



Change of RC/HC Reporting Schedule for CERF

Background

The annual Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) CERF narrative reports are the RC/HCs' official reporting tool on the use of CERF funds. The reports highlight whether set targets have been met and explain how funds have been prioritized and utilized to meet life-saving humanitarian needs. They also form the framework for agencies to report programmatically to the RC/HC, and by extension to the ERC/CERF, on results achieved with CERF funds.

Following the CERF Advisory Group's and key donors' call for improvements of the RC/HC reports, as well as the CERF Five-year Evaluation's emphasis on the need for stronger accountability reporting, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), Ms. Valerie Amos, made improving CERF narrative reporting one of her main priorities. In her communications with RC/HCs and heads of CERF-recipient agencies in November 2011, Ms. Amos expressed concern about the quality of reporting from the field asking for support in improving the quality of narrative reports.

Following efforts to sustain quality improvements of the RC/HC reports over the past years, the reports have generally continued to improve. However, following an assessment of this year's reporting cycle, it is evident that amendments to the reporting schedule are necessary in order to ensure further strengthening of the reports. The current RC/HC reporting process dictates annual submission of reports by a pre-defined deadline – 15 March. This reporting schedule involves a number of inherent challenges that are contributing negatively to the report quality and increase the workload for agencies receiving CERF funds. These include:

Agency Reporting Burden: Many CERF allocations currently require two reports and some even three. Agencies receiving CERF funds during the last half of the calendar year are currently requested to submit draft RC/HC reports to the CERF secretariat on March 15 despite ongoing project implementation. The following year, the same recipients are requested to provide final RC/HC reports. Secondly, the Umbrella LoU stipulates that agencies receiving rapid response disbursements to projects with an implementation end date between 1 January and 30 June of a given year shall submit mid-year interim project reports to the relevant RC/HCs. Hereby, a significant number of CERF allocations require two or more reports¹.

Report Timing, Accuracy and Staff Turnover: The annual fixed reporting deadline of 15 March means that for a significant number of allocations narrative reporting will only take place several months after project completion². In addition, there generally is a high staff rotation in emergency responses and with the current reporting process, there is a significant risk that the staff involved in the emergency response will have rotated by the time that the final report is due. As a result many RC/HC reports are prepared when CERF events have long passed and often by staff not involved in the CERF supported emergency response which jeopardizes the quality of the reports.

CERF Secretariat Review: Simultaneous submission of all RC/HC reports causes bottlenecks in the CERF secretariat. Submission of approximately 50 reports to the CERF secretariat within a week results in late

¹ For example, 206 ongoing CERF projects that agencies reported on in March 2013 will need to submit a final report by 15 March 2014.

² For example, for the reporting cycle due 15 March 2014, a total of 288 projects (or 46% of all projects at the time of writing) will report eight months or more after project activities have been completed. This includes all allocations under the CERF Underfunded second round of each year for which narrative reports are due eight and a half month after project completion.

review of the reports and late provision of feedback to RC/HCs and agencies. This jeopardizes the quality and timeliness of the review process and consequently the quality of the final reports.

These inherent problems with the current RC/HC reporting process have been highlighted in many of the independent Country Reviews under the CERF Performance Accountability Framework (PAF), and most recently the CERF reviews for DRC, the Sahel and Yemen conducted in 2013 recommended that the CERF secretariat explore changing the RC/HC reporting cycle to a rolling approach. Feedback from country level partners in the review countries has been positive.

New Reporting Schedule

Against this backdrop, and following consultations at headquarter and field level with recipient agencies and other stakeholders,³ the CERF secretariat will abandon the fixed RC/HC reporting deadline and instead put in effect a reporting schedule that follows the project cycle.⁴ Instead of the 15 March deadline, the RC/HC offices will be requested to submit RC/HC reports within three months of each grant package's expiration (for both Rapid Response and Underfunded allocations). This change will have the following advantages:

- **Reduced agency reporting burden:** Instead of multiple reports, only one narrative report will be requested for each grant whereby the agency reporting burden will be reduced significantly (interim narrative reports will be made redundant and disappear);
- **Reporting by relevant staff:** There will be a greater chance for formulation of the reports by staff involved in the emergency responses, which should improve the report quality and ensure an easier reporting process for RC/HCs and the agencies;
- **More timely review:** Preparing the reports shortly after implementation of the grants will allow partners at country level to more meaningfully reflect on the results achieved with CERF funds and the effectiveness of the CERF process at country level. It will also allow for identification of good practices and challenges while events are still fresh in people's minds.
- **Simpler report structure:** The reporting process will be simplified as country teams with different allocations during the year will not have to merge reporting into one consolidated report but instead prepare stand-alone reports for each grant package;
- **Less reporting during peak season:** For many agencies, the first months of the year are a busy reporting period and abandoning the 15 March deadline is expected to relieve the reporting burden in the beginning of the year for many agencies;
- **Timely feedback from the CERF secretariat:** As the reports will be submitted throughout the year, the CERF secretariat will be able to ensure reviews shortly after submission, provide timely feedback and be able to address issues sooner and more effectively;
- **Accountability:** The availability of more real-time information will strengthen RC/HCs ability to use CERF strategically and increase CERF's transparency and accountability to donors, member states and other stakeholders. Finally, the change will improve CERF's ability to track and analyse programmatic information, as well as the monitoring of CERF performance against key indicators in the Performance and Accountability Framework.

To facilitate an easy transition to the new reporting system the period from September 2013 to March 2014 will serve as a transition period where RC/HCs will be offered the opportunity to report within a period of three months after completion of the grant tranches instead of waiting to 15 March 2014. RC/HCs are encouraged to report according to the new schedule and the CERF secretariat will provide dedicated support to those countries that decide to do so. For those with grants expiring in 2013 that do not submit RC/HC reports during the transition period, the final deadline remains 15 March 2014. The new rolling reporting schedule will be mandatory starting 15 March 2014.

CERF secretariat, 26 Aug 2013

³ A move from fixed to rolling RC/HC reporting was discussed as part of regular bilateral consultations with agency HQ focal points at headquarters level during first half of 2013. Furthermore, three PAF reviews conducted in 2013 specifically solicited field level feedback from recipient agencies, cluster leads and OCHA country offices on a possible move away from fixed reporting

⁴ This will not require amendments to the umbrella LOU.