods of crisis-affected populations. While the life-saving criteria allow the programming of early action elements into emergency response actions that strengthen the local actors’ capacities to react faster in the face of crises, CERF cannot fund outright prevention and preparedness programmes.

The CERF secretariat does not foresee the existing criteria to be broadened under CERF’s current configuration. To increase flexibility, the above referenced CERF studies recommended to allow for more flexibility in dividing funds between the two windows for rapid response and underfunded emergencies (currently, about one-third of available funding is allocated to underfunded emergencies and two-thirds for rapid response).

### **Application approval process**

The second-highest number of lessons commented on the application approval process. Broadly considered, there seemed to be polarized views about the CERF approval process. On the one hand, CERF was appreciated for its fast turnaround in approvals, leading to quick disbursement of funds to enable immediate response by field actors, as highlighted by Bangladesh, DPRK, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Jordan, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda and Yemen. There was a strong emphasis on the quick disbursement of CERF funding that enabled humanitarian actors to act immediately and to support advocacy given the attention created by CERF as a start-up fund. On the other hand, CERF was criticized for its increasingly demanding and complex approval requirements. Bolivia, Chad, Iraq, South Sudan and Syria mentioned the problem of providing certain information, such as implementing partners in rapid response situations and other detailed information not yet available at approval stage due to challenges in the field. This created unnecessary back-and-forth potentially delaying the humanitarian actions on the ground.

### *CERF Response*

One of CERF’s key indicators is the time taken to review and approve applications, and disburse funding to projects. The CERF secretariat closely tracks the timeliness of the review and approval process and continuously works to shorten it. The CERF secretariat usually comments on draft applications and project proposals within one working day and its objective is not to take longer than two. For rapid response projects, UN agencies can request that CERF funds

<sup>1</sup> Two studies on the added value of a reformed CERF; [Study on the Added value of a Reformed Central Emergency Response Fund](#) (Barnaby Willitts-King, March 2015) and [Review of the Potential for Assessed Funding for the Central Emergency Response Fund](#) (Edward Tsui, February 2015)

<sup>2</sup> In the context of humanitarian response, early action should be distinguished from the prevention and preparedness programmes that would require multi-year development commitments, often at the institutional and policy levels, to achieve full impact.

are used to cover implementation costs up to six weeks before the disbursement date of the CERF grant which further increases the timeliness of CERF.<sup>3</sup>

The CERF secretariat works to ensure that grants are clearly prioritized and support a joint. A clearly prioritized strategy is required as the basis for each CERF application. When a grant has not been clearly prioritized, the secretariat, on behalf of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, may ask that such a strategy be developed and clearly communicated. In other cases, further information is required to ensure that this is the case. In some cases, the CERF secretariat will advise RC/HCs not to include certain activities in an application if these would fall outside of the life-saving criteria. The above actions may add some extra but necessary time to the approval process.

The CERF secretariat does not ask for information that is not available at the application stage. For instance, if implementing partners are not known at this stage, agencies may simply note this in the project proposal. The new CERF application template clarifies which information is required and should therefore help to shorten the review process (see below). CERF will also seek to clarify budget requirements for submissions to help avoid unnecessary back-and-forth during the application process (see below).

### Application guidance and templates

In relation to the application process, countries also provided a number of lessons on the application guidance and templates (narrative and budget). Issues raised on the narrative part of the application concern the formulation of expected outcomes and indicators and the planning of beneficiary numbers that eventually cause problems during reporting stage. It was suggested by Sudan that the CERF secretariat develops further guidance to have a clear log-frame as “the current format allows for a degree of vagueness”. Mauritania was of the view that an online application may eliminate some of these problems by having certain mandatory fields and settings that would guide the development of SMART indicators, for example. Gender mainstreaming was another area that could benefit from more guidance in the application.

On the budget portion of the application, many countries observed challenges due to the level of details required in the cost breakdowns and a general lack of understanding of the agencies in how the CERF budget works. This was the part that consumed valuable turnaround time in the application submission process. It was suggested that CERF provides more support and training to agencies to avoid unnecessary back and forth. Another key concern was the appropriateness of staffing cost provisions in the budget to enable adequate coverage for the CERF response. Several countries mentioned that certain types of emergencies are by nature “staff heavy” to respond to, such as a cholera outbreak in Haiti that requires putting in place adequate alert capacity through mobile teams or in the case of oPt and the Philippines where specialist expertise budgeting was challenging yet crucial for the response. It was recommended that CERF takes into consideration the specific nature of a crisis in approving the level of staffing cost in a project, possibly by developing more detailed staffing guidance by sector of response.

### *CERF Response*

The CERF secretariat has developed a new application template, which was piloted in 2014 and officially introduced in January 2015.

The new template aligns with the new instruments under the Humanitarian Programme Cycle and includes strengthened references to broader response strategies by requesting (when applicable) links to strategic and cluster objectives in Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) and by referencing Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessments (MIRA) and Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNO). The new template helps to further clarify linkages between CERF proposals and needs assessments and broader response strategies. The template introduces a simple logical framework with clear outputs, indicators and activities, replacing the text-based format of the old template, which will make it easier to track achievements against plans.

<sup>3</sup> Implementation can, of course, not begin before the start of the emergency and only if internal UN agency rules allow it.

The aim of the new template is to encourage strategic use of CERF funding by putting emphasis on the prioritization of needs and the parts of the response to which CERF can add most value. The template clarifies what information the Emergency Relief Coordinator requires in order to determine an emergency's eligibility for CERF funding and a project's adherence to the CERF's life-saving criteria. This should shorten the review process by minimizing the need for several rounds of revisions during the application phase.

The new application template requires more structured information on issues related to gender and gender-based violence. The template asks for sex- and age-disaggregated data and gender is mainstreamed throughout the document, e.g., a gender analysis is requested in the section on 'humanitarian context and response', applicants are asked to describe how gender was taken into account during the prioritization process, and gender issues should ideally be reflected in the log frame. The new template includes a gender marker, as well as a description and justification of the score on the gender marker. A self-assessed indicator on whether gender-based violence has been considered in project design has been included in the new template.

The CERF secretariat, during the second quarter of 2015, will internally review its budget requirements and guidelines. The review will help clarify the minimum requirements for budget details in CERF proposals and will establish what additional guidance is required to avoid unnecessary budget-related delays during the application and approval phase.

The CERF secretariat is reviewing the option of an online system for applications, noting that there are many advantages to the current way of submitting applications by email, including its speed, simplicity and flexibility. In its analysis the CERF secretariat will have as the main premise that if an online system is to be considered it would have to add clear value to field-based partners, and not unnecessarily add to their workload.

The CERF secretariat has redesigned and improved its training in 2014 using a participatory inter-active methodology targeting RC/HCs, country team members, cluster- and sector-leads, and OCHA staff who facilitate the CERF process. The training anchors the CERF allocation process in country-level structures and provides an opportunity for participants to dissect what it means to prioritize strategically while ensuring evidence-based programming focusing on the most urgent humanitarian needs. The new training will be fully rolled out in 2015 and should improve understanding of what is required and eligible in CERF submissions, thereby help reducing unnecessary back-and-forth during the application phase.

### Other observations relating to application

Certain countries commented on the value of CERF as an effective support for advocacy and resource mobilization. In Yemen, the complementary use of CERF and country-based pooled funds (ERF) was successful in leveraging other funding. In Jordan, CERF served a humanitarian advocacy purpose with the Government to allow additional refugees to be assisted as they saw works in the camps started. In DPRK, the political situation limited the ability of country partners to raise funds and CERF's support is particularly crucial to enable them to continue humanitarian interventions. Other lessons drawn by the country teams in relation to the application stage include partnership challenges between the CERF secretariat and the recipient countries, and between recipient agencies and their implementing partners. For example, a CERF Advisory Group member visited Mali to observe CERF impact and OCHA and recipient agencies felt they could have facilitated the mission better if they had more information on it. Another challenge was the time needed for identifying and negotiating implementing partner arrangements that often could not be done due to the short timeframe of the application phase.

### *CERF Response*

CERF funding can be used to support humanitarian advocacy and resource mobilization efforts and the CERF secretariat seeks to identify best practices in this respect. For instance, publicly announced rapid response grants can highlight the urgency of a specific humanitarian situation. Allocations to underfunded emergencies can highlight the plight of people in forgotten humanitarian crises.

Complementary use of funding from CERF with other funding sources, including country-based pooled funds, is encouraged. A guidance document that lists seven good practices to ensure complementarity between CERF and country based pooled funds is available on CERF's website. Evidence shows that this has been successfully implemented in a number of countries. This includes findings from reviews of CERF's added value (see below), which examine complementarity between CERF and a country-based pooled fund, where applicable, as well as with other funding channels.

During the preparation of a CERF application, NGOs and other partners are encouraged to (and do) participate in the strategic process to prioritize humanitarian action for CERF requests.

The CERF secretariat continues to analyse the use of sub-grants under CERF projects and has been working with UN agencies and NGOs, bilaterally and in the IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team, to speed up the implementation of CERF projects, including through more effective partnerships and faster disbursement of sub-grants. CERF Advisory Group members and donors continue to show a strong interest in UN-NGO partnerships under CERF grants and the effectiveness of sub-granting arrangements.

When possible the CERF secretariat will liaise more closely with members of the CERF Advisory Group on their missions, to ensure that country-based colleagues can be well informed in advance.

## Phase 2: Implementation

For the implementation phase, not many lessons were drawn for the CERF secretariat as implementation was at country-level and observations for country partners were handled separately. Still, certain observations were relevant and important for the CERF secretariat in ensuring the effective use of CERF funds. Key lessons in this phase included the implementation timeframe, reprogramming and no-cost extension needs, and monitoring and evaluation.

### Implementation timeframe

A number of countries commented on the short CERF project implementation timeframe and suggested that this be reviewed as part of CERF's policy, particularly with respect to the six month rapid response timeframe. Colombia mentioned implementation challenges related to poor communication and access difficulties, while Iraq needed more time to adjust activities to changing circumstances. The Republic of Congo and Malawi argued that a six-month timeframe is too short not just for the implementation of activities but for the follow up on monitoring and evaluation. Certain countries asked that seasonal considerations be made for certain sectors in aligning the CERF implementation timeframe. Malawi indicated that agricultural interventions should automatically be considered for a no cost extension when certain key activities are still outstanding. Niger argued that the CERF timeline could be adapted to the reality of each sector.

### *CERF Response*

As noted above, CERF focuses on life-saving humanitarian action and, under its rapid response window, on kick-starting a quick response to new or deteriorating crises. The implementation period for CERF rapid response grants has been increased, in consultation with UN agencies, from three to six months. Grants from the window for underfunded emergencies have to be implemented within about nine months. If, due to unforeseen circumstances, more time is needed, the RC/HC can request a no-cost extension. The Emergency Relief Coordinator will approve project extensions only in exceptional circumstances, if the reasons for the inability to implement are clearly documented to be outside of the control of the recipient agency. Compelling reasons for project extensions include, but are not limited to, unforeseen and increased access restrictions, unforeseen changes in government policy, or a fundamental change in the socio-political climate underpinning the application for CERF funds.

Activities that take longer to implement should not be prioritized for and funded by CERF but rather be covered by other funding sources. CERF typically only funds part of a programme in complement with other funding, and the overall programme may not end with the expiration of the CERF grant and conclusion of CERF-funded activities.

UN agencies are responsible for monitoring, evaluation and reporting with regard to CERF-funded action. While monitoring should be an ongoing activity during implementation, an evaluation could take place after the project implementation. As CERF usually funds only a part of an agency project or programme, monitoring and evaluation by agencies will usually cover activities beyond what was funded by CERF, and will often continue beyond the implementation period of a CERF project.

### Reprogramming and no-cost extension

Countries valued the ability to request reprogramming and no-cost extensions during implementation, as mentioned by Ethiopia and Jordan. Other called for yet still greater flexibility to adjust the project timeframe and activities in rapidly changing crisis settings in order to maximize the use of resources. Jordan and the Philippines questioned the 15% movement among budget categories as being too restrictive and suggested to have a larger margin without formal fund redeployment due to the unpredictable nature of sudden onset emergencies. The Philippines recommended increasing the margin of budgetary shifts to 25%.

#### *CERF Response*

As humanitarian contexts change, CERF-funded projects may need to be adjusted. UN agencies can request three types of project revisions: no-cost extensions, changes in their programmatic activities, and changes to the budgets of their CERF-funded projects. The CERF secretariat reviews these requests individually and the Emergency Relief Coordinator approves them if they are well justified but rejects those that could have been avoided by better planning. Project revisions requests are meant for larger, substantive changes to CERF-funded projects. For smaller changes, UN agencies agreed in the 'Umbrella Letters of Understanding' with OCHA to have a flexibility of up to 15% for each budget category, such as supplies, equipment or transfers to implementing partners.

In 2014, the CERF secretariat received 69 project revision requests, three-quarters of which were approved. (Almost all requests that were not approved, 16 out of 17, included a request for an extension.) Thus, there is considerable flexibility in adjusting CERF-funded projects to changing circumstances on the ground.

### Monitoring and evaluation

Quite a few countries made observations on monitoring and evaluation in relation to the CERF implementation timeframe. In Malawi, where technological uptake for smallholder farmers is slow, it was felt that more time was needed for technical supervisory and monitoring missions to ensure proper assistance is delivered. Sudan further elaborated that with a six month project period, only output monitoring can be done and not outcome monitoring. Colombia called for a common monitoring and evaluation strategy in order to promote transparency and objectivity in a response. The Colombia team found that the fact that each agency is subject to its own evaluation procedures may not encourage a joint review of the CERF grant by all stakeholders. Mauritania believed that evaluation should be made compulsory and be integrated in project development in order to fully assess CERF impact.

#### *CERF Response*

UN agencies are responsible for monitoring, evaluation and reporting with regard to CERF-funded action in accordance to each agency's established procedures. Agencies are not required to establish specific monitoring and evaluation processes for CERF projects, but they are expected to provide timely and relevant information to the RC/HC and the country team on the implementation of CERF funded activities.

Monitoring should take place during project implementation in support of effective project management, regardless of the timeframe for implementation (which is six months for rapid response projects and about nine months for projects funded from CERF's window for underfunded emergencies). A project evaluation, if one is planned, can take place after the implementation period. As previously noted, CERF usually funds only a part of an agency project or



programme, thus monitoring and evaluation by agencies will usually cover activities beyond what was funded by CERF, and will often continue beyond the implementation period of a CERF project.

Humanitarian Country Teams may decide to complement agencies' own regular monitoring efforts with collective monitoring of CERF projects if it sees a strategic advantage in doing so. If collective monitoring of CERF projects is undertaken the objective should be to add value to the overall humanitarian response and to strengthen in-country CERF processes by fostering joint learning, advance good practices, inform future allocations and enhance accountability<sup>1</sup>.

Monitoring of CERF-funded humanitarian action beyond agency monitoring should be embedded in larger monitoring and reporting mechanisms. Guidance of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) suggests that the contribution of CERF and other pooled funds to the humanitarian response should be specifically described in 'periodic monitoring reports', which describe humanitarian activities in line with a Humanitarian Response Plan. Assessing CERF's contribution through overall response monitoring will help promote strategic assessment of CERF's added value, ensure adequate visibility and enhance collective accountability for CERF allocations.

CERF also encourages humanitarian country teams to conduct inclusive after action reviews (AAR) to assess the results achieved with CERF funds and to reflect on lessons learned from CERF processes. AARs can serve as a cornerstone for the preparation of CERF narrative reports.

From central level CERF seeks to monitor the Fund's performance at strategic level. In line with its Performance and Accountability Framework (PAF), the CERF secretariat commissions three to five reviews annually to assess the value added by CERF to humanitarian response in selected countries. These reviews are conducted by independent evaluation experts and are available on the CERF website at

<http://www.unocha.org/cerf/reportsevaluations/evaluations/country-reviews/performance-and-accountability-framework>

From 2010 until 2014, 18 reviews covering 23 countries were completed.

### Phase 3: Reporting

A number of countries also reflected upon the reporting process. Most made observations on the reporting guidance and template, while some discussed beneficiary counting and actual outcomes reporting related to issues in monitoring and evaluation.

#### Reporting guidance and template

While Bangladesh and Mali were generally pleased with the CERF reporting template and guidance, other countries such as Burundi, Iraq and Senegal observed that the template is repetitive and requires more work than necessary. Specifically, Iraq would like to see the background sections in the template simplified (or pre-populated) given much of the information on the humanitarian needs and prioritization was already provided during the application stage. Further, reporting on CERF results could be made lighter since results are requested in the chapeau of the report and the individual agency project tables and often this leads to the same information repeated in the report. The difficulty in reconciling gender and evaluation information at project level is another concern. Somalia recommended reporting by clusters/ sectors rather than by individual agencies, given that the responses are programmed at the cluster/sector level. Pakistan indicated that lack of reporting capacity of partners can lead to omissions or under-reporting of project results at times. Cluster representatives noted that the reporting format is not always conducive to systematic monitoring. In order to resolve some of the reporting issues, Mali, Mauritania and Pakistan called for an online reporting system that would facilitate results reporting and data aggregation.

### *CERF Response*

The narrative reports are the main accountability tools for CERF grants and these are important for the CERF secretariat and for CERF's donors. The reports are published on CERF's website and are meant to provide donors and other stakeholders with a comprehensive overview of the CERF grant, including the emergency to which CERF has helped respond, CERF's role in the response, what has been achieved with CERF funding and what the added value of the CERF funding has been. In this respect it is necessary to repeat in the report key background information on the humanitarian context and the needs. When sending out templates and guidance, the CERF secretariat attaches the original applications so that this can serve as reference in preparation of the reports at country level. Since the information may need update or adjustment, the CERF secretariat cannot prepopulate the information.

The reporting process is organized differently in different countries, although the CERF secretariat has developed a good-practice in-country process and recommends that an after-action review (AAR) takes place with all relevant stakeholders to kick off the reporting process. Given their role in the application phase it is encouraged that sectors or clusters take part in AARs and play a key role in collecting, analysing and preparing information for the CERF reports. However, as agencies are implementing the CERF-funded programmes and are responsible for their oversight, project-level information will need to be provided by agencies.

The CERF secretariat is continuously reviewing its reporting template, to make it user-friendly, informative to the CERF secretariat and to donors and other users of the reports and to support better collection of data and information. The reporting template will be updated in early 2015 to be aligned with the new CERF application template and CERF will take the above feedback into consideration when doing so.

As previously noted, the CERF secretariat is reviewing the option of an online system for applications and reporting, noting that there are many advantages to the current way of submitting applications by email, including its speed, simplicity and flexibility.

### **Beneficiaries and outcomes**

Several countries mentioned beneficiary reporting as a challenging endeavour in connection with planning of beneficiaries during application stage. Haiti, oPt, the Philippines and Sudan would like the CERF secretariat to develop further guidance on beneficiary planning so to avoid problems at final reporting stage. oPt suggested that "It may be beneficial to request applying agencies to state beneficiaries per locality in the proposal and report (accordingly) to help cluster coordinators and OCHA identify overlaps and avoid double-counting." Similarly Haiti recommended that a table showing beneficiary targets by sector and by gender in the application would make beneficiary reporting easier. The Philippines indicated that data disaggregation should include a <18 category.

### *CERF Response*

CERF fully recognises that beneficiary estimation is challenging when preparing CERF applications and that planned figures may not always correspond to the number of people reached and eventually reported. CERF therefore accepts discrepancies but seeks to understand the background when significant differences are encountered. CERF mainly uses reported beneficiary data (people reached) in its communication with donors.

The new CERF application template takes into account many lessons learned with respect to beneficiary information. It includes a breakdown of planned beneficiaries by sector and gender, as well as categories for adults (18 years and above) and children (under 18 years). Beneficiary figures are also broken down into refugees, internally displaced people, host communities, and other. These categories are the same ones as used for country-based pooled funds. Once the CERF reporting template has been updated to align with the new application template this data will also be reflected in the report.



## Other observations relating to reporting

Recipient countries also mentioned the need to share CERF reporting guidance and template earlier and to make efforts to shorten the time lag between implementation and reporting. CAR welcomed the shorter (i.e. rolling) reporting cycle (compared to the previous annual reporting) while Iraq explained that individual agencies should be able to work on the report as soon as they completed their activities, rather than waiting for others. Chad reflected upon the time extension needed for report submission and requested that CERF provides surge support for reporting (and applications), since such documents are for donor information and need to be of a high quality.

### *CERF Response*

The RC/HC is now informed about the upcoming end of the implementation period two months before the expiry date of a CERF grant and is at the same time reminded of the timeline for the required reporting (three months after grant expiration). Reporting guidance and templates are shared by the CERF secretariat six weeks before the grant expiration. RC/HCs are thus notified of CERF reporting five months before the deadline of the report, giving Humanitarian Country Teams ample time to conduct an after-action review and compile a report.

CERF funds in excess of 500 projects a year in up to 50 different countries. For 2013 grants this resulted in 83 narrative reports from CERF recipient countries. CERF reviews each report in detail and provides feedback and support for the finalisation of the reports, but it will not be possible for the CERF secretariat to provide surge support for preparing the reports at country level. This responsibility lies with the country level partners and will have to be planned for when CERF grants are requested.

Agencies are invited to start working on their parts of a CERF report according to the implementation period of their projects. However, as CERF provides funding to strategically prioritized applications, reporting should also include the grant level (i.e. the consolidated submission), rather than just the project level, and a complete and comprehensive report should be submitted.

## Conclusion

This analysis of lessons learned from CERF reports submitted by RC/HC for 2013 allocations showed a converging of themes across the various phases of the CERF cycle. It is the first attempt to systematically analyze the lessons learned information contained in the reports and to group and highlight some of the key observations made by recipient countries. It is positive to note that about 76% of the total 83 reports included lessons learned for the CERF secretariat, which suggests that many of the countries dedicated time towards reflecting upon the CERF process.

The information and suggestions received through the lessons learned submissions offers CERF a unique direct feedback channel with CERF partners at field level. And while some suggestions may yield direct changes or actions while others won't they will all help inform initiatives by the CERF secretariat to make CERF more effective and efficient. CERF will continue to systematically analyse and follow-up to lessons learned from the field.

*CERF secretariat, 5 May 2015*