



Since its inception in 2006, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has provided substantial funding to the largest humanitarian crises worldwide. In 2014 alone, CERF provided \$105 million to Level 3 emergencies in the Central African Republic, Iraq, and South Sudan, plus another \$97 million for the humanitarian impact of the CAR and South Sudan crises on neighboring countries. Thus, two-thirds of CERF funding in 2014 went toward L3 emergencies and their regional effects.

Review of CERF Support to L3 Emergencies and the ‘automatic allocation’

In 2012, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals agreed that major sudden-onset humanitarian crises triggered by natural disasters or conflict which require system-wide response would be subject to a Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation or ‘Level 3 (L3) emergency activation’ based on an analysis of five factors: scale, complexity, urgency, capacity and reputational risk. The Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), in consultation with IASC Principals, would issue the designation of an L3 emergency which would automatically trigger certain protocols such as the establishment of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and/or the designation of the Resident Coordinator as Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). The protocols also include an “immediate initial CERF allocation of between US\$10-20 million, to be issued by the ERC within 72 hours of the crisis onset, on a ‘no regrets basis’.”

The purpose of this paper is to review the implementation of this last protocol – the automatic CERF allocation – in the five L3 emergencies to date: Syria, Central African Republic, South Sudan, Iraq and the Philippines.

Syria – declared L3 on 15 January 2013

The conflict in Syria emerged in 2011 and steadily worsened in the years since. CERF support to the crisis began in May 2011 with a small rapid response allocation for a modest emergency health response. As the crisis expanded and new needs arose, CERF approved four more rapid response requests and one underfunded emergency application from Syria between 2011 and 2012. By the time the IASC declared the Syria conflict to be an L3 emergency in January 2013, two years after the conflict began, the CERF had already provided more than \$40 million to humanitarian activities inside the country.

The Syria crisis was the first emergency declared L3 by the IASC and became a testing ground for the newly established protocols despite the fact that they were designed for traditional sudden on-set situations. In line with the L3 guidelines, the ERC decided on an allocation of \$20 million from the CERF for the emergency. Aside from the L3 declaration, there was no operational trigger for a CERF rapid response allocation and the resulting CERF application attempted to fill critical funding gaps rather than target new and specific needs like a traditional rapid response application would. In remarks at an ECOSOC side event in the summer of 2013, the Humanitarian Coordinator at the time admitted that the automatic allocation of CERF funding had no added value in terms of strategic timing or advocacy on the ground and, in fact, simply resulted in additional work to discuss and draft the CERF application.

Central African Republic – L3 declared on 11 December 2013

Political instability erupted in CAR in December 2012 and by March 2013 the government had been dissolved. In April, the Humanitarian Coordinator requested \$7 million in CERF rapid response funds to address the rising needs resulting from the displacement, looting and violence. Insecurity continued resulting in more humanitarian needs while also hindering the delivery of assistance. By October, the ERC had received project extension requests from four of the seven agencies that had received the CERF funds.

The situation rapidly deteriorated in the fall of 2013. Recognizing the growing needs but also aware of the operational difficulties in CAR, the ERC agreed in late November to review a rapid response application for no more than \$10 million. As the HC and HCT worked on the CERF request, the crisis exploded prompting the IASC Principals to declare an L3 emergency on 11 December. The ERC maintained her original decision to provide \$10 million to CAR.

The above December 2013 rapid response request was developed under severe operational constraints with little consultation amongst or within clusters. As the needs grew in January 2014, UN agencies advocated for additional CERF funding based on the L3 declaration. The ERC was initially reluctant given the difficulties the HCT had with the prioritization of the first request but agreed to additional funding in February only after the multi-sector initial rapid assessment (MIRA) and revision of the Strategic Response Plan which could be as a basis for the strict prioritization of a CERF request. By the end of 2014, the ERC had approved a total of \$34 million in rapid response funding for projects in CAR.

South Sudan – L3 declared on 11 February 2014

When violence and displacement erupted in South Sudan in December 2013, the HC immediately requested and received \$15 million in CERF rapid response funding to scale up the response. The HC prioritized the CERF request in parallel with the reprogramming of nearly \$40 million in grants from the Common Humanitarian Fund; thus, utilizing both funds in a complementary manner to ensure an equitable scale up across clusters. The L3 declaration came in February two months after the crisis began when the complexity and scale of the emergency became more apparent. Given the amount of CERF funding disbursed just weeks before and the significant contributions in process from bilateral donors, an automatic allocation was not considered by the ERC.

The HC reached out three more times for rapid response funding in 2014 when growing needs required a time critical response such as delivering goods and supplies to rural outposts prior to the rainy season in April and responding to a cholera outbreak in July. With no political solution in sight by August, the HCT began preparing for an upsurge in violence and displacement with the end of the rainy season and the HC requested CERF funds to respond to protection needs and bolster services at protection of civilian (POC) sites. By the end of 2015, the crisis in South Sudan was the largest recipient of CERF funding having received nearly \$54 million.

The case of South Sudan demonstrates timely and strategic use of CERF. At the same time, allocations from CERF throughout 2014 were not triggered by the L3 declarations but rather based on emerging urgent needs and effective ways of identifying CERF's niche in a changing situation.

Iraq – declared on 12 August 2014

Iraq was declared L3 in August 2014 after months of steady increases in violence and displacement. Like in Syria, CAR and South Sudan, the CERF had already supported response efforts prior to the declaration, thereby making an automatic allocation redundant. Rapid response funds were released in February 2014 when violence erupted in Anbar Province, in June following a polio outbreak, and in July when ISIL advances escalated the crisis and displaced thousands.

The ERC did not consider further CERF funding for the emergency at the time of the L3 declaration in August given the nearly \$11 million already provided by CERF. As the conflict and needs grew in scale, the HC requested additional CERF support towards the end of 2014. Considering the specific added value of CERF funding, the ERC agreed to \$15 million in grants. Similar to the other L3 conflict emergencies, the impact of CERF funding in Iraq was determined by strategic focus of the requests and not directly linked to the L3 declaration.

Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines – declared on 12 November 2013

To date, the L3 designation has only been applied to one sudden onset natural disaster – Typhoon Haiyan in November 2013. Within 48 hours of the typhoon, the ERC informed the HC of an allocation of \$15 million to help operationalize the immediate response. The request from the HC and HCT included

several projects and sectors addressing needs identified in the Flash Appeal. As the scope of the emergency became apparent, the ERC increased the allocation amount to \$25 million with more direct instruction that the additional funds support immediate distribution of relief supplies and bolstering the logistics capacity. This increase in certain high priority sectors maximized the impact of the funding and further bolstered the immediate response.

In the case of Typhoon Haiyan, an immediate indication of available CERF rapid response funding was deemed useful although one could argue that CERF funding would have been allocated by the ERC even without the L3 declaration given the nature and scale of the crisis. At the CERF training in Manila in 2014, HCT members highlighted that the CERF was one of the first sources of funding for the emergency and allowed them to rapidly scale-up their response. However, they also agreed that the in-country prioritization process could have been stronger; a lesson learned for the emergency.

Lessons Learned

In each emergency, the impact of CERF funding depended heavily on numerous factors such as timing, strategy and focus of the request, and complementarity with other resources, amongst others. As each emergency is different, the ERC cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach with CERF funding. In slow onset or conflict situations where CERF funds have already been accessed before the L3 declaration, an automatic allocation is redundant.

As demonstrated in the examples above, the automatic allocation of CERF funds as per the L3 protocols are not appropriate in slow-onset emergencies where CERF's regular allocation procedures are better suited. In practice, the strict protocol has not been implemented as such by the ERC given the uniqueness of each case.

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