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| The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF): UNFPA actions to improve timely disbursement and implementation |

**Background**

In 2014, the Central Emergency Response Fund supported UNFPA’s response to crises in twenty-eight countries with more than $ 15 million. Overall, CERF funds continued to be a very important source of support for UNFPA’s humanitarian response to almost every major humanitarian crisis in 2014. CERF funds also played a crucial role in kick-starting the humanitarian operations of UNFPA country offices in the aftermath of crises.

In response to the priority issue of timeliness of CERF disbursements, UNFPA undertook an internal analysis in 2014 to understand the underlying reasons for the timelines for disbursements made by country offices and to see how best to support them to improve performance.

The review criteria considered for the analysis included the following:

1. **Review the statistics** for respective countries and their accuracy based on the reality on the ground (e.g. the spreadsheet is based on payments made and in some cases activities may have been implemented which is not self-evident from the financial data).
2. **For countries with an average of 0-25 days** for first disbursement, learn from their experience and identify best practices especially with regard to preparedness.
3. **For other countries, especially those on the high end of the spectrum,**country offices were requested to underline the challenges that brought about high averages, particularly systemic bottlenecks to implementation that might require the review of or changes to existing procedures.

The findings in this report were based on desk reviews, survey analysis, consultations with country offices (Country Representatives and Humanitarian Coordinators of CERF recipient countries in 2013). The preliminary findings were also discussed at the Global UNFPA Humanitarian Consultation held in New York in August 2014.

**Actions taken by UNFPA to improve CERF disbursements**

Based on the top challenges identified (namely, partnership, staff capacity, internal programming and financial procedures and pre-financing) from the UNFPA’s review on CERF, and good practices identified on preparedness, UNFPA has taken the following actions to improve CERF disbursement and implementation:

1. **Preparedness: Roll out of the UNFPA’s Minimum Preparedness Actions**

In 2014, priority attention was given to improved preparedness, especially in 33 high-risk countries[[1]](#footnote-1), through: expanded partnerships for rapid deployment of standby expert personnel; joint pre-positioning of supplies; roll out of UNFPA’s guidance on Minimum Preparedness Actions (MPAs) including partnership assessment and mapping; establishment of a roster of experts for sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence; assessments of the readiness of national governments to implement the Minimum Initial Services Package for reproductive health in crisis; development of Minimum Standards for addressing Gender-Based-Violence in emergencies (GBViE); and the roll out of regional simulation exercises.

1. **Development of new financial tracking tool on CERF**

The findings of the UNFPA internal review on CERF resulted in the development of a new financial tracking tool which monitors timely disbursements of CERF grants. The financial tracking tool was complemented by regional analyses of UNFPA CERF disbursements to assist regional and country offices in their day-to-day monitoring of activities related to CERF funds.

The new CERF monitoring tool will fully be institutionalized in UNFPA in 2015 and integrated in the country office management dashboard as a performance indicator. The CERF financial tracking tool will also be reviewed on a regular basis by the UNFPA’s Humanitarian Steering Committee, chaired by the UNFPA Executive Director and senior management.

1. **Revised Fast-Track procedures (FTPs) for operations and programming procedures in humanitarian settings**

UNFPA has revised its internal Fast-Track Procedures (FTPs) for operations and programming in emergency settings to address key bottlenecks faced by country offices in early 2015 taking into account recommendations from the internal CERF review and Global UNFPA Humanitarian Consultation.  The FTPs are a set of procedures that offer UNFPA COs in humanitarian settings greater delegation of authority and flexibility in specific programme and operational areas for a time-bound period.

1. **Pre-financing: Increased annual allocation of the emergency fund from $5 million to $10 million to initiate timely humanitarian response and CERF implementation**

In 2014, UNFPA sought to provide more funding to countries experiencing emergencies and scale its response. To this end, UNFPA proposed to increase the annual allocation of the emergency fund from regular resources, from $5 million to $10 million, which was approved the UNFPA Executive board in January 2014. The UNFPA emergency fund supports planned CERF activities while waiting for the first disbursement of CERF funds.

1. **Updated UNFPA - CERF guidance:**

To ensure the swift disbursement and implementation of activities with CERF funds, UNFPA HQ shared a document entitled “Tips to Country Offices on the use of CERF funds” to reiterate the importance of timely disbursement and provide practical advice to country offices ranging from issues related to planning, disbursement and extensions, as well as actions to be taken during preparedness phase as per the new UNFPA’s guidance on Minimum Preparedness Actions.

1. **Training sessions on CERF in 2015 as part of UNFPA’s three Surge Training roll-out**

UNFPA will roll out three surge trainings, including a specific session on CERF in 2015. The surge training comprises selected candidates from the UNFPA global surge roster to be deployed from the onset of a crisis, especially for a level 3 emergency response. UNFPA will also continue to participate in annual CERF training conducted by OCHA at the country and regional levels.

1. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Iraq, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Turkey, Burundi, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, South Sudan, Uganda, Haiti, Colombia, Guatemala, Burkina Faso, CAR, Chad, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)