

# CERF'S RESPONSE TO EL NIÑO 2023-2024


## A FORWARD-LEARNING APPROACH

Based on learning from earlier El Niño events, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), developed a proactive approach for more **effective and timely action**.


An independent [review](#) of CERF's response to the severe El Niño episode of 2015-2016 found that CERF often provided the first funding to El Niño-driven humanitarian disasters. Still, in most cases country teams only applied for funds when the humanitarian impacts were already being felt, and CERF funds could have been more effective if disbursed earlier. This confirms the growing positive feedback on CERF funded anticipatory and early action.

Accordingly, ahead of the 2023-2024 event, CERF took early steps to **reduce human losses and enhance cost-effectiveness** by focusing on early and anticipatory action where possible, in addition to responses.


CERF's humanitarian approach to the El Niño 2023-2024 episode has entailed:



**Promoting earlier responses** by funding anticipatory and early action for El Niño-related disasters and predictable crises, to get ahead of humanitarian impacts.



Ensuring closer **monitoring** of the global El Niño situation to identify countries at highest risk of severe impact, including countries affected by previous El Niño events.



**Proactively engaging with OCHA country and regional offices** to identify opportunities to strategically optimize the impact of CERF funds – with initial consultations at the country and regional level already held as early as July 2023 based on the forecasts of rainfall from the International Research Institute (IRI) at Columbia University.

**Continuously optimizing the CERF El Niño approach:** Lessons learned from El Niño responses will be used to improve CERF's response to future La Niña and El Niño events, including early action and rapid response.

## OVERVIEW OF EL NIÑO ALLOCATIONS 2023-2024<sup>2</sup>

The revised approach has enabled earlier and more effective responses to El Niño



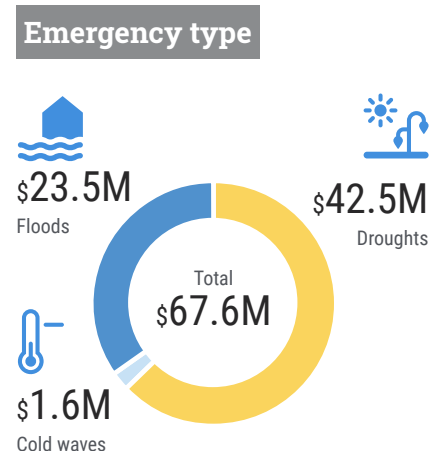
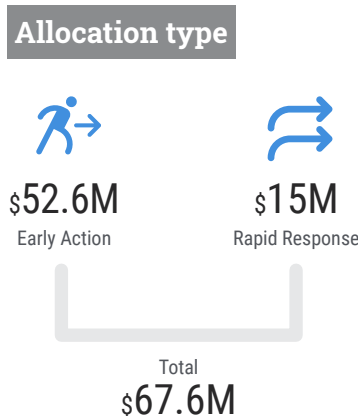
in **11** countries,



assisting around **2.5M people**



through a total of **\$67.6M** allocated.

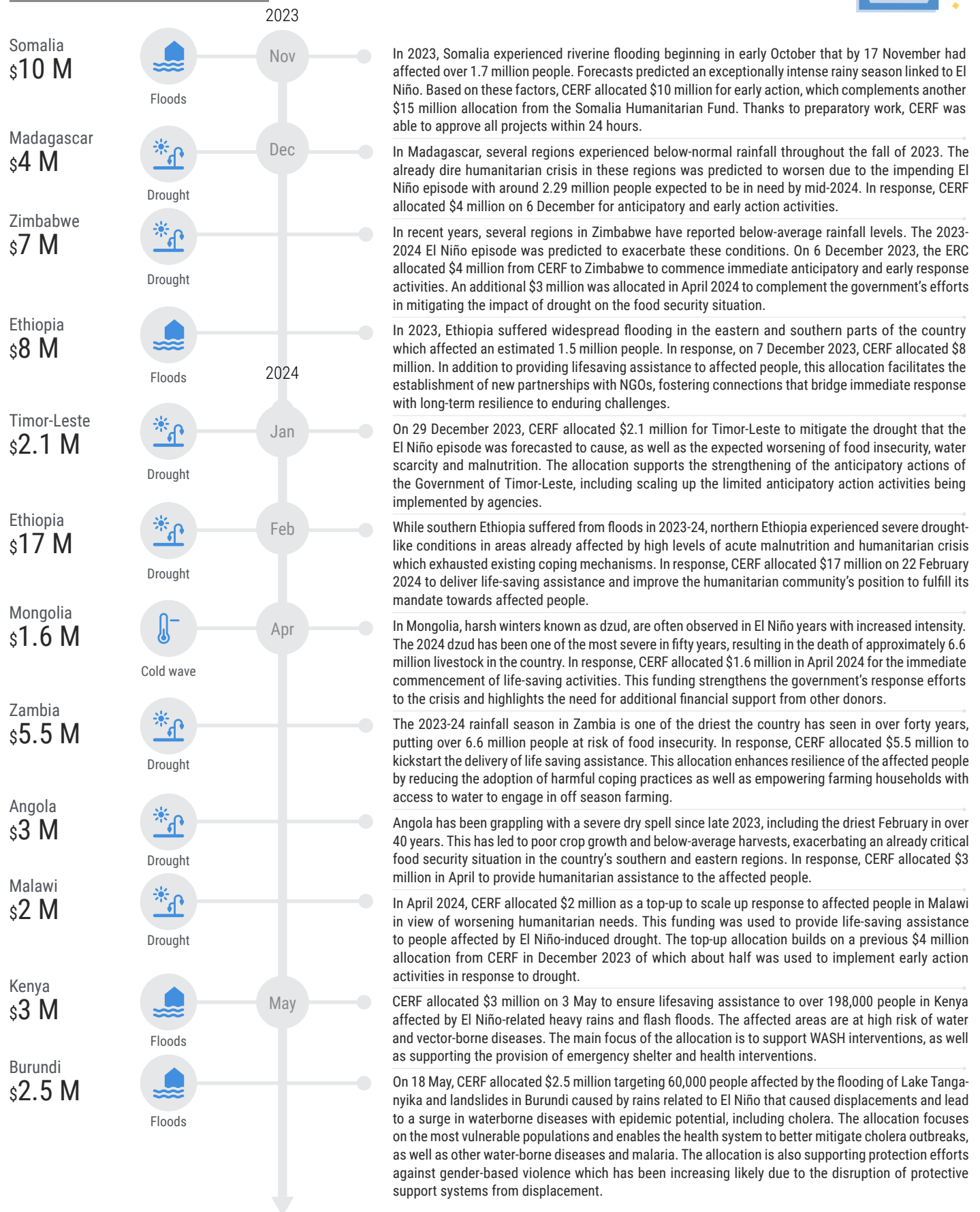


2. Covering the period October 2023 to June 2024.

The [CERF Climate Action Account](#) supports CERF allocations to climate-related disasters.



## CERF allocation timeline \*



In 2023, Somalia experienced riverine flooding beginning in early October that by 17 November had affected over 1.7 million people. Forecasts predicted an exceptionally intense rainy season linked to El Niño. Based on these factors, CERF allocated \$10 million for early action, which complements another \$15 million allocation from the Somalia Humanitarian Fund. Thanks to preparatory work, CERF was able to approve all projects within 24 hours.

In Madagascar, several regions experienced below-normal rainfall throughout the fall of 2023. The already dire humanitarian crisis in these regions was predicted to worsen due to the impending El Niño episode with around 2.29 million people expected to be in need by mid-2024. In response, CERF allocated \$4 million on 6 December for anticipatory and early action activities.

In recent years, several regions in Zimbabwe have reported below-average rainfall levels. The 2023-2024 El Niño episode was predicted to exacerbate these conditions. On 6 December 2023, the ERC allocated \$4 million from CERF to Zimbabwe to commence immediate anticipatory and early response activities. An additional \$3 million was allocated in April 2024 to complement the government's efforts in mitigating the impact of drought on the food security situation.

In 2023, Ethiopia suffered widespread flooding in the eastern and southern parts of the country which affected an estimated 1.5 million people. In response, on 7 December 2023, CERF allocated \$8 million. In addition to providing lifesaving assistance to affected people, this allocation facilitates the establishment of new partnerships with NGOs, fostering connections that bridge immediate response with long-term resilience to enduring challenges.

On 29 December 2023, CERF allocated \$2.1 million for Timor-Leste to mitigate the drought that the El Niño episode was forecasted to cause, as well as the expected worsening of food insecurity, water scarcity and malnutrition. The allocation supports the strengthening of the anticipatory actions of the Government of Timor-Leste, including scaling up the limited anticipatory action activities being implemented by agencies.

While southern Ethiopia suffered from floods in 2023-24, northern Ethiopia experienced severe drought-like conditions in areas already affected by high levels of acute malnutrition and humanitarian crisis which exhausted existing coping mechanisms. In response, CERF allocated \$17 million on 22 February 2024 to deliver life-saving assistance and improve the humanitarian community's position to fulfill its mandate towards affected people.

In Mongolia, harsh winters known as dzud, are often observed in El Niño years with increased intensity. The 2024 dzud has been one of the most severe in fifty years, resulting in the death of approximately 6.6 million livestock in the country. In response, CERF allocated \$1.6 million in April 2024 for the immediate commencement of life-saving activities. This funding strengthens the government's response efforts to the crisis and highlights the need for additional financial support from other donors.

The 2023-24 rainfall season in Zambia is one of the driest the country has seen in over forty years, putting over 6.6 million people at risk of food insecurity. In response, CERF allocated \$5.5 million to kickstart the delivery of life saving assistance. This allocation enhances resilience of the affected people by reducing the adoption of harmful coping practices as well as empowering farming households with access to water to engage in off season farming.

Angola has been grappling with a severe dry spell since late 2023, including the driest February in over 40 years. This has led to poor crop growth and below-average harvests, exacerbating an already critical food security situation in the country's southern and eastern regions. In response, CERF allocated \$3 million in April to provide humanitarian assistance to the affected people.

In April 2024, CERF allocated \$2 million as a top-up to scale up response to affected people in Malawi in view of worsening humanitarian needs. This funding was used to provide life-saving assistance to people affected by El Niño-induced drought. The top-up allocation builds on a previous \$4 million allocation from CERF in December 2023 of which about half was used to implement early action activities in response to drought.

CERF allocated \$3 million on 3 May to ensure lifesaving assistance to over 198,000 people in Kenya affected by El Niño-related heavy rains and flash floods. The affected areas are at high risk of water and vector-borne diseases. The main focus of the allocation is to support WASH interventions, as well as supporting the provision of emergency shelter and health interventions.

On 18 May, CERF allocated \$2.5 million targeting 60,000 people affected by the flooding of Lake Tanganyika and landslides in Burundi caused by rains related to El Niño that caused displacements and led to a surge in waterborne diseases with epidemic potential, including cholera. The allocation focuses on the most vulnerable populations and enables the health system to better mitigate cholera outbreaks, as well as other water-borne diseases and malaria. The allocation is also supporting protection efforts against gender-based violence which has been increasing likely due to the disruption of protective systems from displacement.

\* Beyond the listed allocations, Malawi received \$4 million in December 2023 through the underfunded emergencies window to respond to protracted humanitarian needs and El Niño-related drought. So far, it is estimated that about \$2 million has been used for ensuring assistance to people affected by drought.