



United Nations
CERF | Central
Emergency
Response
Fund

CBPF Country-based
Pooled Funds

Measuring the impact of OCHA- managed pooled funds

IMPACT

Jock Baker, Independent Consultant
December 2021

Executive Summary

Background

Pooled funds have been one of the key successes of the humanitarian reform process, equipping the humanitarian system with a financing mechanism that provides rapid and flexible funding. Donor contributions to both Pooled Funds have progressively increased over the years, notably to the Country Based Pooled Funds (CBPF). In different forums and discussions donors have nevertheless regularly highlighted the need for improved analysis, reporting and communications on the OCHA-managed Pooled Funds' operational impact.

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the CBPF, hereafter referred to as "Pooled Funds", and the Interagency Steering Committee (IASC) more generally, tend to use "impact" in two ways 1) as an expression of humanitarian need and 2) impact a result of support/assistance provided. The humanitarian system has struggled with measuring impact of their assistance, due to a combination of the short-term nature of interventions and numerous external influences, especially in complex emergencies.

Study Purpose

OCHA commissioned this study to help clarify their concept of impact for both Pooled Funds, to recommend modifications to the existing concept while giving due consideration that the proposed approaches to measurement and reporting are practical and achievable within the operating context of the Pooled Funds and available resources.

Methods

The methodology consisted of a desk review of over 500 documents and interviews with 49 key informants, of which 17 were representatives of bilateral donors to help in capturing different perspectives on the perceived impact and value-added of Pooled Funds. Impact measurement was examined from the perspective of Pooled Funds, donors, three other comparable peer pooled funds were analysed when proposing a framework that Pooled Funds could be used to measure outcomes and potentially provide information about its contribution to impact.

Key Findings

CERF performance accountability framework (PAF) reviews and the 2019 CBPF evaluation have found that qualitative evidence indicates that the funds have also contributed to saving lives, alleviating suffering, and maintaining dignity. However, this was hard to measure because, compared to the development sector, the humanitarian system generates relatively little outcome and impact-level data.

Donor perceptions - donors lack a uniform expectation about what operational impact, which they often equated with value-added, though some would prefer to receive more concrete results to communicate to senior officials who hold decision-making power over funding. Even so, the donors interviewed were largely positive about the direction that both CERF and CBPF were heading, highlighting timeliness, flexibility and support to humanitarian leadership and coordination. CERF was seen to be effective in addressing forgotten emergencies and the majority approved of their support to anticipatory action. CBPF was of particular interest to donors due to its ability to fund local actors directly.

Mapping of Pooled Fund templates and reports – when reviewing documents with an "impact lens",

while it is evident that use of the term in Pooled Fund reports to describe which effects of the disaster should be addressed is generally consistent. On the other hand, use of “impact” to describe results is used in different contexts and there is relatively little data to back up the claims made beyond anecdotal qualitative data.

Peer comparison – the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) managed by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) and the Start Fund were used to conduct a peer comparison of humanitarian pooled funds. The comparative study also included the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), although this has a longer-term perspective than with humanitarian pooled funds. Learning that could potentially be relevant to CERF and the CBPF included around their experience of community-based surveys and performance measurement of anticipatory action, localization.

Proposed impact framework for Pooled Funds – findings suggest that there should be two broad categories that can be measured to assess outcomes and, to some extent, impact. At an allocation level, outcomes should be measurable, but impact measurement would be limited due to the relatively short duration of funded projects. For other categories of outcomes, it should be possible to measure outcomes and possibly even contribution “impact” over time notably for countries which have a CBPF.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The Pooled Funds should continue to improve the understanding of how their support has impacted communities. There are several discernible trends in the humanitarian sphere which would allow better measurement, including more systematized outcome measurement by agencies, more efficient methods for collecting and analysing data, including in difficult-to-access areas and increased use of cash-based transfers, notably unconditional cash. The Pooled Fund's monitoring evaluation and learning (MEAL) system needs to be revisited so that it benefits from available outcome data and better supports Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP). A specific example of this is the role that after-action reviews (AAR) in understanding the results of CERF allocations, but the AARs (and resulting reports) are highly variable in quality.

Five resulting recommendations targeted at the Pooled Fund Management Branch (PFMB) are described in detail at the end of this report, but can be summarized as:

1. Better define and communicate the impact of the Pooled Funds, Revise Pooled Fund templates and guidelines to encourage and better capture outcomes.
2. Revise Pooled Fund templates and guidelines to encourage and better capture existing data on outcomes.
3. Produce periodic multi-year syntheses of lessons learned for the Pooled Funds to demonstrate that the Pooled Fund Management Branch (PFMB) is reflecting on longer-term changes and adapting its approach accordingly.
4. Improve the consistency and quality of After-Action Reviews to promote learning and encourage countries to see these as adding value.
5. Review and revise the MEAL systems for Pooled Funds in a way to capture outcome data, including encouraging agencies to set outcome data.