



FAO and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)

March 2016

CERF grant support to FAO's emergency and rehabilitation programmes

1. Background

In many humanitarian crises, most of the affected vulnerable population depend on agriculture for survival. Emergencies can cause severe damage to the agriculture sector and the food production system – including crops, livestock, fisheries, aquaculture, forestry and natural resources. Rapid and efficient response to agricultural threats and emergencies saves life, promotes recovery and reduces the gap between dependency on food assistance and self-reliance. In addition, it can mitigate and avert the loss of lives resulting from food security, malnutrition and loss of livelihoods.

Supporting farmers to meet the planting season deadlines or keep their livestock alive are critical time-sensitive interventions. If delayed, the affected populations can be pushed into further displacement, deeper poverty or irreversible destitution and long-term dependency on food assistance.

From the very beginning of a crisis, FAO supports countries and partners to protect and restore the livelihoods of affected farmers, fishers, herders and foresters. The immediate provision of feed saves livestock from starvation at a fraction of their replacement cost. Seed assistance restores the self-sufficiency and dignity of vulnerable farming families, reducing the need for food assistance. Building the resilience of livelihoods is key to FAO's emergency response, to ensure communities lay the foundations for their own long-term recovery.

In 2015, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) was a key resource partner for FAO. It was the third largest contributor to FAO's emergency operations in the food security sector, with an allocation of USD 27.4 million, covering 28 countries through 33 grants. FAO is the sixth largest recipient of CERF funding with this contribution representing 5.83 percent of all CERF allocations in 2015.

Funding provided by CERF through the rapid response window allowed for quick and effective responses both to sudden-onset disasters, such as cyclones or earthquakes, and to slow-onset emergencies, such as droughts and locust infestations, as well as to the peaks of humanitarian needs in protracted crisis. The under-funded window enabled FAO to respond in countries which do not attract much support from donors.

2. Working with partners: considerations and efforts for improvements

FAO is strongly committed to working with partners – governments, national and international non-government organizations (NGOs) and other civil society organizations – to ensure effective and efficient use of CERF funds to provide essential assistance to the most vulnerable population affected by a humanitarian crisis and address food insecurity.

In the implementation of emergency operations, FAO usually handles procurement and transport of inputs and requires implementing partners' services for final distribution.

In relation to the analysis of data on sub-grants under the 2014 CERF projects, where FAO appears to be slow in the start of implementation, FAO would like to draw attention to the following points:

- **A 'slow' start does not necessarily translate into a delay in overall project implementation.** The appearance of the 'slow' start of sub-grants implementation or 'slow' disbursement of sub-grants from FAO to implementing partners does not automatically mean a delay in overall project implementation. Before the disbursement of sub-grants to implementing partners there is already work being carried out directly by FAO staff, e.g. procurement of inputs, transport to decentralized warehouses, quality control, trainings, etc.
- **Project workplans may entail activities carried out by partners that are foreseen at a later stage of the implementation process.** This means that what appears to be a 'slow' start, in reality does not represent any delay because it simply reflects the natural timeline of a specific project. Implementing partners' activities may be required at a specific time in the lifespan of a project, which seems to be 'late' if looking only at the statistics of dates, but is in fact timely with the plan of activities to be implemented.
- **Timing of agricultural activities is subject to the seasonal calendar,** hence distributions are planned and implemented accordingly. This applies to agricultural inputs, but also to other types of activities such as livestock vaccination or fishery inputs, which may be linked to a specific timeline during the year (i.e. rainy season, catch seasonality, etc.).
- **Distributions need to be strategic.** In some cases, inputs can also be purposely distributed at the moment of the planting season to avoid that an early distribution results in, for example, consumption of seeds, leaving the household with no inputs at the planting time.
- **FAO country offices are aware of the need to improve efficiency and effectiveness of partnership arrangements.** Specific rules are in place to bypass tenders to identify implementing partners in emergency situations – hence for all CERF grants. Implementing partners are usually identified during the preparation of the CERF proposals.
- **Quality control and risk management are crucial.** There is an internal approval process of sub-grants agreements, with operational and financial clearances that are an inevitable step for an adequate process of quality control and risk management. While trying to reduce any delay to a minimum, we should not de-emphasize internal control processes that are essential for the organization to ensure efficiency and quality of sub-grants implementation.
- **Technical clearances are required.** In some countries, partnering with NGOs or national government services require clearances from government technical bodies, which can – at times – require additional time in the process. While FAO is constantly trying to have preventive discussions and anticipate clearances and endorsements as much as possible, there are cases that are out of FAO's control.

3. CERF Programme highlights

South Sudan: Life-saving support in the midst of conflict

Through a joint rapid response operation, funding from CERF enabled FAO to provide vegetable and fishing survival kits to more than 135 000 people. These kits gave beneficiaries in remote areas quick access to a critical source of nutritious food, and the possibility of trading or selling surplus production to meet other needs. One vegetable kit – containing 220 g of quick-maturing vegetable seeds – could produce food in just six weeks and yield 1 940 kg of vegetables, enough to feed a

family for six months. With the hooks, monofilament and twine from a fishing kit, each beneficiary household could catch an average of 429 kg of fish per month.

Malawi: Preventing a lost harvest

Without urgent funding from CERF, farmers affected by the floods in January 2015 would have been unable to plant again until November/December. Thanks to timely support, 16 000 households benefited from short-cycle crop and vegetable seeds, planting materials and goats. Assisted farmers were able to immediately restart their livelihoods, producing enough vegetables, beans, maize and sweet potatoes to reduce the season's hunger gap by five months. The increased access to safe, fresh food contributed to improving families' nutritional status, while the sale of a portion of production increased their disposable income.

Vanuatu: Ensuring continued access to food following a cyclone

Following Tropical Cyclone Pam, CERF funding enabled nearly 50 000 people to rapidly resume production of fruits, vegetables and root crops within three months of the cyclone. The project also supported the construction of two nurseries and five demonstration plots to contribute to community food supplies, as well as training on food preservation techniques to help beneficiaries protect supplies (i.e. root crops) that had not been destroyed by the cyclone. Together, these interventions helped ensure that affected families had a continuous source of nutritious food in the immediate aftermath of the storm.

Syria: increasing access to safe, nutritious food

Thanks to CERF funding, FAO increased access to safe, nutritious food for 492 Syrian refugees and Jordanian host community households. Vegetable seeds and seedlings were distributed, enabling each household to produce at least 130 kg of food. Training was provided on all aspects of production, from planting, irrigation and fertilization to harvesting, and introduced mobile rooftop and vertical gardens, which made efficient use of limited outdoor space. Additional training focused on basic nutrition as well as cooking demonstrations showcasing recipes for healthy, balanced meals.

4. Conclusion

FAO is investing heavily in coordination of activities within the food security clusters and promotion of joint programming with cluster partners to ensure that sub-grants agreements with implementing partners are the result of a coordinated effort and joint planning of all food security stakeholders.

A best practice comes from the agricultural campaigns in Central African Republic, in 2014. Thanks to joint planning at cluster level, FAO procured and transported agricultural inputs to decentralised warehouses in the country, while WFP provided seeds protection rations (food rations to avoid beneficiaries eating the seeds before planting them) and partner NGOs combined distribution of food rations and agricultural inputs to the same households. This subsequently created a more efficient use of resources and better coverage.

FAO remains strongly committed to constantly improve effectiveness and efficiency and in 2016 intends to scale up activities to raise awareness and provide guidance to its country offices on CERF allocations and procedures, with a specific focus on close monitoring and analysis of sub-grants start of implementation and disbursements.