

CERF Grants Support to UNICEF's Actions for Children

Updated: 18th March 2016

1. BACKGROUND:

Since its establishment, CERF has supported UNICEF's humanitarian operations in 88 countries with millions of children receiving critical lifesaving programmes. In October 2015, CERF funding to UNICEF surpassed US\$1 billion leading to concrete results for children in complex and protracted crises e.g. Syria and South Sudan; and acute humanitarian situations in Nepal and Vanuatu. In 2015 alone, UNICEF received a total of US\$ 113.9 million in CERF grants, 29 countries received support through the rapid response window, while 19 countries received through the under-funded window.

We would like to share some themes around UNICEF's utilization of CERF grants in 2015, they range from our success in improving timeliness of disbursing sub-grants to partners in the Rapid Response (RR) window, advancing the narrative on localization of aid and challenges we continue to face.

2. SUB-GRANTING TO PARTNERS.

UNICEF agrees that timely release of sub-grants to partners, is critical for saving the lives of children and women. In this regard, **there are residual challenges but we are happy to report success.** UNICEF analysis of sub-granting to partners' encompasses not only timeliness, but also the value of the grants to partners, use of CERF to localize aid and timely completion of programmes.

We would like to **put this data in context** of our commitment to children before describing achievements.

- ✓ **About 1 out of every 2 CERF sub-grantee globally is a UNICEF partner.** In 2014 CERF reported a total of 1,214 sub-grants to implementing partners. Of this amount, UNICEF, the second largest recipient of CERF funds, reported 517 sub-grants (42 per cent of the total).
- ✓ **Every cent counts for local partners and importantly for children.** In dollar value for money, for every \$1 dollar UNICEF received, about 41 cents (41 per cent) was sub-granted to partners. This compares to an average of 23 cents (23 per cent) sub-granted to partners per \$1 dollar by other agencies. This excludes goods procured and delivered with CERF funds.
- ✓ **In dollar volume, UNICEF implemented the largest total amount through partners** (\$48.4 million through 517 sub-grants). This amount accounted for 41 per cent of all CERF funding received by UNICEF.
- ✓ **About 8 out of every 10 (76 per cent) UNICEF's sub-grants in 2014 went to international and national NGOs.** This is in line with the work UNICEF is doing to specifically strengthen the capacity of implementing partners, particularly National Non-Governmental Organizations (NNGOs).
- ✓ **UNICEF works in multi-sectors,** as such CERF grants have covered multi-sector work, including projects in education, health, nutrition, water and sanitation, and protection.
- ✓ **Timely completion of CERF projects:** The measurement of UNICEF's success in sub-granting to partners is not only in the timeliness or the value, but also how many are completed in a timely manner. In 2014, UNICEF had 96 per cent (7 extensions out of 184 grants), while in 2015 timely completion of projects was at 98 per cent (only 2 non-cost extensions out of 130 grants).

Having outlined the context, we would like to report success in improving timeliness of disbursements to partners. The analysis below focuses on the **RR sub-grants**. The figures for UNICEF represent a **56 per cent increase** in the number of sub-grant implemented in 2014 compared to 2013.

On implementation timing:

- ✓ Similar to 2013, (38 per cent), the highest proportion of CERF-funded activities in 2014 (37 per cent) were **started within the first month of receipt of CERF funds**. Also in 2014, the implementation of **57 per cent of all CERF RR sub-grants** started within **the first two months of the disbursement from CERF**. By the end of the third month, 77 per cent of RR-sub grants had started. These figures represent a 17 per cent increase over the 2013 figures.

On disbursement timing:

In 2014, UNICEF disbursed 303 RR sub-grants compared to 194 RR sub-grants in 2013. **This 22 per cent increase** is a remarkable achievement for UNICEF given the large increase in the number of sub-grants in 2014. Even with the record number of [Level 3 responses](#), which UNICEF was responding to in South Sudan, Syria, Central Africa Republic, Iraq and the Ebola crisis, we still managed to record improvement in timely disbursements of grants to partners.

- ✓ For UNICEF, emergency response activities always commence within 24 hours, and the country offices **are assured of access to internal Emergency Programme Fund (EPF) within 48 hours of request from which, they can disburse immediately to partners while awaiting donor and CERF grants**. As such, we have continued to leverage CERF funds to enable further scale up efforts in our operations. The data for 2013 and 2014 confirms this and shows that **disbursement of more than half of RR sub-grants for 2013 and 2014 took place within the first three months to enable further scale up of response**. Available resources were used and then CERF funds subsequently used for either addendums to existing Programme Cooperation Agreements (PCAs)/new PCAs with quarterly payments made to partners.

3. On measures UNICEF implemented to accelerate disbursement:

In 2015 UNICEF implemented key measures to improve disbursement of funds to implementing partners, we **expect to see a marked improvement in our disbursement rates for 2015**, given that the 2013 to 2014 improvements happened before UNICEF put these measures in place. The measures undertaken includes:

- **New PCA guidance and forms:** UNICEF launched new PCA guidance in March 2015. The new guidance includes new provisions that are especially relevant to humanitarian contexts, it specifically encourages country offices to develop pre-authorized agreements for emergency response and sets benchmarks for timely signing of agreements. UNICEF country offices in complex, high threat environments were among the first to be trained on the new PCA guidance.
- **Streamlined headquarters (HQ) processes:** Increased collaboration between HQ units has resulted in a streamlined workflow that has significantly increased the issuance of budget for CERF grants to UNICEF country offices. UNICEF country offices now receive CERF budget within 2 days of receipt of the CERF approval letter.
- **Sensitizing country offices on UNICEF commitment to timely disbursement of funds:** All CERF recipient country offices received trainings which increased their awareness on the importance of accelerating disbursement of sub-grants to partners. In case of delayed disbursement, or delayed start of implementation due to external constraints, UNICEF offices must inform the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator and or OCHA accordingly and keep the Regional

Office and the Office of Emergency Programmes in New York (EMOPS) copied for follow up vis-a-vis the CERF Secretariat.

- **Strengthening monitoring and oversight of timely grants implementation:** In 2015 UNICEF instituted a 20 weekdays “trigger” to ensure that disbursement of funds to Implementing Partners take place within 20 weekdays from receipt. Non-disbursement triggers an alert on the UNICEF global dashboard which is actively monitored by regional offices and headquarters. The reporting system has been fully operational from September 2015.

4. CHALLENGES:

Every partnership, has its challenges and that UNICEF's experience with accessing and implementation of CERF grants could be discussed under 3 categories: **need for UNICEF to enhance efforts to improve timely disbursement of funds, feedback from country offices on protracted nature of discussions, and their request for simplification and flexibility in the approval process.**

- **Country specific challenges with timely disbursement of funds to partners:** In 2014, UNICEF experienced some country specific challenges in timely disbursement of funds, the specific countries included Sierra Leone, Haiti, Niger, Yemen, Myanmar, Ukraine and Burkina Faso. We already have some preliminary observations but it is quite complex and a number of factors led to delay. These could have included: UNICEF internal administrative procedures on Partnership Agreements, security challenges and need to get government clearance before signing agreement for operations particularly in conflict affected countries. We are analysing the newly shared data, and will hold targeted CERF webinars with concerned country offices to further identify their context specific challenges and sensitize them on the new UNICEF measures for accelerating disbursement to partners.
- ***Protracted discussions at CO level:*** Whereas CERF strengthens coordination, one of the issues we have heard from our country offices and **is a consistent emerging theme in the time it takes going back and forth on negotiating a CERF application at the country level.**
- ***UNICEF's need to improve on Quality of the Proposals, but a call for flexibility in the review and approval process:*** We support CERF's emphasis on strategic and results focused proposals. To this effect, we have held joint webinars for UNICEF country offices and will continue to emphasize on requests focusing on prioritized needs. In the meantime, we propose **that CERF's review process strikes a balance between the urgent need to expedite release of grants and on getting operational details right.**

5. CONCLUSION:

We are working jointly and having regular consultations with the CERF team on areas for improving quality of UNICEF's proposals. We hold regular consultations on addressing issues from country offices of concern, and held joint webinars in 2015 to sensitize country office on the strategic focus of CERF. **CERF Secretariat has continued to provide timely and comprehensive support which is highly appreciated.**

More information on UNICEF's Humanitarian Action for Children can be accessed from: <http://www.unicef.org/emergencies/>