

Introduction

In line with the Performance and Accountability Framework (PAF) of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), the CERF secretariat commissions three to five reviews annually on the value added by CERF. These reviews are conducted by independent evaluation experts. Between 2010 and 2013, 15 reviews covering 20 different countries were completed (three reviews examined regional crises in West Africa in 2011-2012, the Sahel in 2011-2012, and in the Horn of Africa in 2011).

So far, in 2014, the CERF secretariat has commissioned two independent humanitarian consultants to review the value added by CERF to the humanitarian responses in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Sudan. Two additional reviews – a regional review of the Syria conflict and Myanmar country review – are planned for late 2014 and will be shared with the CERF Advisory Group in April 2015.

The country review of the DPRK focused on the use of CERF funds in 2013 and 2014. Field visits for the review took place in August 2014.

Summary of findings and recommendations

UN agencies, funds and programmes in DPRK have received a total of US\$97 million from CERF to date, including allocations from the Underfunded Emergencies window (UFE) each year since 2007. In 2013 and the first half of 2014, CERF contributions amounted to almost \$19.5 million from the UFE window, and \$2.1 million from the Rapid Response window in response to floods during 2013.

CERF has been the largest humanitarian funding channel to the country every year since 2009, contributing almost a quarter of reported humanitarian funding in 2013, when CERF provided over \$15 million in grants. The review found that CERF processes have met timeliness benchmarks in DPRK, and have generally operated smoothly, assisted by the small size of the UN Country Team. CERF has a good reputation in DPRK as a timely, flexible, apolitical source of funds that supports humanitarian coordination and adds significant value to humanitarian action. Given DPRK's unique situation, CERF operates somewhat differently from other countries. There is a fine line between accommodating those unique characteristics and ensuring the consistent application of CERF standards.

The following section outlines the main findings and recommendations of the DPRK country report. Additional information is available in the report itself. The views expressed are the consultant's own.

Main Findings

CERF plays a valuable role in DPRK, which is acknowledged by the Government and UN agencies alike, in challenging operational conditions. CERF has added value to the humanitarian response in DPRK in four distinct but linked ways:

- **Timely Resources:** The low levels of funding to DPRK mean that CERF has added value in providing timely resources for humanitarian action in priority areas.
- **Results and Impact:** CERF funds have made a difference to the lives of many thousands of citizens of DPRK through improved nutrition, healthcare and water supply.
- **Presence and Influence:** CERF has helped UN agencies maintain a presence in DPRK and engagement with the Government.
- **Support to Humanitarian Coordination:** The more general CERF objective of supporting coordination and the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator is adding some value in DPRK.

Detailed review findings for each of these areas are outlined below.

Timely Resources

- The low levels of funding to DPRK mean that CERF has added value in providing timely resources for humanitarian action in priority areas. As a main source of humanitarian funding for several years, providing almost a quarter of humanitarian funds recorded for DPRK, CERF has provided a substantial part of each UN agency’s DPRK budget.
- The challenge is that the unusually consistent funding from CERF has made UN agencies dependent on CERF funding. Instead of acting as a trigger or catalyst for donors as it does elsewhere, CERF is often the “donor of last resort” in DPRK.
- This is a difficult situation. CERF funding to DPRK may not be reliable in future, which makes UN agencies vulnerable. Should less CERF funding be allocated to DPRK because of requirements in other crises or a shift of the strategic focus, DPRK could be left in the lurch.
- UN agencies do strive to fundraise, but there is a strong sense that redoubled and coordinated efforts are needed to construct a fresh narrative of humanitarian needs and operating conditions in DPRK, and the UN’s ability to address these needs based on convincing reporting of results, in order to re-engage a wider group of donors.

Results and Impact

- The second value that CERF funds have brought is in making a difference to the lives of thousands of citizens of DPRK through improved nutrition, healthcare and water supply. The supply of essential items has had impacts, for example on reducing post-operative infections, reducing childhood morbidity and maternal mortality, and reducing the spread of water-borne diseases.
- The challenge is that CERF on its own is only a drop in the ocean of meeting the country’s humanitarian needs. Its overall impact is limited compared to the assumed enormity of the need. In addition, the Government’s reluctance to acknowledge the needs, as well as assessment and data restrictions, makes it very challenging to undertake a comprehensive mapping of the location and needs of vulnerable people. This in turn undermines the ability to create a convincing humanitarian strategy that can galvanise action from the international community, including CERF.
- While it can be argued that CERF funding is saving lives, the lack of funding and the chronic nature of the situation mean that CERF’s UFE funding is filling development-related gaps and preventing a deterioration of the humanitarian situation rather than addressing acute, time-critical humanitarian needs. The risk is that agencies are not necessarily addressing the needs of the most vulnerable people with CERF funds, and that the prioritisation process is based more on gaps in existing programmes rather than an evidence-based strategic discussion.
- In monitoring results and impact, operational constraints have sometimes stood in the way of providing solid evidence of results in a way that could build donor confidence.

Presence and Influence

- In the context of limited funds, CERF has helped maintain a UN agency presence in DPRK and engagement with the Government. This third area in which CERF has added value is seen by the consultant as potentially more important, although the added value is harder to quantify.
- Given DPRK’s international isolation and vulnerability to shocks, maintaining a minimum UN presence is seen as important to provide support to keep vulnerable people from “going over the edge”, to be able to monitor the situation and develop relationships with Government counterparts. This is not explicitly the CERF’s role, but it means that the UN is a credible interlocutor for the Government. If the humanitarian situation were to deteriorate, there would be a baseline of operational presence and knowledge that could be scaled up.
- It is clear that the Government values CERF, and UN agencies could do more collectively to make progress on strategic and operational issues of concern. For example, harmonise UN agencies’ CERF monitoring visit

arrangements to bring monitoring standards in line with the 'highest common denominator' of WFP's monitoring agreement. Similarly, developing stronger assessments and articulating a humanitarian strategy for DPRK would be justified by the size of the CERF contribution.

Support to Humanitarian Coordination

- Finally, the more general CERF objective of supporting coordination and the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator is adding some value in DPRK. Greater inclusion of NGOs and Government stakeholders could strengthen coordination and CERF programming if done appropriately.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: A revised humanitarian strategy for DPRK should be articulated jointly with the Government, based on new assessments

(Responsibility for action: RC, UNCT, Government of DPRK)

Information on the distribution and nature of vulnerability to underpin planning and fundraising is not consistently available, reliable or verifiable. Undertaking fresh assessments across relevant sectors would build an important picture to feed into discussions on a revised humanitarian strategy, as is usually undertaken in CERF contexts.

Recommendation 2: Prioritisation of CERF funds should be more inclusive and based on a revised strategy and ongoing analysis, with higher-quality proposals developed

(Responsibility for action: RC, UNCT, Thematic Groups, the CERF secretariat, Government of DPRK)

A more strategic discussion during the prioritisation process is important, as it is a more inclusive discussion involving international NGOs and the Government, rooted in an agreed humanitarian strategy and following humanitarian principles. Greater focus on development of high-quality proposals with higher standards of evidence should be encouraged.

Recommendation 3: The revised humanitarian strategy should be used to communicate and advocate towards donors based on a new narrative of vulnerability, to complement finite CERF funding

(Responsibility for action: RC, UNCT, donors)

CERF has been an unusually regular donor to DPRK, but this dependence is risky given the way in which CERF funds are allocated on a global basis. There is no guarantee of funding from year to year. Building a resource mobilization strategy is important to give CERF confidence that UN agencies are doing their utmost to decrease their reliance on CERF.

Recommendation 4: Application of the CERF life-saving criteria should be tightened to focus the limited CERF resources on the highly vulnerable, using new assessment data

(Responsibility for action: RC, UNCT, Thematic Groups, CERF secretariat)

In a resource-scarce environment, giving too much latitude in interpreting the life-saving criteria risks diluting CERF's impact, even if DPRK is unique. New assessments and strategy development would support such an approach and support re-focusing programmes onto the most vulnerable beneficiaries.

Recommendation 5: Assessment and monitoring requirements should be standardised among UN agencies to better meet international norms

(Responsibility for action: RC, UNCT, Government of DPRK)

To build donor confidence about programme results and quality, the UN and Government should find a way to agree on more comprehensive assessments and standardized monitoring requirements across the UN with as short of a notice period as possible, including increased and random access to beneficiary households and more flexibility over UN agencies observing each other's projects.