

Independent Reviews of the Value Added by the CERF in Chad, Mauritania and Sri Lanka

Summary by the CERF Secretariat

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Introduction

Following 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 the CERF per year to be conducted by independent evaluation experts. The CERF Secretariat commissioned John Watt, an independent consultant, to conduct country-level reviews of the CERF in Chad, Mauritania and Sri Lanka in October 2010. Reviews were to employ the methodology tested in the pilot study of the value added of the CERF in Kenya in early 2010. Countries were chosen so as to reflect recipients of both large and small amounts of CERF funding, natural as well as man-made disaster and to avoid duplication with countries selected for the CERF five-year evaluation. The reviews largely focussed on activities in 2009 based on the 2009 annual report of the RC/HCs due in March 2010.

The sections below outline the most common themes and recommendations across the three country reports. Additional information as well as country-specific findings are available in the country reports. The views expressed are Mr. Watt's.

Main Findings

- The CERF was found to increase the authority of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC). The fact that CERF submissions require the approval of the RC/HC strengthened the overall coordination authority of that individual and this pillar of humanitarian reform. However, strategic planning was deemed in need of further improvement. The CAP in itself was seen as not providing a sufficient basis for planning CERF submissions, in particular for submissions to the Rapid Response window which are typically outside of the CAP.
- Other parts of humanitarian reform, such as the cluster system, were also reinforced. However, while clusters prioritized projects internally, there was a need for stronger inter-cluster coordination. In addition, there were on occasion perceived tensions between the dual roles of the cluster lead, on one hand, as guiding the cluster and, on the other, being a representative of a particular agency when deciding on funding allocations.
- Agency monitoring and evaluation systems at the project-level were deemed sufficient. The CERF was commended for featuring reasonable reporting obligations and the system of country-level reporting focal points, within either the OCHA or Resident Coordinator's office, was found to be working well.
- A mixed picture emerged on the timeliness of funding. Processing times for applications within the CERF Secretariat were generally short. However, significant variability existed in the pre-submission phase, the time it took agencies to revise project proposals in line with comments by the CERF Secretariat as well as in the completion of administrative steps at agency headquarter to disburse funds to field offices.

- CERF funding was found to be reliable and predictable thereby contributing to the CERF’s aim of making humanitarian financing more equitable and predictable. However, the reports highlighted potential unintended consequences of this in that it might induce agencies to eschew pursuing other donors, such as ECHO or USAID, whose application procedures were perceived as more onerous. In addition, the timeliness of CERF support might relieve pressure on donors, such as ECHO, to make funding available rapidly in response to an emergency, instead adopting a wait and see approach in the knowledge that CERF funding was available.
- Considerable debate was engendered by the CERF’s life-saving criteria with some finding the criteria too broad, others too restrictive and some about right. A risk was found in the “life with dignity” concept as it might be exploited for programming that was not traditionally life-saving. Therefore, a slight tightening of the criteria was proposed as well as rewording to make them context-specific.
- The CERF loan element was found of limited utility with interviewees at the field level indicating that they could foresee few occasions when they would make use of this facility.
- The lack of CERF funding for disaster preparedness necessitated by the CERF’s focus on response activities was criticised. Highlighting the cyclical nature of natural disasters in some countries, the reports argue that support to mitigation and risk reduction activities could be considered life-saving.

Main Recommendations

1. The life-saving criteria for CERF applications should be carefully interpreted to include the context of the way people are living within any particular country or region. This may mean a slight tightening of the criteria to ensure that the term “dignity” is not exploited for funding which could have been sought prior to a crisis developing by some UN agencies. The CERF Two-Year Evaluation recommended that the specific context should be considered when applying the life-saving criteria. However, these reviews point out that context will mean different things to different people.
2. NGOs should be brought more into the process of information sharing on the priorities in the field when a CERF application is being prepared as they have a greater field presence and more first-hand information. This would assist with the level of transparency and inclusiveness. This is not to say they should make decisions which are clearly those of the RC/HC and the UN country team
3. A disaster preparedness element or window to reduce the impact of an impending disaster could be considered. This could be based on an agreement with the national authorities of a recipient country where there is national support to such an element to diminish the level of dependency on CERF funding.
 - a. This would still be life-saving and could also be seen as saving livelihoods and therefore reduce the overall costs of humanitarian response.
 - b. This is where the CERF could really be able to say that they are reinforcing capacity, but this should not take the place of present capacity building activities and only be used at the time of an impending disaster.

4. UN Agencies should not be taking 100 per cent of their funding from the CERF. Other donors even if their application process is more difficult and time consuming should be approached.
5. The CERF loan facility (the “third window”) should be stopped and the funding made available for other purposes. This could be further support to either or both of the other two windows of rapid response or underfunded emergencies.
6. The timing of UFE grants for any country should take into account seasons and conditions within that country to ensure that grants are arriving at the most appropriate time to have the desired impact.
7. The period for using rapid response funds should be extended to six months from the present three-month period. It is understood that this is already part of the new Secretary-General’s Bulletin.