



Observations on FAO sub-grants to implementing partners in 2015 CERF-funded projects

In 2016, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) remained a key resource partner for FAO's emergency response to food security crisis and agricultural threats and emergencies. It was the fifth largest contributor to FAO's emergency operations in the food security sector, with an allocation of USD 22.6 million, covering 25 countries through 28 grants. FAO was the seventh largest recipient of CERF funding with this contribution representing 5.16 percent of all CERF allocations in 2016.

In 2017, until 3 May, FAO has received USD 24.2 million from CERF, covering 19 countries through 20 grants.

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. FAO works closely 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 overall planning and coordination, 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 2015 CERF projects, FAO would like to draw attention to the following points:

1. Timeliness

- There has been a **remarkable improvement on the timing of activities implementation start by implementing partners and on the timing of the first instalment compared to the previous year**. In fact, in Rapid Response allocations, 31% of the sub-grants (Letters of Agreement in FAO terminology) were signed within one month, compared with 5% in 2014. Similarly, in 17% of cases, the first instalment was released within one month, compared with 5% in 2014. The percentage of sub-grants started within the fourth month and beyond has decreased from 44% in 2014 to 24% in 2015.
- As already highlighted in March 2016, FAO considers anyway that a **'slow' start does not necessarily translate into a delay in overall project implementation**. What appear to be a 'slow' start of sub-grants implementation or 'slow' disbursement of sub-grants to implementing partners does not automatically mean a delay in overall project implementation. In fact, before the disbursement of sub-grants to implementing partners,

activities may be carried out directly by FAO staff, e.g. for 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.

2. Type of partnership

- The funds transferred to implementing partners in 2015 within the framework of CERF funding to FAO corresponds to 12.8% of the total received (total amount of sub-grants: USD 3 516 321; total amount received from CERF in 2015: USD 27 402 155);
- In all CERF allocations (including both Rapid Response and Underfunded Window), FAO sub-grants were signed with Government institutions (35%), National NGOs (35%) and International NGOs (30%). This means that **70% of the sub-grants were allocated to national responders**, with an evident implication on reinforcing their capacities, in line with the Grand Bargain commitment 2.
- Specifically, in Rapid Response allocations the proportions are the following: Government: 21%, National NGOs 40%, International NGOs (38%), while in Underfunded window the percentage of sub-grants with government institutions increases to 53%. National NGOs are at 28% and international NGOs are 19%, bringing the total sub-grants to national responders to 81%. Consequently, we can assume that in UF allocation – with advanced planning and more time for implementation – it is easier to engage with national institutions and NGOs compared with Rapid Response that have a shorter timeframe both for planning and implementation.

Timing of Activities Implementation Start by IPs - by type of partner (RR+UF) in %				
Intervals	GOV	INGO	NNGO	Total No. of sub-grants
Within 1st month and before	25%	44%	31%	16
Within 2nd month	27%	20%	53%	15
Within 3rd month	20%	60%	20%	10
Within 4th month and beyond	48%	18%	33%	33
Total %	35%	30%	35%	
Total No. of sub-grants	26	22	26	74

Timing of Activities Implementation Start by IPs - by type of partner (RR only) in %				
Intervals	GOV	INGO	NNGO	Total No. of sub-grants
Within 1st month and before	15%	54%	31%	13
Within 2nd month	29%	21%	50%	14
Within 3rd month	20%	60%	20%	5
Within 4th month and beyond	20%	30%	50%	10
Total %	21%	38%	40%	
Total No. of sub-grants	9	16	17	42

- Finally, on average, it is faster to engage and start implementation of activities with International NGOs as compared to government and national NGOs, especially in Rapid Response allocations. In fact, 54% of the sub-grants signed within the first month are with INGOs, compared to 15% with government and 31% with NNGOs. This can be assumed to be linked to the capacity of partners and their familiarity and experience in partnering with UN agencies. This trend should however improve as localization and related capacity building work progresses.