

Independent Reviews of the Value Added by CERF to the Humanitarian Response The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan, Sahel and Yemen

**Summary by the CERF Secretariat
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Introduction

Following the endorsement by the CERF Advisory Group of the draft Performance and Accountability Framework (PAF) at its July 2010 meeting, the CERF secretariat finalized the PAF in August 2010. Amongst other things, the PAF foresees three to five country-level reviews of the value added of CERF per year to be conducted by independent evaluation experts.

In 2013, the CERF secretariat commissioned Silvia Hidalgo, Andrew Featherstone, Marie Spaak and Tasneem Mowjee, independent humanitarian consultants, to review the value added of CERF to the humanitarian response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Sahel region, Pakistan and Yemen. Field visits for the reviews to capitals and field locations in the DRC, Pakistan, Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal and Yemen¹ took place between May and July 2013.

The reviews were largely focussed on activities in 2012 based on the 2012 annual report of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs), and submitted in March 2013. Countries were chosen to reflect recipients of both large and small amounts of CERF funding and natural as well as man-made disasters. Priority consideration was given to long-standing CERF recipients. Similar to previous years, the CERF secretariat included a regional review in the form of the Sahel study.

Common Findings

Although the studies each focussed on a specific country, several common findings emerged across the reviews:

- **CERF is a rapid source of funds:** Reviews consistently highlighted that the CERF secretariat was quick to process applications once formally submitted. Where applications were submitted early in the crisis, CERF funds enabled a timely response. This was, however, not always the case. For example, in Burkina Faso and Senegal governments delayed the declaration of an emergency. This in turn delayed the appeal for international assistance and, consequently, the submission of a funding request to CERF.

¹ Additional desk research and telephone interviews were undertaken as part of the Sahel study to review CERF support to Mali, Mauritania and Gambia.

- **CERF is key for smaller or less visible countries:** CERF support was crucial in enabling a humanitarian response in smaller and less visible emergencies, such as Burkina Faso, Senegal and Yemen, where there is a limited international donor presence. In those countries, CERF acted as one of the largest sources of humanitarian funds².
- **CERF can support coordination and leadership structures:** There was evidence from several studies, especially where CERF was a key funding source that showed that CERF funding had strengthened the RC/HC or sectors/clusters. For example, in Yemen it was found that CERF funding had empowered the RC/HC and strengthened that leadership role. In addition, the RC/HC encouraged agencies to implement through local partners, thereby strengthening local humanitarian response capacity. The allocation of CERF funding through the clusters also helped to reinforce their role, encouraging participation by local NGOs and greater engagement by the government.
- **Modify the narrative reporting schedule:** At the request of the CERF secretariat, reviewers examined the possibility of changing the reporting schedule from a fixed date each year to a rolling one, whereby reports are submitted a set number of months after expiration of the grants. Several studies came out in favour of this, noting that it could lead to timelier reporting, reduce workload and contribute to better reporting, in particular in countries with high staff turnover.
- **Develop After Action Reviews:** Several reviews recommended the development of *After Action Reviews* (AARs) as a possible measure to improve lessons learning at the country level. With the introduction of a rolling reporting schedule these could be conducted as part of the report preparation process.
- **Maximize complementarity between CERF and country-based pooled funds:** In keeping with findings from previous PAF reviews and the five-year evaluation of CERF, several reviews noted complementarity between CERF and country-based pooled funds (CBPFs) when it came to selecting recipients (e.g. prioritizing CERF for UN agencies and CBPFs for NGOs) and timing allocations. However, there was scope for increasing complementarity even further, for example by using CBPF structures, such as Advisory Boards, for supporting CERF processes. This was found to be the case in Pakistan and Yemen.

Linkages between Findings and the CERF secretariat's Work Plan

The CERF secretariat will follow-up to the global level recommendations from the reviews and will consult with RC/HCs on the country level recommendations. In addition, the common issues identified in the PAF reviews provided important supplementary information to a number of priority areas in the CERF secretariat's current

² CERF was the largest source of humanitarian funding for Djibouti in 2011 representing more than 30 per cent of all funding recorded by the Financial tracking Service (FTS). In Ghana, CERF was the second largest funding source in support of the refugee crises with 44 per cent of total funding and in the Philippines CERF was found to be one of three top humanitarian funding sources since 2006.

work plan. In addition to informing the development of CERF's 2014/2015 work plan, a number of specific deliverables in the CERF work plan for the fourth quarter of 2013 are directly related to the findings of the reviews:

- The CERF secretariat is working on finalizing specific guidance to support country-level CERF prioritisation processes. Development of the guidance is underway and field testing is expected to be undertaken in the fourth quarter of 2013 after which the guidance will be finalized and officially launched.
- The CERF secretariat had also requested that reviewers explore with stakeholders at country-level the pros and cons of switching to a rolling reporting schedule for the RC/HC report on the use of CERF funds. The response to this was generally favourable and several reviews recommended a switch to a rolling schedule. In response, and based on additional consultations, the CERF secretariat has recently finalized a revised reporting template and accompanying guidance. For an interim period until the end of 2013, countries will have the option to submit reports either within three months of grant expiration or at the traditional 15 March date. For all projects expiring in 2014 and after, reports will be due within three months of grant expiration. The CERF secretariat expects that this change will reduce the reporting burden on agencies as only one report will have to be prepared per project as the need for interim reports will be eliminated. It will also lead to higher quality reports since they can be submitted closer to the end of project implementation taking advantage of institutional memory.
- Several reviews also recommended the introduction of an optional light mid-term CERF project progress update to be conducted at country-level. The CERF secretariat agreed with this recommendation and will develop a template based on an earlier version prepared by an OCHA regional office.
- The CERF secretariat has also developed guidance and a template for country-level CERF *After Action Reviews* (AAR). The aim of AARs is to encourage country-level joint learning and to strengthen the collaborative process around the preparation of the annual CERF report. With the change of the RC/HC CERF reporting schedule from one fixed date per year to rolling reports, the CERF secretariat envisaged that AARs will be conducted as part of the report preparation exercise under the leadership of the RC/HC.
- The CERF secretariat has prepared improved guidance on harmonisation between CERF and country-based pooled funds (CBPFs). To inform the development of the guidance the CERF secretariat initially drafted an overview paper taking stock of the main findings on CERF and CBPF complementarity from a variety of reports, studies and evaluations, both externally mandated and commissioned by the CERF secretariat or OCHA. The draft guidance note was then discussed at the April 2013 pooled fund managers workshop and shared with CBPF staff in the field for comment. The guidance noted is currently under revision as per the comments.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations by Report

The sections below outline the main findings and recommendations across the eight country reports. Additional information and a complete list of recommendations are available in the country reports themselves³. The views expressed are the consultants' own.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The DRC was selected as it is the single largest recipient of CERF funds, having received \$238.6 million from CERF since 2006. Although it was studied as part of the 2011 five-year CERF evaluation, it had never been part of the PAF country reviews. The review covered the CERF-funded cross-sectoral interventions in 2012 totalling \$31.4 million, with particular attention to the health interventions. The review focused on the use of CERF funds in 2012. These amounted to \$31.4 million from the Rapid Response (RR) and Underfunded Emergency (UFE) windows in response to infectious disease outbreaks as well as displacement resulting from conflict.

Main Findings

- The review found that CERF had added value to the broader humanitarian endeavour in the DRC by supporting UN agency response capacity and furthering the overall functioning of parts of the system (i.e. Humanitarian Reform process).
- CERF allocations had also helped strengthen the role of clusters at different levels, foster coordination and joint action on specific issues, fill gaps and provide a better balance of humanitarian aid within the country and, in certain cases, improve the overall efficiency of certain projects.
- However, the reviewer noted that the CERF allocation process in the DRC could be more transparent and inclusive of other stakeholders, including donors. The decision-making process varied across allocations but was mostly carried out at a centralized level. She pointed out that in a large country like DRC, a fully inclusive process relying on the inter- and intra-cluster coordination framework would not be feasible.
- There was limited clarity among actors in the DRC on what triggered a request for CERF funding which would help better define CERF objectives in DRC that would be coherent with predefined benchmarks and make the process more predictable.
- Some interviewees highlighted the need for continued improvements in reporting and accountability for CERF. The reliance on agency systems and self-reporting was seen as a challenge. In addition, there was limited participation and learning derived from the annual CERF reporting exercise.
- The reviewer underlined the need for additional guidance on the role of the OCHA country office in the management of CERF processes.

³ <http://www.unocha.org/cerf/reportsevaluations/evaluations/country-reviews/performance-and-accountability-framework>

Main Recommendations

To Country Actors

- Under the HC/RC's leadership, the humanitarian community in the DRC should persevere in efforts to improve contingency planning and identify triggers for CERF requests.
- To increase the complementarity between pooled funds (CERF and CHF), OCHA DRC could reconsider the management arrangements for CHF and CERF which are currently separated.
- Consider vetting CERF proposals through Pooled Fund Board: This would help foster transparency, inclusiveness and a more coherent and coordinated approach.
- Review the possibility of the CHF monitoring framework covering CERF projects after it has been rolled out.
- OCHA's CERF-related role in the DRC context should be clarified.

To the CERF secretariat

- Consider changing the reporting cycle so that agencies can report three months after the end of the date foreseen for the completion of projects.
- Institute a system for tracking or reporting on some of the structural challenges that recipient agencies face when implementing CERF projects and following CERF processes.

SAHEL REGIONAL REVIEW COVERING BURKINA FASO, NIGER AND SENEGAL

The review of CERF's value added to the response to food and nutrition crisis in the Sahel was commissioned for a number of reasons. Notably, the crisis affecting Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal, along with a number of other countries in the Sahel belt, was a regional problem. It was, therefore, of interest to determine how different countries had utilised CERF, and to what extent the different context had influenced the nature of the response. While several reviews and evaluations of the humanitarian response had taken place, none provided much meaningful information on the CERF contribution to the response. Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal were selected because they provided a cross-section of countries in the region and did not duplicate previous CERF review missions (e.g. Chad and Mauritania were visited in 2010). The Sahel review focused on the use of CERF funds in 2012, which amounted to about \$46.4 million from the RR response to food insecurity, disease outbreaks and forced displacement due to the Mali crisis.

Main Findings

- The review found that CERF funding was rapidly made available upon submission of funding requests for the response to the drought.
- In all six countries reviewed, CERF was found to be among the earliest sources of substantial funding for drought response. CERF funding for

drought response was rapidly mobilized. Speed was further enhanced where agencies had internal advance mechanisms.

- CERF had, therefore, enabled agencies to rapidly start or scale up operations to address key gaps in the response at a time when funding was still limited or unavailable, and while looking for additional funding.
- Nevertheless, country submissions were not all as timely as they could have been. Considering the timeline of food security and nutrition crises in the region as well as the time required to mobilise and distribute assistance, CERF requests should have been submitted earlier. This was even more the case due to the general awareness in the last quarter of 2011 of a deteriorating food security and nutritional situation and of an early start of the lean season.
- The timeliness with which governments recognised the crisis and requested international assistance and their leadership of the response were considered key factors for resource mobilization.
- The review also highlighted CERF requests being developed at country level, which enabled agencies to prioritize and mobilize funding for an integrated package encompassing the response to immediate time-critical needs. The added benefit of this approach was that agencies worked together under the leadership of the RC/HC to prepare the response, which strengthened RC/HC leadership and catalyzed the establishment of humanitarian coordination mechanisms in countries where there were none.
- The review noted that in all countries except Niger, the UN system was development-oriented and lacked humanitarian experience and capacity in late 2011 and early 2012. The type of country-level coordination mechanisms in place was a decisive factor when it came to the involvement of non-UN actors, in particular NGOs, in CERF prioritization and decision-making processes at both the strategic and technical levels. As a result, UN agencies worked more closely with government counterparts at the time of prioritizing and strategy setting than they did with NGOs.
- The prioritization of sectors was straightforward given the availability of a regional strategy and government response plans in the case of Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mauritania. The requests to CERF were in line with the regional response strategy elaborated at regional level in Dakar, with government response plans where these existed, and with the CAP in Niger.
- UN agencies mainstreamed the strengthening of resilience into strategic planning and programming, including during CERF prioritization processes. As a result, CERF country requests all included projects aiming at protecting or strengthening livelihoods (agriculture) and most projects included measures to reinforce national capacities.

Main Recommendations

To Regional/Country Actors

- The Regional Humanitarian Coordinator, with the support of the OCHA regional office, should consider playing an active role with respect to the timeliness of the humanitarian response in countries in the region in the event of early warning indications of a food security and nutrition crisis.

- RC/HCs should ensure that CERF processes are transparent, open and inclusive, in particular at cluster/sector-level, and systematically remind cluster/sector lead agencies to involve implementing partners in project design and formulation.
- RC/HCs should consider discussing with the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) the possibility of conducting, with the support of OCHA, a stock-taking exercise four or five months after the approval of a CERF RR allocation in order to find out if projects are on track and achieving their objectives.
- RC/HCs should consider bringing up with the HCT the possibility of organizing, with the support of OCHA, an After Action Review after the implementation of each CERF allocation in order to draw lessons-learned while they are still fresh in people's minds.

To the CERF secretariat

- The CERF secretariat should change the periodicity of reporting from annual reports to reports for each CERF allocation to be prepared a few months after the end of the implementation period.
- The CERF secretariat should recommend to RC/HCs that an *After-Action Review* be undertaken in connection with the reporting exercise.

PAKISTAN

From a CERF perspective, Pakistan presented an interesting mixture of concurrent natural and complex disasters. In addition, Pakistan also has an Emergency Response Fund (ERF) and the review presented an additional opportunity for studying complementarity between CERF and country-based pooled funds (CBPFs). The review focussed on activities in 2012 when Pakistan received \$36.7 million from the RR and UFE windows.

Main Findings

- The review noted the high value placed on CERF by the humanitarian community. Considered as the fund of first response, CERF had been successful in providing timely and much-needed assistance for a variety of humanitarian crises across both the UFE and RR windows.
- In addition to meeting needs, results also suggested that CERF had assisted in leveraging donor funding for hard-to-fund humanitarian responses.
- However, it was more difficult to gauge the contribution made by CERF to strengthening humanitarian coordination. CERF could certainly make a positive contribution. However, protracted negotiations over funds could significantly diminish this gain. This is due to structural problems with accountabilities within and between members of the HCT in Pakistan.
- While CERF delivered strong results across a range of sectors, the process and format which guides reporting should be strengthened.
- The CERF life-saving criteria caused considerable debate, particularly in relation to the RR window. The consultant concluded that discussions on

prioritisation would benefit from a more restrictive interpretation of the criteria. This should focus on fewer sectors. In addition, more detailed criteria would assist in determining eligibility of projects for CERF-funding.

- CERF was found to have delivered mixed results against process indicators, generally performing well on timeliness, but less so for inclusiveness and transparency. While the 2012 UFE application was considered as good practice and benefitted from a strong process, allocations from the RR window, while being timely, appeared to have omitted some humanitarian partners, particularly NGOs, from decision-making processes which their presence may have helped bring greater objectivity to.
- In addition, the relationship between the ERF and CERF was described as coexistence rather than complementary. Both funded similar work and while there were some examples of coordination of resources, they tended to be the exception rather than the norm.

Main Recommendations

To Country Actors

- The prioritisation process for the CERF RR funding requires stronger leadership.
- An *After-Action Review* and reflection exercise should be conducted after each CERF allocation.
- A thematic/sectoral evaluation of CERF results should be conducted to complement the RC/HC annual report and PAF reviews.
- Pooled funds in Pakistan should be supported by a single team.
- Similar processes could be used to identify needs and priorities for both CERF and the ERF.
- Consideration should be given to vetting CERF proposals through ERF governance and review structures.
- The use of the ERF monitoring and evaluation capacity could be used to complement existing UN agency efforts.

To the CERF secretariat

- The CERF life-saving criteria should be more restrictively interpreted and additional detail should be given to guide discussions on eligibility.
- An online project management system should be developed by the CERF secretariat

YEMEN

The CERF secretariat had originally intended to commission a study of CERF's value added to the complex, conflict-related humanitarian needs in Yemen in 2012. Due to security considerations, however, it was not possible to conduct the study in Yemen as planned and the Philippines were chosen as a replacement. In 2013, an improving security situation allowed the Yemen study to be conducted. In addition, Yemen presented an interesting context of complex emergencies and had a small ERF presenting an opportunity to further study CERF-CBPF complementarity. The review focussed on

activities in 2012 when Yemen received \$23.4 million from the RR window as well as the prioritization exercise for the first UFE round of 2013.

Main Findings

- CERF was found to have added value to the humanitarian response of UN agencies and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in several ways, by:
 - supporting a timely response to acute emergencies, by enabling agencies to leverage other funding,
 - complementing other donor funding,
 - filling critical gaps and funding activities that other donors are unwilling to support,
 - enabling agencies to establish a presence in conflict-affected areas, which increased the UN's credibility with the government, and
 - enabling agencies to expand activities to new areas.
- CERF funding to Yemen had empowered the RC/HC to bring humanitarian actors together to plan responses in a coordinated manner. The RC/HC had also used CERF funding to encourage CERF recipient agencies to implement through local partners and thereby strengthen local humanitarian response capacity. The allocation of CERF funding through the clusters, particularly in 2012, had helped to strengthen their role, encouraging participation by local NGOs (especially local NGOs) and greater engagement by the government.
- Agencies found CERF very useful for responding to immediate needs. However, as the situation stabilised, they had needed to address rehabilitation and recovery needs as well as the population's underlying chronic vulnerability. The CERF's focus on life-saving activities meant that it was not able to fund recovery/rehabilitation activities or the underlying causes of vulnerability even though there is a risk that the failure to address this will result in a return to instability.
- There was general agreement that the RR allocations in 2012 had been inclusive since activities were prioritised through the clusters. The main lesson learned from the UFE allocation process in 2013 was that it was more effective and inclusive to allocate funding by cluster rather than by agency.
- Although the CERF allocations did not follow the same procedure as the ERF, the HC and OCHA promoted the complementarity of the two funds and, overall, review participants were positive about the complementarity of the CERF and ERF.

Main Recommendations

To Country Actors

- The cluster-led process to prioritise and allocate CERF funds used in 2012 should continue to be the way in which future CERF grants to Yemen are allocated.
- On behalf of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), OCHA should develop a brief progress report that agencies could complete mid-way through

implementing a CERF allocation. This could cover basic information such as amount of funding spent, activities delivered and challenges encountered.

- At the end of the implementation of each tranche of funding, OCHA (on behalf of the HC) should organise an inclusive *After Action Review* to capture lessons learned while these are still fresh in people's minds. This would contribute to the RC/HC's annual report or, if the Secretariat introduces reporting per CERF allocation, to prepare the actual report.
- In light of the high turnover of staff in most agencies, it would be helpful if OCHA could provide a training workshop at country level on CERF guidance and rules to ensure that agencies have a common understanding of these.
- OCHA should ensure that it has adequate capacity to ensure that the same team manages both CERF and ERF funding, which will support complementarity between the two funds further.
- Agencies should ensure that cluster coordinators receive the RC/HC's annual report once it is finalised and cluster coordinators should share it with members.

To Agency Headquarters/the CERF secretariat

- The CERF secretariat should introduce a system of reporting after the implementation of each CERF grant is completed to improve the quality of information.
- CERF recipient agencies should ensure that all programme managers and cluster coordinators are familiar with CERF requirements, such as requesting permission to re-programme funds and prioritising CERF funding within clusters. This could be the responsibility of the agency's CERF focal point.
- The CERF secretariat should introduce a system of a reminder email about no-cost extensions (NCE) requests a month before the end of the implementation period of a RR grant package, similar to that for UFE grants.
- The CERF secretariat should revise RR, UFE and NCE guidance to clarify whether the implementation period for both windows applies to implementing partners