



CBPF – CERF Complementarity

Lessons Learned and Good Practices

May 2021

1. Introduction

OCHA manages two important kinds of humanitarian pooled funds, the **Country Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs)** and the **global Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)**, which are both fast and flexible financing instruments that support emergency response operations in key, strategic ways. Both Funds are designed to foster a more coherent and timelier humanitarian response, building on coordination mechanisms, and reinforcing the leadership of Humanitarian Coordinators. The Funds have proven to be one of the great successes of humanitarian reform efforts and have since their inception 15 years ago become a key pillar of the humanitarian architecture, now channelling more than \$1.5 billion annually to humanitarian organisations around the globe.

Given that these two types of Funds often support response in the same contexts, with typically half of CERF funding going to countries with CBPFs, questions arise on how the resources are used in complementary and coherent ways. Ensuring that the two Funds are used jointly and strategically for greatest overall impact has been a continuing priority for OCHA and partners¹. The 2019 CBPF Global Evaluation² acknowledged efforts to ensure coherence and strategic alignment between the two Funds, while pointing to the need to further strengthen complementarity (...) through the issuance of revised guidance and dissemination of good practice”. A recent internal OCHA review³ recommended that the Pooled Fund Management Branch (PFMB) work towards “a more integrated pooled fund approach”.

There is considerable experience at the global and field levels in using the Funds in complementary and coherent ways. The joined-up use of the two Funds is assured at the field level by common decision-making and management structures: final decisions on how to use the resources are made by the same individual (the Humanitarian Coordinator) and the management of resources is typically supported by the same OCHA teams (the CBPF Humanitarian Financing Units). Decision-making processes at headquarters also include considerations on complementarity and coherence.

Given the many examples of good practices, OCHA sees an opportunity to further document decisions made both at headquarters and in the field to show the types of complementary approaches that exist to using CERF and CBPFs. The following paper is intended to provide an overview and practical examples of how complementarity – and coherence – between the pooled funds is achieved. The paper first explores the respective comparative advantages of each funding mechanism, upon which complementarity is based. It then considers the ways in which complementarity is ensured at the global and country levels, setting out recent illustrative examples⁴.

2. Recognizing the comparative advantage of each funding mechanism

Complementarity between CBPFs and CERF, globally and at country level, is derived from recognizing and building on the respective comparative advantages of each funding mechanism, and their unique value addition. Key characteristics – and differences – between the two instruments are set out below (see summary table at the end of this section):

- **CBPFs’ comparative advantage and distinct added value reside in their predictability for Humanitarian Coordinators and ability to fund a variety of humanitarian needs, working directly with a wide range of actors.** CBPFs operate in a limited number of countries characterized by high, protracted needs and sustained interest from donors. They provide predictability for Humanitarian Coordinators (HC) by availing funding to the humanitarian community on an annual basis in those countries. They are flexible tools, able to support priority activities and strategic initiatives identified at the country level – whether planned (within the framework of Humanitarian Response Plans) or unforeseen. Resources are available to a variety of actors at the country level, whether UN agencies, international or national NGOs,

¹ In 2013 CERF issued guidance to the field on how to ensure complementary use of resources “[Pooled Funds Complementarity Guidance: Harmonization of CERF and CBPFs Processes](#)”.

² “OCHA Evaluation of Country-Based Pooled Funds”, 2019

³ Review of CERF Secretariat Processes, Organizational Development Unit (ODU), May 2020

⁴ Drawn from a desk review of CBPF evaluations; reports of global pooled fund managers workshops; CBPF annual reports; country reviews conducted under CERF’s Performance and Accountability Framework; and CERF annual reports.

on the basis that they are best placed to deliver the agreed strategy. As such, CBPFs are central to localization and to promoting the greater involvement and agency of local and national actors in humanitarian action. In-country leadership of allocations by the Humanitarian Coordinator allows scope for innovation and contextually appropriate strategies to advance global priorities and to leverage greater coherence in the humanitarian response.

- CERF’s comparative advantage and distinct added value reside in its worldwide reach and agility in adding to country-level resources quickly and at scale when needed.** CERF is a global Fund managed by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and it can respond in any country at any time through prepositioned donor contributions at the global level. CERF provides additional funds to those already available at country level when humanitarian needs exceed existing resources. As the UN’s “emergency fund,” CERF is first and foremost a rapid response mechanism – focused on new or deteriorating humanitarian crises which trigger additional, unforeseen needs, relying on in-country resources to address foreseen, planned-for humanitarian requirements. As such, CERF resources are used to jump-start new operations or scale up an existing response, drawing global attention to unmet needs and encouraging deployment of funding from other sources. CERF’s speed and agility is premised on funds prepositioned by donors globally at the beginning of each year and pre-existing framework agreements with eligible UN agencies allowing for quick disbursements. Twice a year, CERF also provides additional funding to critically underfunded crises where resources are insufficient to address prevailing, high levels of need and vulnerability. Through the leadership of the ERC at the global level and Humanitarian Coordinators at the country level, CERF is also well suited to help catalyze system change and promote closer alignment between global priorities and policies and field practices.

CBPFs – key characteristics

- ✓ Country specific (with criteria/thresholds for establishment)
- ✓ \$5 million - \$200 million annually (depending on country)
- ✓ Decisions by HC at country level, supported by Advisory Board
- ✓ Majority to NGOs, including NNGOs
- ✓ Numerous, smaller grants to partners for front-line services
- ✓ Short to medium-term projects (6-12 months, occasionally longer)
- ✓ Larger strategic allocations in support of key HRP priorities (standard allocations)
- ✓ Smaller injections of funds to respond to unforeseen needs (reserve allocations)
- ✓ Broad humanitarian mandate

CERF – key characteristics

- ✓ Global reach
- ✓ >\$500 million annually (globally)
- ✓ Decisions by ERC globally, RC/ HC at country level
- ✓ UN only
- ✓ Fewer, larger grants for core UN programmes (including pipelines)
- ✓ Short-term projects (6-9 months)
- ✓ Sizeable support to critical gaps in severely underfunded HRPs (underfunded window)
- ✓ Support to UN Agencies through a revolving loan facility
- ✓ Sizeable short-term emergency funds to kickstart collective response to new shocks (rapid response window)
- ✓ Narrow life-saving emergency mandate
- ✓ Includes a revolving loan facility

3. Complementarity from a global perspective

Complementarity between the two pooled funds from a global perspective is ensured in the CERF decision-making processes. In allocating resources, CERF first considers available funding at the country level, and only steps in if needs outstrip existing available resources. As such, in contexts with a CBPF, CERF considers available CBPF resources and potential allocations being planned/undertaken by the CBPF, in informing allocation decisions. As every situation is different there is not a set ‘formula’ for determining CERF support for countries with CBPFs - rather, CERF will consider each request within the parameters of the specific emergency context.

Rapid Response Allocations: Some common scenarios and considerations for CERF rapid response allocations to CBPF countries include:

- **The CBPF has little or no funding available for the new response** in which case CERF will assess requirements based on the new humanitarian needs and funding available from other sources, as in any other context. Should the CBPF be positioned to make a small allocation, complementarity between CBPF and CERF funding will be ensured at country level.
- **The CBPF has significant funding available to respond** to the situation, in which case CERF will assess whether the CBPF will be able to fully meet requirements with existing resources, or whether additional CERF support is needed. If CERF support is required, the size of the allocation will be determined by the scale and severity of needs and will take into consideration resources deployed by the CBPF as well as from other sources. Ensuring complementary with CBPF funding will be a key consideration in determining the scope of the CERF allocation, and an integral part of the allocation strategy the Humanitarian Coordinator submits as part of the CERF request.
- **The CBPF has significant funding available but will not be able to respond at scale** to the new situation as existing funding is needed for other priorities. A CERF request in this context will demand added scrutiny and require close consultation with the field to understand competing priorities and the rationale for the CBPF not responding to a greater extent to the new needs with its existing resources. Where found to be justified, a CERF allocation may proceed in the normal way ensuring strategic complementarity with a likely smaller allocation from the CBPF. The justification for the limited response from the CBPF will be included as part of the CERF request put forward by the HC.

While no two situations are identical, most allocations can be placed within these three broad scenarios, with the first two the most common.

Underfunded Emergency Allocations: Allocations from the **CERF Underfunded Emergencies (UFE) Window** are informed by a global analysis of funding and vulnerability levels across all humanitarian operations to determine the most underfunded emergencies to support. The analysis of funding levels considers available CBPF resources where these exist. Funding requests from countries with a CBPF will need to explain how CBPF and CERF UFE funding will complement each other strategically.

4. Complementarity at country level

Complementarity between the two pooled fund mechanisms at the country level is ensured through the Humanitarian Coordinators’ leadership and decision-making, and through OCHA’s management of the allocation and oversight of project implementation. Through his/her decision-making, the Humanitarian Coordinator can decide how best to use these different funding sources based on the comparative advantage of each mechanism, and as part of one “joined up” approach.

OCHA, in support of the Humanitarian Coordinators’ leadership and in their management of the resources, helps translate this vision into allocation strategies and processes that ensure coherence, non-duplication and best overall use of resources. In most countries with a CBPF (17 out of 19⁵), OCHA’s Humanitarian Financing Unit also facilitates CERF funding requests, allocation processes and reporting. There is significant value in this arrangement, building on the CBPF’s ongoing engagement and working relationships with a range of stakeholders and coordination platforms in country, including cluster coordinators, operational partners, the Humanitarian Country Team, NGO networks, donor forums, etc. Technical expertise available

⁵ The two countries with CBPFs where the HFU does not also facilitate CERF processes are Nigeria and Syria.

in-country to support CBPF processes, including GenCap and ProCap, have also been harnessed to inform CERF programming. In some cases, this has extended to vetting and quality control of CERF project proposals, in a similar approach to that used by the CBPF. In some cases, monitoring systems put in place by CBPFs have also been used to strengthen CERF in-country processes through monitoring of CERF-funded projects.

The following are illustrative examples of types of complementarity achieved using CERF and CBPF resources. Depending on the context these approaches may be applied individually or in combination to achieve an effective response:

- 4.1. Temporal sequencing:** CBPF and CERF allocations can be used to support different phases of an emergency response – allowing for continuity in the scaling up of critical humanitarian services. For new, unforeseen emergencies, CBPFs can make initial fast-tracked – typically smaller - “reserve” allocations⁶ to support the initial response while a fuller assessment of needs is undertaken, which can then be followed by a larger CERF Rapid Response allocation (if requirements exceed existing resources). In addition, this immediate injection of funds to support initial response efforts can be followed by further allocations by the CBPF, to address additional needs beyond the initial phase of the emergency.

***Example from Iraq:** CERF and the Iraq Humanitarian Fund (IHF) together contributed some \$100 million towards the Mosul humanitarian operation in 2016 and 2017. A critical consideration in ensuring complementarity in the deployment of resources from both pooled funds was temporal sequencing given the implementation timelines required for different activities. In essence, the IHF made funds available for NGOs and UN Agencies in anticipation of the military operation – which included pre-positioning of relief items and initiating other priority activities involving longer implementation periods. CERF resources, deployed subsequently, were primarily directed at addressing the most time-critical needs immediately following the military operation and the onset of the crisis.*

- 4.2. Different, complementary Fund recipients:** CBPF and CERF allocations can be designed to provide funding to different types of recipient organisations in a way that best addresses the overall humanitarian situation. CBPFs typically provide most of their funding to a wide network of front-line national and international NGO partners, while CERF funding is provided through fewer, large-scale grants for direct operational requirements of UN agencies, including bulk procurement of supplies and provision of common logistics services. While CERF provides funding to UN agencies, the latter enter into partnerships with local and international NGOs to implement their projects.

***Example from South Sudan:** Following the declaration of localized famine in early 2017, an allocation by the South Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SSHF) of \$22.5 million was conducted in parallel with an allocation of the CERF Rapid Response Window of \$15.5 million. Integrated planning considered which mechanism could most effectively support different fund recipients in undertaking complementary, prioritised activities. The SSHF supported front line activities by NGOs - such as distribution of vegetable, fishing and hygiene kits, rehabilitation of water sources and sanitation facilities, provision of primary health care services and management of acute malnutrition. CERF was used to support UN agencies in procuring emergency supplies in bulk that could be distributed in the communities by NGOs, and to provide common logistics services including humanitarian air services. Together these elements constituted a timely and effective overall response.*

- 4.3. Different, complementary sectoral focus:** Informed by each Fund’s comparative advantage CERF and CBPF allocations can be designed to address needs in different sectors, in order to achieve the desired programmatic coverage. Adopting a complementary sectoral focus in allocations from the two Funds will depend on the context and be contingent on factors such as the required scale, timing, location and duration of foreseen activities in the sector, and the profile of partners best placed to lead the response.

***Example from Myanmar:** In response to population displacement in northern Rakhine State in late 2016, an allocation of \$4.3 million through the CERF Rapid Response Window enabled UN Agencies to scale up protection, food security and health services. CERF prioritized these sectors considering access*

⁶ Only a limited portion of CBPF funds are set aside for reserve allocations, whereas the majority of resources are provided through pre-planned standard allocations.

constraints in Rakhine State and operational readiness of UN Agencies in these sectors, as well as their established relationships with national and local authorities. This was complemented by an allocation of \$1 million from the Myanmar Humanitarian Fund (MHF) for NGO partners to expand emergency nutrition and WASH assistance. The MHF prioritized these sectors considering the operational readiness and technical expertise of NGOs in these sectors, and their ability to reach affected communities through existing programmes. The combined use of resources from both pooled funds, informed by common needs assessments and prioritization, achieved the desired sectoral coverage within an integrated response.

- 4.4. Different, complementary geographical targeting:** CBPF and CERF allocations can be designed to target different geographical locations, in order to achieve the overall spatial coverage desired to meet the needs of the most severely affected communities. Adopting a complementary geographical focus will be informed by a range of factors such as existing partner presence and programmes and the envisaged timing and duration of response activities.

Example from Afghanistan: *In the last quarter of 2020, the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF) and CERF conducted a joint allocation to respond to COVID-19. For the health sector response, each mechanism prioritized different districts within Herat region. CERF, through IOM, supported districts with higher numbers of cross border returnees, IDPs, and marginalized migrant populations, using resources for public health facilities at major border crossing points. The institutionalized collaboration between IOM and local and national health authorities was a key factor for CERF in prioritizing these locations. In parallel, the AHF prioritized basic primary health and trauma care through mobile services in districts with greater needs among host communities and other vulnerable groups, supporting NGOs who were best placed to deliver services in these locations.*

- 4.5. Common promotion of global priorities and cross-cutting issues:** CBPF and CERF allocations (through the Underfunded window in particular) can be used to reinforce consideration of, and attention to, key themes, cross cutting issues and good practices that are recognised by the wider humanitarian community as important to quality of aid. As examples, both pooled funds could be used to promote anticipatory approaches, gender-appropriate programming or the use of cash-based assistance to enhance the quality of response, drawing attention to these areas and promoting systemic change in a joined-up way. Aligning processes and resources around thematic priorities will amplify messaging and contribute to mobilising broader support of a common agenda.

Example from Jordan: *In the first quarter of 2020 CERF made an allocation through the Underfunded Emergencies Window to scale up assistance for Syrian refugees in Jordan. Funding prioritised response services to GBV survivors, including case management, psychosocial support and life-saving health services. In the third quarter of the year a reserve allocation from the Jordan Humanitarian Fund (JHF) similarly prioritised response to GBV, including the clinical management of rape. Under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator both Funds gave due consideration and prioritisation to GBV in their allocation strategies and processes, increasing visibility of GBV as a key concern and highlighting the need for additional attention and resources within the wider response.*

- 4.6. Joining up to support capacity strengthening:** CBPFs have more flexibility in the types of activities they support compared to CERF. While addressing capacity requirements is beyond CERF's mandate, CBPFs have the potential to support certain aspects of capacity strengthening. By joining up allocation strategies between the two Funds, CBPFs can help support critical capacity strengthening efforts that are important for the overall response, but that cannot be covered by a CERF allocation alone.

Example from South Sudan: *In response to Ebola virus disease (EVD) in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo in 2018, a \$2 million allocation from the CERF Rapid Response Window bolstered infection prevention and control. In parallel, \$2 million was allocated by the South Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SSHF) to strengthen surveillance and infection prevention and control. SSHF-funded activities included capacity strengthening initiatives, such as support to the development and dissemination of standard operating procedures and technical guidelines, and associated training of healthcare workers and community leaders. These capacity strengthening activities supported best practices across the response including in the use of CERF resources.*