

Independent Review of CERF Allocations to Syrian Conflict and Regional Refugee Crisis

**Lebanon, Jordan and Syria
2013 – 2015**

**Humanitarian Outcomes
February 2016**

Acknowledgments

The support and engagement of OCHA and agency staff in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan and representatives of Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon during this CERF review was essential to the success of this exercise and very much appreciated. Staff and management in OCHA offices in New York and across the wider Syria context in Damascus, Jordan and Lebanon facilitated the process by helping to organize interviews, arrange transport, accommodation, office space and provide administrative support whenever necessary. Without their degree of professionalism, enthusiasm and patience the realization of this review would not have been possible. The open dialogue was very constructive and the openness to explore lessons learned was critical to understanding the context, especially given the limited time available to carry out the assessment and analysis.

Disclaimer

This is an independent review and the authors assume responsibility for all opinions herein.

Evaluation Team

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|--------------------|---------------------|
| Team Lead: | Glyn Taylor |
| Senior Researcher: | Edward Rackley, PhD |

List of Acronyms

| | |
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| AAP | Accountability to Affected Populations |
| AAR | After-Action Review |
| CERF | Central Emergency Response Fund |
| CBPF | Country Based Pooled Fund |
| DRR | Disaster Risk Reduction |
| ERC | Emergency Relief Coordinator |
| ERF | Emergency Response Fund |
| GBV | Gender-Based Violence |
| FTS | Financial Tracking Service |
| HC | Humanitarian Coordinator |
| HCT | Humanitarian Country Team |
| HRP | Humanitarian Response Plan |
| IASC | Inter-Agency Standing Committee |
| ICCM | Inter-Cluster Coordination Mechanism |
| IDP | Internally Displaced Person |
| INGO | International Non-Governmental Organization |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| NCE | No-Cost Extension |
| NFI | Non-Food Item |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NNGO | National Non-Governmental Organization |
| OCHA | Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (United Nations) |
| PAF | Performance and Accountability Framework (CERF) |
| RC/HC | Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator |
| RR | Rapid Response |
| TOR | Terms of Reference |
| SHARP | Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan |
| SRP | Strategic Response Plan |
| UFE | Underfunded Emergency |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Program |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| WASH | Water, Sanitation and Hygiene |
| WHO | World Health Organization (United Nations) |

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Executive Summary

From 2013 to 2015, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) allocated approximately US\$77 million in the form of CERF Rapid Response and Underfunded Emergency grants to support refugee operations in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq¹. For Syria itself, some \$72 million was allocated in 2013 and 2015. The total CERF funding (RR and UFE) for 2013 and 2015 both in Syria and for Syrians in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq is \$148,608,421. These levels are high in absolute terms and in relation to the size of the CERF, yet small as a proportion of the appeals and requirements in the region. This fact has an influence on all of the findings.

This report aggregates the findings from Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. CERF country studies explicitly recognise that each context is unique and look to draw out lessons for global application from each. Extra caution is required in deriving lessons from Syria and the sub-region, given the exceptional scale and complexity of the operational context for humanitarian actors. Findings also have to be seen in the context of previous analysis on the workings of the CERF. It has previously been acknowledged that as well as being an instrument of the UN led-humanitarian system, the CERF is an instrument which can only work through its core coordination structures². As detailed in the report below, the specific operational contexts in Syria and each country in the sub-region (as well as regionally and 'Whole of Syria' coordination) create specific challenges for coordination and by extension, for mechanisms like the CERF that work through them.

Country level allocation strategies: Jordan and Lebanon are both relatively stable middle-income countries which host over a million Syrian refugees on top of pre-existing Palestinian refugees. For the time period under study (2013-15), each saw an evolution in context and response strategy. The 'rapid onset phase' of the refugee crisis is over and neither Jordan nor Lebanon is the site of famine, life-threatening insecurity, extreme oppression or mass physical vulnerability. Interventions have evolved towards meeting the life-sustaining needs of refugees, where possible through sustained interventions aimed at strengthening national institutions and 'host' communities. This is now the core of the response narrative and reflected in the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (2015-2016)³ and the Whole of Syria Approach⁴⁵.

CERF disbursements in 2013 and 2015 reflected and supported this overarching strategic shift. Within it, however, both RR and UFE allocations were overwhelmingly oriented towards fundamental, life-sustaining needs, the humanitarian core of the response strategy in both countries. As such, CERF allocations in both countries have

¹ Iraq is the subject of a separate, 'stand-alone' report which should be read in conjunction

² CERF UFE review

³ <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/3RP-Report-Overview.pdf>

⁴ Adopted in Sept. 2014 under UNSC Resolution 2165

⁵ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/whole-of-syria>

helped to stem the deterioration of refugee living conditions, stabilize host-refugee relations and to mitigate protection concerns.

RR allocations for Jordan and Lebanon in 2013 allowed agencies to meet the time critical needs of refugee populations and Lebanese returnees as they arrived. By 2015, CERF allocations supported Agency efforts to prevent a worsening situation for refugees. To this end, UFE allocations predominantly supported budget shortfalls for UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF. Although the allocations cover a tiny fraction of the shortfall facing recipient agencies, the accepted rationale for this support is the avoidance of even small slips in program delivery which might trigger a cascading sequence of “negative coping mechanisms” and protection risks. In this light, the value added by CERF allocations was often viewed by Agency staff as their ability to cover shortfalls in funding even for very short periods in time, allowing for large operations to continue at scale. That the CERF covered shortfalls in this way was also used as encouragement or leverage with other donors to increase funding. Smaller agencies are divided over whether this is an appropriate use of CERF, as there is no threat of starvation in the region, only “negative coping mechanisms.”⁶

In Syria, humanitarian actors are required to deal with an ongoing and constant range of acute crises stemming from conflict and insecurity. The response is equally characteristic of a protracted crisis in that it is required to deal with large and relatively static displaced populations, as well as groups whose vulnerability is increasing sharply in the face of a rapidly deteriorating economy, a steep decline in the availability of basic services, and severely depleted coping mechanisms. As above, it is also critical to note that the constraints placed upon actors operating from Damascus continue to define the operational environment as much as the needs or achievements of the humanitarian community.

This is clearly a challenging environment for donors and financing instruments, including the CERF: how to prioritise resources, which are meagre in comparison to the levels of need in the face of a constant range of acute crises, with severe access constraints, as well as seemingly endless and blanket need in more accessible areas. As in the sub-region, the broad pattern of allocations in 2013 and 2015 mirrors the strategy in the SHARP, large allocations to emergency distributions with smaller ‘*balancing*’ elements to programming which supports acute vulnerabilities in displaced and host populations. While the CERF has been well utilised, it has filled a very small proportion of funding in absolute terms. In Syria the 2015 UFE prioritisation paper clearly stated the desire to focus on “*immediate life-saving needs... prioritizing the most vulnerable... in key locations across Syria*” and had a clear intent to build coherence of action amongst the projects funded. Ultimately, however, the constraints on the response outweighed the

⁶ All CERF allocations were in line with the CERF life-saving criteria (https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/CERF/FINAL_Life-Saving_Criteria_26_Jan_2010__E.pdf).

desire of the HCT to influence access. As such, prioritisation discussions directed funding to address a relatively diverse set of high priority funding gaps for UN agencies' ongoing programme activities. Again in keeping with the sub-region, while allocations were viewed as insignificant in absolute, aggregate terms compared to overall needs, recipient agencies were clear that CERF funding *had* filled significant funding gaps in time and for specific projects.

In summary: CERF allocations reflect, and have contributed to the prevailing response strategies of the UN agencies in each country. Overall, however, it is fair to say that CERF has not enabled any specific strategic integration, enhanced synergy between individual agencies. This overarching conclusion has to be seen in light of the extraordinary contextual factors, including the contested or constrained coordination systems in place in each. The broad conclusion that the CERF has followed a '*path of least resistance*' into the highest priority underfunded components of the dominant Agencies ongoing programmes, does not diminish CERF's life-sustaining contributions or its strategic aims, especially in light of the enormous populations dependent on outside assistance. CERF encourages country leadership to make the most appropriate allocations per context and is not prescriptive beyond its life-saving and time-critical parameters.

The needs in these protracted crises, including support to long-term refugee populations and failing national infrastructure, were seen as divergent from CERF's relatively narrow eligibility criteria and life-saving objectives by many interviewees. While they valued CERF contributions to their programmes, *a number openly questioned the use of the CERF in Lebanon and Jordan*. Although the objective of UFE is precisely to "Strengthen core elements of humanitarian response in underfunded crises", such perceptions are indicative of a long standing dilemma for CERF.

On timeliness: A number of Agencies described how CERF allocations had enabled them to bridge significant funding gaps at the start of the calendar year while waiting for larger bilateral contracts. Timely contributions in respect of annual funding cycles, delayed donor commitments and meeting critical budget shortfalls are clearly seen as an important CERF value-add: one Agency pointed out "*CERF saved us in early 2015*", another noted that the CERF had accounted for 20% of their funding for 2015 (at the time of the interview), and was the only funding for one key sector. In addition, under threat of airstrikes in Syria in 2013, agencies welcomed the Rapid Response allocation to stockpile contingency equipment in advance of anticipated displacement, inside Syria and cross border (notwithstanding the subsequent 're-programming' of these allocations). The CERF's internal review of the 'automatic' allocation to Syria in 2013 (on declaration of the L3 emergency), however, noted that the funding came at an arbitrary point in terms of the response logic and coincided unhelpfully with Agency scale up and their adoption of other new protocols.

A request was made to CERF to support the winterization for Syria in late 2014, and this provides a specific case study in the challenges associated with the normal, piecemeal organisation of programming and financing. A winterisation plan was prepared in advance of the winter season 2014/15; winter was predicted and an appropriate plan developed, but the level of the funding shortfall for the plan only became clear as winter loomed. A request was made to the CERF (RR window) to meet the shortfall, and this request was rejected, in part on the bases that winter is not a sufficient trigger for the RR window and that the application was made to cover a shortage of funding in an existing plan, rather than for a new event. In December 2014, Syria was selected by the ERC as one of the recipient countries of the 2015 UFE window first round. The original RR application was amended for the first UFE round of 2015, with a proposal based on largely the same set of actors and activities while targeting different locations. Winterisation activities for 2015/16 were included through three projects (of 14 funded) and distributions took place in advance of winter 2015/16.

In summary: Again noting the relatively small proportional size of allocations, CERF undoubtedly fills gaps in an inefficient global funding model which means that Agencies are consistently short of money at the beginning of each financial year. Notwithstanding resistance to the use of the CERF in the sub-region noted in some interviews in Jordan and Lebanon, there is no reason for the secretariat to withhold CERF from possible future support to critical life-sustaining programs in, for example, shelter, WASH, food and essential medicines. The need for broader reform of humanitarian financing is clear and a number of processes ongoing in the lead up to the WHS. To a certain extent these are beyond the scope of the CERF and this study. It is important, however, that the CERF continues to be engaged in these conversations and maintain a clear role in the new order, which may include the adaptation of funding instruments and multi-year financing.

On processing speed and transaction costs: The majority of agencies, in Syria and the sub-region, stated that CERF allocations arrived quickly, often under a month. Reporting is generally described as appropriately light, and the introduction of the interim reporting format is welcomed by OCHA to assist with ongoing oversight and to avoid complications at end of grant, when agencies are slow to implement and grant expiration deadlines loom. In Jordan, several smaller agencies mentioned that CERF opportunity costs were too high in 2013 (due to protracted negotiations at HCT level) and as a result they did not apply in 2015, nor would they again. Others reported similar frustrations and that they would prefer not to apply again (*“heavy investment, small return”*) but that HQ pressures forced their involvement. Perhaps the most common complaint in regards to process was the overly short window for putting together CERF submissions for Rapid Response.

In Jordan, the decision to channel CERF funds to cash distribution was taken on the basis of low transaction costs i.e. via established partners. Similarly in Syria (and noting the restrictions on partner choice), UN Agencies, by and large, chose to use partners with

whom they had existing relationships to reduce time lags and transactions costs in onwards funding.

In summary, recipient agencies were satisfied by and large with the speed of CERF contributions and with the performance of the CERF secretariat in this respect. Complaints about high transaction costs for small return are similar to those from other CERF country studies, yet minority views. As outlined in the following section, the use of CERF in a deliberately 'efficient' manner can be taken as a positive. However, it should also be noted that the use of CERF allocations in such a way runs counter to one of the PAFs key principles, encouraging transparency and inclusivity in consultations around prioritization.

On enhanced coordination: Agency staff in both Lebanon and Jordan often remarked that CERF *“will not impact inter-agency coordination but will reflect the health of existing coordination and the quality of strategic thinking in place.”* In Syria, and notwithstanding the constraints mentioned above, inter-agency and sectoral coordination are viewed positively, and the CERF is also viewed as having little or no effect given its size. Across the three countries, CERF was viewed as *“one tool among many”* - i.e. HCs did not report any ability of the CERF to influence cross-sector strategic thinking (i.e. a more efficient division of labour). One stated *“This already happens through the country appeals”* which are jointly crafted between sectors and with national authorities.

Where CERF allocation consultations have generated conflict and mistrust (Jordan, primarily), the experience suggests that competing agency interests colored, even compromised, the state of inter-agency coordination to begin with. In Jordan the 2015 CERF allocation consultations were deemed open but tensions over small amounts relative to agency budgets resulted in a high transaction costs and distrust among agencies. In Lebanon proposals were drafted and submitted to HC/OCHA for a final decision, a process seen as somewhat opaque and undemocratic but attractive because of the low transaction cost and small amounts at stake. This process was *“collegial because the decision-making was not in our hands”*.

Specifically in regard to Syria, it is important to note the issue of the Whole of Syria (WoS) approach. All CERF allocations to Syria during the review period predate the Whole of Syria approach and, as such, have passed through Damascus-based coordination and Damascus-based responses. Allocations to Jordan and Turkey have gone to projects for refugee programming, i.e. not to cross border operations. In Jordan, the HC noted that it would be a political challenge to divert money allocated 'to Jordan' for programming in southern Syria. Obviously these dynamics are shaped by the real challenges faced by UN RC/HCs in balancing their impartial humanitarian remit while retaining relations with the sovereign member states in which they represent the UN system.

In Lebanon and in Syria, it is worth noting that local partners view their interactions with the country based pooled funds very positively, describing them as enabling project design better informed by their local knowledge and ultimately offering better accountability to affected populations⁷. Most were unaware that they were implementing projects with CERF funding and were less happy with normal contracting arrangements with UN agencies. Complaints were typical of those from national partners worldwide e.g. short funding windows and project cycles driven by arbitrary 'year-end' deadlines. In none of the countries under review was there explicit complementarity or joint strategy between the CERF allocation process and the respective country based pooled-fund.

In summary, given the relatively small size of CERF allocations compared to overall needs and funding, it is predictable that CERF was not seen as explicitly enhancing inter-agency coordination. As acknowledged throughout, CERF can only work through existing coordination structures and can exacerbate a lack of harmony in coordination. Building on the other conclusions above: in respect of partners, national and international NGOs, allocation processes at country level have not been conducted in a transparent and inclusive fashion; choice of implementing partners deliberately favour the '*path of least resistance*', funding to UN Agency programming via partners or projects which minimise delays or additional overheads. There is a long standing recognition in the use of pooled funds, including the CERF, of a direct trade-off between transparency/inclusivity and speed. The use of the CERF across the region is clearly defined by efforts to minimizing additional costs and delays. It is reasonable to ask whether or not the use of the CERF in this way appears contrary to the *spirit* of reform. OCHA teams in each country should proactively consider the potential to run CERF allocations in conjunction with country based pooled funds when timing permits (in keeping with existing guidance).

In a similar vein is the question of whether potential future CERF UFE allocations to Syria should pass through the WoS architecture. Clearly WoS has been created to address challenges in coordination for the response across Syria. Yet the question of its use for CERF allocations is a challenging one, both politically and technically. A clear majority of interviewees felt that in principle, *not* to utilize the WoS architecture going forward would undermine the negotiations and agreements to date. There were significant reservations however, as to how such an allocation might work in practice. Ultimately, a detailed analysis of how such an allocation might work is beyond the scope of this study, but the idea clearly warrants greater discussion.

⁷ Whereas only UN agencies and IOM can directly access CERF funds, NGOs can receive grants directly from country based pooled funds.

INTRODUCTION

This CERF review covers three countries – Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. The Performance and Accountability Framework, developed in 2010, was used to guide data collection during this assessment and as a facilitation tool for briefings at the beginning and end of field visits.

Objectives and Scope of this CERF Review

The Terms of Reference (TOR) for this review (attached as an annex) detail the objectives and key questions of the review. Its main purpose is to assess the value add of CERF funding since 2013 with regard to response efforts in Syria and its refugee-hosting neighbors. Its scope covers inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes of CERF allocations between 2013 and 2015 for Syria and programming for Syrian refugees and vulnerable communities in Jordan and Lebanon.

The PAF indicators provided the basis of quality assurance around certain broad areas of concern to the ERC:

1. *An independent assessment on how CERF processes are achieving key management benchmarks:*
 - CERF submissions are based on an inclusive planning process and adhere to established quality criteria;
 - Transparent systems are in place for correct allocation, efficient flow and use of CERF by agencies;
 - Adequate monitoring and evaluation systems are in place at the agency level for measuring and reporting on results;
2. *An independent assessment on the extent to which CERF has achieved the following:*
 - Empowering the RC/HC and enhancing the quality of coordination within the cluster approach and across clusters;
 - Facilitation of adequate coverage, eliminates gaps and facilitates an effective division of labor among humanitarian actors;
 - Contribution to a timelier response; and
 - Favors the delivery of relevant life-saving actions at critical moments.

Methodology

In addition to the specific points of the evaluation noted above, the general thrust of this regional review aims to capture the operational impact of the CERF across the three countries covered by this review. The Lebanon mission included site visits to Mt. Lebanon and Bekaa district, areas hosting the greatest concentration of Palestinians

from Syria and Syrian refugees in country, respectively. In Jordan the evaluators visited a series of urban refugee families in Amman. In Syria, given the constraints on movement and implementing partners, the team held interviews in Damascus only, and visited one CERF funded charity hospital in Damascus. These visits allowed evaluators to meet beneficiaries and agency staff in the field, and to observe ongoing activities supported by CERF and other donors. Key informants were pre-selected by OCHA country staff to offer a representative sample of significant stakeholders; CERF focal points and senior managers in recipient agencies, national and international NGO partners of recipient agencies, and NGO representatives in the HCT.

Report structure

The main report which follows is in two main sections, one covering key findings from Lebanon and Jordan, and the other covering main findings from Syria. Preceding these main findings, however, is an overview of the regional context and a brief analysis aggregate funding flows into the whole regional response. Iraq is covered in a separate study which should be read in conjunction. Part of the response in Iraq is funded through the regional Appeal (3RP) and it also has a stand-alone appeal⁸. Aggregate funding reports for the region tend to include Iraq. For the sake of simplicity, therefore, funding to Iraq is included in the data set below, as well as being reported separately in the Iraq report.

Syria conflict and the regional implications

With the Syrian conflict entering its sixth year, the UN estimates that 13.52 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection⁹. Within Syria, 6.5 million people, including 2.8 million children, are displaced, and displacement continues at an extraordinary rate¹⁰. In interviews, senior UN staff noted the inadequacy of the terms ‘chronic’ or ‘protracted’ crisis, which are often applied to Syria in reference to the its long duration and the lack of a political solution. The humanitarian response is characteristic of a protracted crisis in some respects in that it is required to deal with large and relatively static displaced and vulnerable populations who are increasingly vulnerable in the face of a sharply deteriorating economy, a steep decline in the availability of basic services and depleted coping mechanisms. The humanitarian system in Syria is also required to deal with a range of acute crises stemming from conflict and insecurity. For response to recently displaced populations and for those in besieged or hard to reach areas, a constant state of response readiness is required, given the speed at which the context can change, and the sometimes fleeting nature of permission to

⁸ Iraq hosts Syrian refugees as well as its own internal conflict, and the humanitarian response contains elements which are targeted to refugees (notably those in camps) and other elements which cater for vulnerable populations more broadly (catering for IDPs and mixed populations including non-camped refugees.)

⁹ Humanitarian Response Plan 2016 – OCHA Syria

¹⁰ *“On average, since 2011, 50 Syrian families have been displaced every hour of every day. The pace of displacement remains relentless. Well over 1.2 million people have been displaced so far this year, many for the second or third time. Increasing numbers of civilians are fleeing and are prepared to risk their lives to reach Europe.”* – HRP 2016

undertake relief operations. Indeed the constraints placed upon actors operating from Damascus, continue to define the operational environment as much as what it is able to achieve.

Across Syria's neighbours and North Africa, 4.2 million Syrians are registered as refugees. Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq are each hosting an unprecedented number of Syrian nationals, in addition to large numbers of Palestinians, in some of the poorest, most under-served areas of each country in a variety of settlement situations. Adding to the existing caseload of Palestinian refugees, the combined numbers increase the burden on public services in all three countries. In some urban municipalities, refugees outnumber residents. Although the Islamic tradition of charity (*Zakat, Nisab*) has contributed immensely to the informal accommodation of arriving families, local absorption capacity and basic public services are over-stretched and overwhelmed. Governments are now demanding UN assistance to help meet these needs and to ensure cohesion between refugees and host communities.

Lebanon and Jordan have the highest per capita ratios of refugees worldwide and, according to the current Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, are the largest providers of financial and human resources to the refugee response.¹¹ Iraq is particularly complex given the overlapping IDP and refugee dynamics. Stand-alone refugee camps are formally prohibited in Lebanon, and Jordanian authorities allow them only as a last-resort, emergency measure. Fear of refugee permanence—a repeat of the Palestinian exodus, who number 1.5 million across the region and depend heavily on UN support—is a constant worry for national authorities and host populations. With only 13% of the 2.8 million Syrian refugees in Lebanese and Jordanian camps, the rest seek housing and emergency support services alongside host nationals, effectively competing for affordable shelter, medical and education services while being banned from formal employment. With no political settlement in Syria on the horizon, the UN must work with national authorities in refugee hosting countries to find tenable solutions that meet the needs of host nations and refugees alike. Without the right to work, however, many refugees will seek alternative avenues toward prosperity and stability.¹² Emigrating out of the region is the most obvious option for many refugee families.

The Syria regional refugee crisis stems from one of the 21st century's most virulent conflicts, in which over 220,000 people have died in fighting inside Syria and over 1.8 million require humanitarian assistance. More than 50% of the population has been displaced, with the number of refugees in neighbouring countries surpassing four million in August 2015. The response to the Syria crisis has also been one of the largest in living memory, with country appeals routinely in the billions of dollars. By all accounts the UN-led humanitarian response across the region has had to substitute for effective

¹¹ Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, 2015-2016: <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/3RP-Report-Overview.pdf>

¹² Jordan and Lebanon are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

political action, owing to deep divisions within the Security Council. Each country affected by the crisis faces its own host of internal vulnerabilities and external threats not uniformly shared or experienced in similar degrees, and these national dynamics influence UN response capacity and modalities in country.

The conflict triggered a major humanitarian crisis with refugees fleeing into five neighboring countries, and in January 2013 a Level 3 emergency was declared by the IASC, two years after the conflict began. Despite repeated attempts to convene relevant actors to discuss a political settlement, this prospect remains remote, even as the conflict attracts direct military involvement by different UNSC countries. The optics of the crisis have magnified in recent months as waves of citizens leave Syria not for neighboring refugee camps but directly for the EU, Scandinavia and North America seeking political asylum and the chance of a new life. Syrian refugees in the immediate region are studying this new dynamic and are, it is widely reported, making similar plans. Without the right to work, their long-term livelihood prospects are not optimistic, increasing the likelihood of outward migration. In 2013 and 2015, CERF supported the growing numbers of Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS), who will require life-sustaining programs into the future.

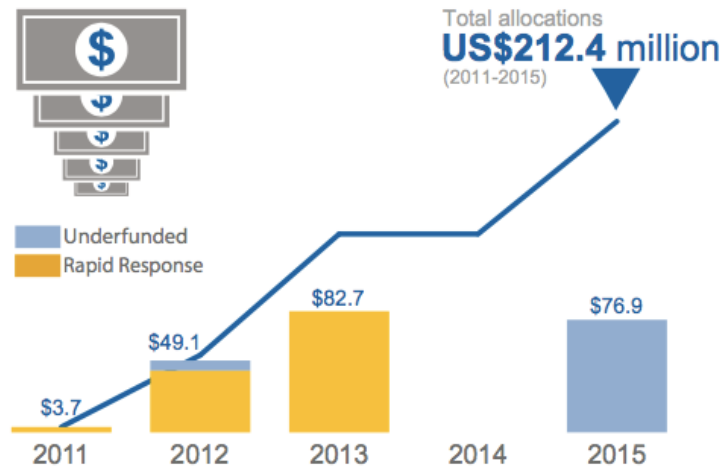
CERF funding to Syria, Jordan and Lebanon from 2011-2015

By the time the IASC declared the Syria conflict to be an L3 emergency in January 2013, two years after the beginning of the conflict, the CERF had already provided more than \$40 million to humanitarian activities inside the country. Although this study focuses on the period between 2013 and 2015, the sizable contributions of CERF prior to 2013 are important to note. Allocations for 2011 and 2012 are included in the funding overview below.

During 2011 and 2012, CERF allocated \$58,200,000 to Syria and neighboring countries. From 2013 to 2015, \$76,978,560 was allocated in the form of CERF Rapid Response (RR) and Under-Funded Emergency (UFE) grants to support refugee operations in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. For Syria itself, some \$71,629,861 was allocated in 2013 and 2015. The total CERF funding (RR and UFE) for 2013 and 2015 both in Syria and for Syrians in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq is \$148,608,421.

The breakdowns per year and country are shown in the tables and graphics below (the graphics include allocations for Syria-related needs in Turkey and Egypt that are not covered by this review).

How much CERF has allocated?



(CERF secretariat)

Allocation by country (in US\$ million)

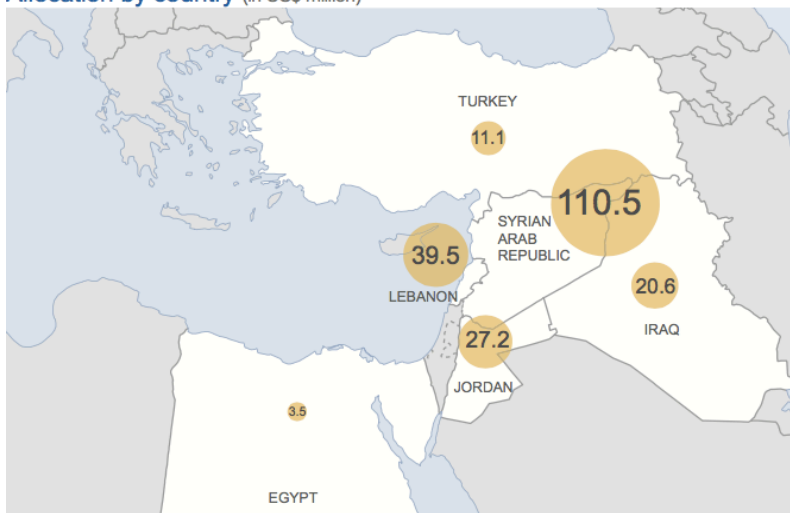


Figure 1 – CERF Allocations to the Syria Crisis – 2011 to 2015¹³

2015

| Recipient Country | CERF Rapid Response Allocations | CERF Underfunded Allocations | Total CERF Allocations | Total Humanitarian Funding Received | CERF as % of Total Humanitarian Funding Received |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Lebanon | | 18,004,139 | 18,004,139 | 1,057,114,940 | 1.7% |
| Jordan | | 7,700,313 | 7,700,313 | 688,944,919 | 1.1% |
| Iraq | 4,490,040 | 7,988,899 | 12,478,939 | 889,925,513 | 1.4% |

¹³ OCHA Financial Tracking Service and CERF secretariat data

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|--|------------|------------|---------------|------|
| Syrian Arab Republic | | 31,226,054 | 31,226,054 | 1,892,683,503 | 1.6% |
|----------------------|--|------------|------------|---------------|------|

2014

| Recipient Country | CERF Rapid Response Allocations | CERF Underfunded Allocations | Total CERF Allocations | Total Humanitarian Funding Received | CERF as % of Total Humanitarian Funding Received |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Iraq ¹⁴ | 25,675,459 | | 25,675,459 | 1,376,757,183 | 1.9% |

2013

| Recipient Country | CERF Rapid Response Allocations | CERF Underfunded Allocations | Total CERF Allocations | Total Humanitarian Funding Received | CERF as % of Total Humanitarian Funding Received |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Lebanon | 18,531,518 | | 18,531,518 | 1,036,242,187 | 1.8% |
| Jordan | 14,754,548 | | 14,754,548 | 933,581,268 | 1.6% |
| Iraq | 9,999,143 | | 9,999,143 | 254,380,245 | 3.9% |
| Syrian Arab Republic | 40,403,807 | | 40,403,807 | 1,440,573,316 | 2.8% |

2012

| Recipient Country | CERF Rapid Response Allocations | CERF Underfunded Allocations | Total CERF Allocations | Total Humanitarian Funding Received | CERF as % of Total Humanitarian Funding Received |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Lebanon | 3,978,910 | | 3,978,910 | 165,300,000 | 2.4% |
| Jordan | 3,994,809 | | 3,994,809 | 263,500,000 | 1.5% |
| Iraq | 2,567,704 | | 2,567,704 | 50,100,000 | 5.1% |
| Syrian Arab Republic | 29,493,103 | 6,983,629 | 36,476,732 | 639,700,000 | 5.7% |

2011

| Recipient Country | CERF Rapid Response Allocations | CERF Underfunded Allocations | Total CERF Allocations | Total Humanitarian Funding Received | CERF as % of Total Humanitarian Funding Received |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Lebanon | | | | 43,600,000 | |
| Jordan | | | | 56,300,000 | |

¹⁴ Figures for Iraq include allocations for Syrian refugees and for programmes unrelated to the Syrian crisis.

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|--|-----------|-------------|------|
| Iraq | | | | 127,100,000 | |
| Syrian Arab Republic | 3,664,730 | | 3,664,730 | 38,800,000 | 9.4% |

MAIN FINDINGS – Lebanon and Jordan

Summary findings follow below in the order of specific indicators in the CERF Performance and Accountability Framework (PAF), structured on the PAF headings, Inputs, Outputs and Outcomes. Regional and country level ratings for each indicator are attached as Annexes each supported by a brief narrative. As in other CERF reviews, the TOR asked for a concise report that can provide the ERC with a “reasonable level of assurance” regarding the achievement of key performance benchmarks while providing the basis for recommendations to improve operational aspects of the CERF and relevant policy issues.

Between 2013 and 2015, Lebanon and Jordan experienced similar arrival trends and an eventual leveling of refugee arrivals, having increased border controls. In 2014, what was a rapid-onset refugee emergency began settling into a protracted crisis, with greater attention on the capacity of national institutions and host communities to absorb and keep pace with the growing refugee population. Neither country received or sought CERF allocations in 2014 despite the ongoing, underfunded humanitarian emergency, as made clear in country appeals. Throughout 2015, response dynamics in each country continued gravitating toward a resilience narrative, amplified by concern from EU nations that Syrian refugees remain in the region.

In sync with this evolution, CERF helped the RC/HCs accommodate the demands of host governments for the UN system to support the capacity of public institutions while continuing to meet the needs of Palestinians permanently settled in Lebanese and Jordanian camps, a delicate balance achieved partly with diplomacy but primarily with ready liquidity.

In Lebanon, the challenges to response operations were reflected in the learning curve facing UN coordination. The RC/HC faced a context of highly dispersed beneficiaries and heavily politicized, low-functioning public institutions. Unlike Jordan, Lebanon has a tradition of non-state actors addressing social needs, so enlisting these voices and views into coordination structures happened early and continues to bear fruit. Its dividends extend to helping negotiate the necessary adaptations from emergency response to resilience programming, integrating host community concerns and Government of Lebanon (GOL) political perspectives. While the largest agencies are generally well funded, coordination must contend with the operational challenges of a dispersed beneficiary population barred from work and without alternative livelihoods. Public services agree to absorb some refugee needs, but are weak institutions to begin with. The evolving resilience agenda must embrace governance challenges that far exceed the core humanitarian response priorities. UNHCT negotiation of this way forward with GOL counterparts has been complex, sometimes fraught, but has resulted in a stronger partnership.

In Jordan, there is little tradition of civil society and community-based organisations through which to deliver assistance. Refugees are dispersed, with comparatively few housed in the two camps that were built from 2013-2014. With most refugees living among host populations in a variety of semi-permanent arrangements, the evolving coordination system faced a steep learning curve as refugee numbers increased dramatically from 2013 and government pressure mounted to accommodate host population needs. Through this crucible the resilience agenda was born, and has since improved working relations between UN and government counterparts. As in Lebanon, the two CERF allocation processes in 2013 and 2015 proved useful indicators of the health and credibility of the coordination structures in place. The 2015 allocation process was considered more inclusive, improving the credibility of both the CERF and new HC leadership following a frustrating experience in 2013. Without a cluster system the HCT uses a sectoral reporting system, which informs the Emergency Response Fund (ERF) very well but in the case of the CERF is agency-led. This has generated frustration among some participants, for whom CERF allocation discussions can appear to be driven more by agency interests than humanitarian needs on the ground. ERF discussions were viewed as more empirically informed and less agency-driven; more collegial and less political as a result.

The evaluation team heard that the coordination model in both countries, which informed CERF consultation processes, was primarily agency driven (as opposed to an integrated synergy of comparative strengths informed by beneficiary needs), a dynamic a senior donor adviser viewed as *“unchanged since Operation Lifeline Sudan,”* with HCs on hand to *“provide checks and balances.”* While neither Jordan or Lebanon are directly compromised or constrained by the security concerns of Syria, their operational strategies are subject to heavy negotiation with national authorities with strong self-interests. Both countries now develop their national appeals which are then fed into the 3RP, contributing to the Whole of Syria (WoS) approach. This has increased lateral (regional) coordination, information sharing and prioritization in unprecedented ways, while increasing administrative burdens. Across the sub-region and in Syria itself, therefore, both coordination environments could be described as ‘constrained’ in different ways, influenced by different political and security pressures.

CERF Inputs: Funding & Process

Indicators for the revised version of the CERF PAF aim to assess levels of funding, inclusiveness and prioritization of the allocation process, quality of CERF submissions per country, quality assurance systems of recipient agencies, reporting processes and timeliness of disbursements following submissions.

The PAF indicators and the findings presented here should also be understood against the conceptual backdrop of what CERF is meant to do. Created in 2005 by UNGA Resolution 60/124 to provide politically neutral funding focused on life-saving and time-critical interventions (e.g., “early action, early funding”), and to strengthen core

elements of humanitarian response in underfunded crises. This profile is valuable and fit-for-purpose as long as emergency or rapid onset conditions obtain, with or without adequate funding. Once a crisis begins to stabilize into a chronic situation, a long-term strategy with appropriate priorities must take shape accordingly.

For the time period under study in Jordan and Lebanon (2013-2015)—both relatively stable middle-income countries hosting over a million Syrian refugees on top of pre-existing Palestinian refugees—this evolution toward longer-term strengthening of national institutions and communities hosting refugees began in 2014 and is now standard policy, reflected in the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (2015-2016)¹⁵ and the Whole of Syria Approach¹⁶ adopted in Sept 2014 under UNSC Resolution 2165. The speed of this evolving strategy has been uncommonly quick. The high quality of UN agency management is one factor behind this rapid adaptation, but the relative strength of national leadership, institutions and infrastructure in each country also contributed.

CERF disbursements in 2013 and 2015 reflect and support this overarching trend while still being separate and distinct from it. RR and UFE allocations were overwhelmingly oriented towards fundamental, life-sustaining needs, the humanitarian core of the response strategy in both countries. Where they apply, cash transfers allow for food, basic medical care and hygiene, and in many instances shelter.

At the same time, the Government of Jordan (GOJ) and GOL are perceived to be using their high refugee numbers to attract a maximum of emergency funds and then extract public infrastructure investments from these engagements. CERF funding, because it supports programs that include host communities and local service providers (health, shelter, WASH, etc.), is not excluded from this trend. Examples include support to national health systems (essential medicines to clinics in poor, underserved areas), public schools currently stretched by refugee populations, even privately owned residential infrastructure (improving abandoned high-rise housing blocks for temporary residence). In Jordanian camps, boreholes and impermanent shelters were built, again as temporary measures to relieve Jordanian communities and public services from the additional burden and resource drain posed by the large refugee influx. As standard practice, CERF does not invest in heavy infrastructure in terms of construction or major repairs that are not temporary or transitional in nature. In Jordan and Lebanon CERF has adhered to these broad parameters.

I. Funding Availability (PAF Indicator 1)

Combined CERF funding to Lebanon and Jordan for populations affected by the Syria crisis accounted for 6.8% of global CERF allocations in 2013 and 5.4% in 2015 (RR and UFE combined). The countries covered by this review were amongst the top ten recipients of CERF funding globally in both years. In 2014, only Iraq received CERF

¹⁵ <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/3RP-Report-Overview.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/whole-of-syria>

funding. In Jordan and Lebanon during that year, agencies claimed there were more refugees returning to Syria than arriving. The GOJ restricted border access because of security concerns, resulting in long processing delays and effectively acting as a deterrent to new arrivals. Jordan had two refugee camps well under capacity, equipped to handle over twenty thousand persons, who have not arrived in such great numbers, preferring host community arrangements over the isolation of camps.

a) Jordan: For Jordan there were two CERF Rapid Response allocations in 2013 for \$9.8m and \$5m respectively. In early 2013 the rate of new arrivals was high, between eighty and ninety thousand persons a month. Strain on host communities by the GOJ was considered untenable and UNHCR were instructed to build Azraq camp for a hundred thousand new arrivals, despite the government's anxiety about permanent refugee structures. UNHCR and UNICEF each received \$4.9m, or \$9.8m of the total \$48m required for the response. Resilience was not yet a consideration in agency programming and both agencies handled core humanitarian needs for the anticipated influx of Syrian refugees (boreholes, shelter, NFIs, water trucking, hygiene). In late 2013 the GOJ tightened border controls, the anticipated influx never occurred, and today Azraq is largely empty with only twenty thousand refugees.

The second 2013 allocation of \$5m benefited eight agencies and aimed to pre-position emergency stocks in advance of a possible bombing close to the Jordanian border, amid rumors of chemical weapons. Agencies prepared for the possible influx, but ultimately redirected their contingency stocks when the high rate of new arrivals never happened.

The 2015 Jordan UFE allocation responded to emergency refugee needs laid out in the Jordan Response Plan (JRP), which sought \$2.9 billion but was only 36% financed. Aid coordination by this time was more streamlined with the GOJ and Ministry of Planning. With 80% of Syrian refugees in host communities, CERF would follow the broad lines of the JRP to promote social cohesion and stimulate local economies, a "necessary and realistic" approach that favored cash-based programs for a total of \$9m between six agencies, with the three biggest refugee agencies receiving the bulk of the funding. Of the total \$9m allocated, \$8.35m went to support 65,000 refugees and \$650,000 went to support 1,750 members of Jordanian host communities.

b) Lebanon: A similar orientation toward social cohesion and resilience has developed in Lebanon since 2013, including greater national ownership over strategy and delivery. Accordingly there is an increasing interest in longer-term livelihoods assistance for host communities and refugees, albeit opposed by the GOL, who fear a permanent refugee presence but want increased support for their communities affected by the influx.

Lebanon in 2013 also benefited from a Rapid Response allocation of \$18.5 million in advance of an anticipated influx of refugees following potential US bombings and possible chemical weapons usage by Syrian forces. Agencies proposed contingency stocks of emergency supplies, and in January 2014 were authorized by CERF to re-

program these materials in existing activities when the rapid influx did not happen. As in Jordan, there was no 2014 allocation for want of a precipitating event, and funding levels did not warrant a UFE allocation.

In 2015 Lebanon received a UFE allocation for \$18 million, which was divided between food security, WASH and health for Syrian, host communities and Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS), with a dedicated UNFPA project on reproductive health and gender-based violence among refugees. Of the total \$18m allocated, \$17.5m went to support 268,000 refugees and \$500,000 went to support 7,500 host community families.

In both Lebanon and Jordan, the proportion of life-sustaining support for refugees to social cohesion programming for host communities shows that the UFE window remains primarily humanitarian, while reflecting a shift in the overall response narrative towards resilience.

II. Inclusive Prioritization and Transparency of Allocation Consultations (PAF Indicators 2-7)

PAF indicators for inclusiveness and transparency aim to measure the level of engagement of clusters/sectors and implementing partners, status of funding, and needs of affected communities in the strategic prioritization of CERF funding.

According to CERF reporting from Lebanon and Jordan, the consultation process to frame CERF allocations were conducted with the Humanitarian Country Team and relevant sector working groups of the RRP. Local communities and officials were also consulted, and these consultations continue to be integral to the humanitarian response in Lebanon and Jordan.

Consensus and executive decisions. In interviews with the evaluation team, agencies characterized the consultative processes both positively and negatively. In Jordan, UNHCR tried to be consultative in coordination and working groups around UFE allocation decisions in 2013, but smaller agencies generally felt unheard or sidelined. This changed with a new RC/HC in 2014, who accepted allocation recommendations that were the product of agency consensus, but later altered these significantly. The final submission included smaller grants for Jordanian host communities by reducing amounts for the three large agencies delivering core humanitarian services to refugees.

Dominance of funding gaps. In interviews with the CERF secretariat and with OCHA senior staff in country, many questions were raised about the seeming absence of CERF strategy (UFE specifically) beyond its ability to cover funding shortfalls and to prevent or pre-empt drastic deteriorations in living conditions for beneficiaries. That UFE allocations are made in response to budget shortfalls is well understood, but there is an expectation that disbursement is decided through an inter-agency process that incorporates beneficiary needs and the comparative strengths of agencies in an

integrated, strategic manner. As a general fundraising strategy in Jordan and Lebanon, agencies are perceived to leverage their chronic underfunding to attract bilateral donors capable of making far greater commitments than CERF. One consequence of this dynamic is that the HC and HCT may argue for an evidence-based allocation strategy for CERF/UFE and from bilateral donors, while the largest agencies prioritize their budgetary requirements in their fundraising strategy.

Yet the evaluation team was repeatedly told that funding gaps have become the de facto prioritization strategy for UFE allocations, at least in Jordan and Lebanon. CERF funds were allocated to agencies with the largest caseloads and that also face the largest funding gaps, and whose programs carry the greatest negative consequences for the beneficiary population should their finances be severely or suddenly curtailed. WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF are the largest CERF beneficiaries in these two contexts for this reason.

Bigger budgets serve the greater needs. Yet in its adherence to traditional humanitarian sectors, CERF RR allocations in 2013 were certainly in line with stated strategic priorities for Lebanon and Jordan. In 2015 as the response narrative diversified to include resilience and social cohesion, there was greater discussion around prioritizing other sectors, in particular protection. This was a debate that divided CERF working groups repeatedly: should the WFP UFE allocation be reduced in favor of protection funding or will prioritizing WFP actually prevent protection problems—understood as ‘negative coping mechanisms’—from arising?

Although understood and appreciated in the abstract, the attraction of CERF as an apolitical, neutral funding source for UN agencies did not seem to command much attention once the UFE country allocations were announced by the ERC. Using CERF to cover shortfalls for the larger, primarily humanitarian agencies was perceived by smaller agencies to dominate the consensus-based UFE allocation consultations in Lebanon and Jordan. Some smaller agencies in Lebanon found the UFE consultative process to be fruitless in terms of time, resources and energy investments from staff (“heavy investment, small return”). Those that benefited from UFE allocations for their programs with host communities were of course happy with their CERF experience.

What of CERF in protracted crises? Interviewees from diverse agencies raised the question of CERF’s role in situations of chronic, protracted crisis. Previous reviews of CERF in multi-country, chronic emergencies have raised this question in conjunction with CERF’s relationship to early warning and preparedness, DRR and reconstruction.¹⁷ The same discussions surfaced throughout this review. The general view was that such debates arise and need answers much more quickly in middle-income countries such as Jordan and Lebanon where governments command greater ownership (and seek their

¹⁷ CERF’s Role in Funding of Preparedness, CERF Secretariat Paper 22 Sept 2011; Supporting Early Action through CERF and CBPFs, CERF/OCHA FCS 8 July 2013.

own development dividends from outside humanitarian funding) than happens in fragile states where national institutions are less demanding partners.

Compared with the ERF, whose allocation strategy is directly informed by technical working groups (no cluster system), many INGOs (as observers) perceived the CERF consultative discussions as primarily influenced by UN agency funding needs and programming philosophies than evolving humanitarian needs on the ground.

UN agencies benefiting from CERF were less critical but pragmatic, stating that allocation decisions “will not impact inter-agency coordination but will reflect the health of existing coordination and the quality of strategic thinking in place.” The Jordan allocation process for UFE in 2013 and 2015 was highly conflictual, all agencies reported, despite transparent and democratic consultations, as noted above. After reaching inter-agency consensus in 2015, the RC/HC subsequently took a unilateral decision in favor of several allocations for host communities and social cohesion that were initially rejected by the group as ineligible. Fundraising pressures being what they are, there will always be losers in any UFE decision, and skepticism of the decision making process is a common byproduct. “We already have difficult relations with other operational actors—agencies and INGOs—we don’t need more hostility and opacity generated through CERF,” lamented one agency staffer. The RC/HC explained his actions as demonstrating sensitivity to government demands for more aid to host communities—important as an acknowledgement of Jordanian authorities as equal partners now and in advance of future dilemmas sure to arise.

In Lebanon the evaluation team met with a new HC, who had not been present for the 2015 UFE consultations. According to the version of events heard by evaluators, interested agencies submitted their UFE proposals and the HC, with OCHA, made executive decisions and reported these back to the group. No participating agency reported any problems with this approach, as it meant less work to reach consensus on a collective allocation strategy. Participants reported that the process was more efficient overall.¹⁸

Smaller amounts, less influence on strategy. Finally, evaluators heard the argument that there has not been much CERF strategy in Jordan and Lebanon because its amounts are small compared to the size of funding gaps, making budget shortfalls the highest priority. Consequently, it is unrealistic to expect the CERF prioritization process to result in any joint strategy because agencies already have their own sector-based strategies with evidence-based planning. “CERF is an excellent instrument but small amounts

¹⁸ In their review of a draft of this study, OCHA NY described a different process, worth including here: “The Lebanon UFE prioritization strategy took three rounds of revision between CERF and the RC/HC and country team before agreement reached. The official application was even submitted one week late due to delays to agreement on strategy for use of funds.” This version suggests a much more collaborative, iterative process, to the point of missing the submission deadline.

inside so large a crisis should not be expected to have an influence on coordination strategy” (UNHCR).

III. Coherent Country Submission (PAF Indicators 8-13)

PAF indicators for coherency of country submission aim to measure its timeliness, quality, consideration of other funding sources and consistency with CERF life-saving criteria and accountability to affected populations.

From contingency to resilience. The 2013 RR submission followed on an ERC visit in late 2012 to Lebanon and Jordan. A contingency plan was developed for as many as 150,000 new arrivals, which never happened. Unlike the 2013 RR grant, the 2015 UFE allocations were conceived in response to a protracted crisis, a largely settled refugee population living alongside host communities instead of camps. The rapid-onset or emergency phase being seen as over (or calm for the time being), CERF assistance would go to life-sustaining operations designed to benefit host communities and the basic public services both refugees and nationals were using (health, water, hygiene etc.). At the national and regional levels, the official response narrative adopted the term ‘resilience’ to signal that the relief operation would address both humanitarian and longer-term livelihood and protection concerns of refugee women and children, and host communities alike. Host countries and their public institutions would try to accommodate the refugees, and the international community would assist them, without usurping or substituting for national capacity and leadership. Under HC/RC leadership, UFE allocations in 2015 would be sensitive to this shifting narrative, without compromising the CERF’s basic life-saving and time-critical parameters.

As noted above, arriving at country submissions for UFE in 2015 that accommodated these complimentary agendas was accelerated by increasing political pressure from national authorities to support basic public services for national populations affected by the refugee influx. Given limited CERF amounts, the Jordan and Lebanon HCT in 2015 could adapt to these demands but only by reducing allocations to the largest agencies in favor of smaller agencies, many of whom operate traditionally in the development space.

INGOs expressed an understanding of CERF and ERF funding parameters, objectives and process, but emphasized their primary interest in the ERF mechanism, which allows them direct control over monies received. For CERF their participation in INGO fora allows them indirect representation at CERF consultations, and INGO representative bodies are well funded in both Lebanon and Jordan. National NGOs have a similar structure, although this body is more developed in Lebanon with its much longer tradition of NGOs than in Jordan, where volunteer-based public service is a still evolving concept.

By the end of 2015, the OCHA-managed Country-Based Pooled Funds for the Syria crisis had disbursed a combined total of \$30.5 million in affected countries.

Accountability to affected populations (AAP) was rarely mentioned in CERF proposals or reports and only noted as completed, since it is a requirement. This does not mean it was not respected, as agencies, partners and even beneficiaries described participatory approaches and feedback systems in the design and operation of various projects, all of which is consistent with AAP guidelines.

IV. Agency Capacity, Quality Assurance, Monitoring & Evaluation (Indicators 14-20)

These PAF indicators aim to measure whether agency capacity is taken into account during proposal development, the extent to which agencies respect reporting guidelines, inclusiveness of reporting processes, quality of OCHA support along with the adequacy of contracting, procurement and M&E systems of recipient agencies.

Capacity to deliver, and to heed political demands. This review found that agency capacity was taken into account in all countries, particularly in 2013 for the RR allocations for contingency planning and pre-positioning of essential supplies. The strengths of the sectors involved (food, shelter, NFI, essential medicines, WASH) had been tested since the Syrian conflict flared in 2011 sending refugees across neighboring borders. Collaborative relations with national authorities were perhaps less strong at that time, despite the mutual dependency between agencies and national authorities to respond quickly and gracefully to the crisis.

Besides the PAF, there is no exclusive or dedicated approach to M&E for CERF funding supporting agency programming and CERF funded activities were covered by individual agencies' regular M&E processes. In Lebanon, the recently developed intermediate status reporting system for CERF grants is now in operation. It is appreciated for its ability to reveal slow spending rates or other anomalies early in the funding cycle, allowing sufficient time for corrective action. Reasons for the lack of common M&E standards range from the variety of country contexts and degrees of access to populations and oversight of partners due to conflict (Syria), and less stable border areas in Lebanon and parts of Jordan. Donors reportedly are sympathetic to these realities and claim to understand that M&E will consequently be less robust. In accepting this trade-off, agencies and donors agree that quality and consistency of delivery is the primary priority.

There has been no OCHA-led training for participating agencies in CERF processes, eligibility parameters and objectives in Lebanon or Jordan since 2012. Evaluators heard from agency staff with previous CERF experience elsewhere that such trainings were much needed and long overdue.

Based on feedback from key INGO partners, there were no significant sub-contracting issues for partners of UNHCR, UNICEF or WFP. Registration of INGOs in Lebanon is a persistent problem that has threatened to disallow partnerships with UN agencies, but this obstacle was not reported regarding CERF subcontracts.

CERF guidance and need for surge capacity. Feedback from OCHA and recipient agencies indicated that guidance from the CERF secretariat was both useful and timely. Guidance was provided by OCHA offices in country, but could have been more systematic and interactive to compensate for variable agency capacity and high turnover. The OCHA office in Jordan was without a Head of Office from 2012 to early 2015, and was led by a P3 with limited CERF exposure who also reported to the RC/HC at the time. Several interviewees maintained that CERF consultations in 2013 and 2015 could have gone more smoothly and productively with direct oversight from the secretariat. While surge capacity from the CERF secretariat in 2013 and early 2015 may have been considered, outside mediation as a mode of technical support is not OCHA practice¹⁹.

Delays and unspent funds. In Lebanon in 2013, a protracted delay resulted in funds being returned to CERF. WFP activities were planned for all areas of Lebanon where Lebanese returnees were present. WFP was unable to agree intervention modalities with key stakeholders (IOM and Government of Lebanon), and the grant was returned to CERF unspent.

V. Streamlined Review, Allocation, Distribution & Reporting (PAF Indicators 21-24)

Agencies reported receiving their RR distribution, government approval delays notwithstanding, in under a month.

Contested consultations. The transaction costs of involvement in the 2013 and 2015 consultative prioritization processes in Jordan were considered onerous and conflictual for many smaller agencies whose proposals did not immediately conform to CERF eligibility guidelines. This delayed the consultations, which were characterized as “negotiations” between large and small agencies, or humanitarian and development ones. Several agencies in Jordan mentioned that these transaction costs were so high that they chose not to re-apply in 2015, nor would they subsequently. Another agency reporting similar frustrations with the allocation process, but that HQ pressure forced their CERF involvement in 2015 and would probably do so again in the future.

Rapid distributions, government delays. The speed of allocation once a final decision was made was not problematic, according to CERF recipients in Lebanon and Jordan.. However, where government approval is also required (as in Jordan in 2013), this

¹⁹ CERF typically provides more than 80 allocations per year (consisting of 500+ projects) to more than 45 different countries, making systematic surge support unrealistic.

delayed the decision-making process significantly for RR—four to six months were reported. In 2015, a year of only UFE allocations, it was decided to focus on Jordanian programs that already had government approval in order to accelerate the allocation and distribution process.²⁰ Short preparation time for CERF submissions was a common complaint by agencies.

Light reporting and valuable seed funding. All agencies interviewed expressed appreciation for the relatively light reporting format and requirements for CERF. There is no dedicated M&E system for CERF allocations, but agencies asserted that their existing M&E and oversight systems were easily adapted to tracking CERF inputs and outputs. The evaluation team inferred from this that additional reporting and monitoring requirements from CERF would not be welcome. For large agencies, already discussed is the fact that allocations went into existing programs for which M&E systems already existed. Some smaller agencies were able to launch new, experimental programs focusing on women’s livelihoods (social cohesion) such as the UNFPA program in Bekaa, Lebanon. OCHA staff seemed to take special interest in the fate of these programs, helping partner agencies to find follow-on funding and monitoring progress through the intermediary reporting format, recently introduced.

Some agencies reported that attempts to contest a rejected submission (official language is ‘not prioritized’) at country level (to OCHA office and HC) were complicated by the fact that no formal appeal process exists. Others perceived an absence of independent oversight by the CERF secretariat of the country prioritization strategy, and of the ‘spurious’ life-saving claims made by certain submissions in order to improve their chances of selection.²¹ Finally, agencies with the highest refugee caseloads were perceived to use CERF to sustain those numbers and thus avoid adopting the more narrow (but widely shared) agency focus on the most vulnerable, which would mean a larger assistance package but for fewer beneficiaries. Caseload, not need, is how many characterize agency survival calculus as the overall response strategy evolves away from a humanitarian narrative toward resilience. These tensions inevitably play out in CERF consultations, how CERF eligibility criteria are interpreted and applied, and thus influence the language of individual proposals.

In Lebanon, CERF was contrasted to the ERF consultation process, which is viewed as less institution-driven and more grounded in field needs that are prioritized within and amongst sector working group. Yet allocations were slow compared to CERF, so slow that some INGOs are not applying again (DRC).

²⁰ A word on process: for UFE, the HC is informed as soon as possible of allocated funding; the HCT and agencies in country are thus apprised. In both Jordan and Lebanon, from the time the ERC first informs the HC about allocated UFE funding, a tight window of nearly one month to draft and submit the prioritization strategy, followed by another three weeks to submit the full application including specific agency projects.

²¹ Specific sectors where this happened include social cohesion and livelihood activities for refugee women, or the supply of essential medicines for Syrian ailments uncommon in Lebanon and Jordan. These activities conform to a resilience agenda but their proposals were criticized by some HCT members of using ‘life saving’ language when evidence for this was scant.

No CERF reports from 2015 are available at this point in the review and it was not possible to get an overall picture of the timing and amounts of CERF funds sub-granted by agencies to their implementing partners. To be clear, CERF does not serve as a ‘pass-through’ in this regard, as sub-grant relationships and their timing are determined entirely by CERF recipient agencies and their local partners.

CERF Outputs: Better Response Capacities

VI. Time-Critical Life-Saving Activities Supported (PAF Indicators 25-27)

These output indicators aim to measure to what extent CERF funds allow agencies to gain donor confidence, achieve geographic and sectoral coverage and whether there was a recognition by key stakeholders that CERF funding contribute to meeting critical life-saving needs.

Life-saving vs. life-sustaining. Currently, and from late 2014 onward, it is widely recognized among partner agencies, government ministries and in CERF appeals that Lebanon and Jordan are the sites of a protracted refugee crisis, not a humanitarian emergency. UNHCR will continue to direct the refugee response, and progressively integrate national authorities. CERF funds are welcome in this context and will continue to prioritize core humanitarian needs, but the context in Lebanon and Jordan is no longer a time-critical, life-saving dynamic. Continuing conflict in Syria could generate new waves of refugees but humanitarian infrastructure in neighboring countries is now adequate to accommodate them.

In 2013 under threat of chemical weapons usage in Syria, agencies welcomed the first of two RR allocations to stockpile contingency equipment and materials in advance of an anticipated influx of refugees and the array of critical humanitarian needs this influx would generate. Although the trigger event did not transpire, refugees continued arriving weekly by the thousands, and CERF authorized agencies to reprogram these materials in other activities. Here CERF proved its ability to respond early to an expected rapid onset emergency.

Separate from this contingency planning, a second Rapid Response allocation in 2013 addressed a range of time-critical needs in Lebanon and Jordan, as the rate of arrival among Syrians and Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) was then high and expected to continue.²² Unmet medical needs (vaccinations and clinics), winterized shelter, potable water in sufficient quantity, and support to government services exhausted by intensified demand were critical at the time. These pressures exacerbated refugee vulnerability and their impact on host communities was widely documented. Lebanese

²² Time-critical response refers to necessary, rapid and time-limited actions and resources required to minimize additional loss of lives and damage to social and economic assets (e.g. emergency vaccination campaigns, locust control, etc.).

authorities highlighted this causal connection between rising refugee caseload and increasing poverty and morbidity among host communities, where the ratio of refugees to citizens is presently the highest in the world.

In both RR allocations for Jordan and Lebanon in 2013, CERF funding allowed agencies to meet the time critical needs of refugee populations and Lebanese returnees as they arrived. Besides the most common basic needs, WHO highlighted drug-resistant tuberculosis and diabetes as emergency, life-saving concerns among arriving Syrians for which host country health systems were unprepared.

Preventing a worsening situation for beneficiaries. In late 2015 at the time of this evaluation there is little evidence of time-critical, life-saving needs on the ground. In UFE allocations, CERF was being used to support budget shortfalls for the three large refugee agencies—although the allocations cover a tiny fraction of the shortfall facing recipient agencies. The accepted rationale for this support is that even a small slip in program delivery (e.g., even a 2\$ drop in monthly cash transfers) would unleash a cascading sequence of “negative coping mechanisms,” a wide-ranging series of protection risks. These include interruption of school so children can work, early marriage of young daughters, increased prostitution and criminality, greater hostility with host communities, etc. CERF covering small gaps at critical junctures in the funding cycle can be life-saving, stated WHO Lebanon: “Our biggest humanitarian concern besides rapid refugee influx is delays in donor allocations.”

Preventing vital programming interruptions. Timeliness of allocations was often understood by agencies in terms of the urgency of their funding shortfall and its potential to curtail or interrupt their operations. Agencies in this situation stressed that CERF was very helpful, while acknowledging that it could not cover the amounts required to cover the shortfall. This means, in practice, that a massive operation was assisted by CERF to continue at scale for two weeks, for example, but then scaled back to minimum services until larger funding arrived. WFP repeatedly experienced this dynamic, and in 2015 alone has reduced its cash distribution from \$27 to \$13 a day. Smaller agencies are divided over whether this is an appropriate, life-saving use of CERF, as there is no threat of starvation in the region, only “negative coping mechanisms.”

Attracting additional funding. Many concrete examples were provided by large and small agencies of CERF funding allowing a start-up or pilot phase of a program which was then used to attract longer-term funding from bilateral donors.²³ All agencies recognized the potential value that CERF funding can offer in this regard, particularly given its arrival in the first quarter of a financial year²⁴. The Jordan HC specified that CERF does help fill small gaps and that remaining shortfalls can then be discussed with donors, sometimes resulting in one-off, usually small contributions: “The UN is

²³ UNICEF Jordan, WHO Lebanon,

²⁴ In the case of the first annual CERF UFE allocation round.

committing this much to cover this gap, what can you offer?” This strategy does not unlock large commitments generally, but can elicit small additional amounts from donors who are already engaged.

Little CERF ownership beyond OCHA. In Jordan and Lebanon, the primary point of contact between agencies and CERF is through the allocation consultations. Their experience of this process, its pros and cons, can also reveal how well agency leaders understand CERF, its purposes and processes. Asked why agencies did not demand more CERF opportunities, many stated that country teams expected the CERF secretariat to announce the availability of funding. Yet they could give no example of field-driven, proactive requests to CERF or to OCHA by agencies for information on future funding availability (these did happen in 2011 and 2012, but are not covered in this review).²⁵ This seemed a common misperception of CERF functionality: either the HC announces an RR appeal and submissions are drafted, or a UFE allocation is announced and consultations begin.

VII. Increased Coordination and HC Leadership (PAF Indicators 28-31)

These output indicators aim to measure how CERF helped improve coordination mechanisms and to enhance HC leadership, how CERF complements other sources of funding and the extent to which the reporting process has fostered joint reflection.

CERF and other pooled funds overseen by HCs offer an opportunity to leverage improved coordination between agencies. Like other Pooled Funds, CERF is generally perceived as a “great added value to interagency coordination,” and one of OCHA’s specific strengths. In countries where OCHA is not leading coordination, agencies value CERF but not for any strategic influence it imparts on coordination locally, nor is this its primary purpose. Again, where OCHA is not leading coordination (i.e. Jordan under UNHCR), agencies recognized OCHA’s information management as its greatest contribution to integrated humanitarian response. In Jordan and Lebanon there is no cluster system owing to the agreement between OCHA and UNHCR on leadership in refugee situations; only Syria itself is recognized as a humanitarian emergency. Given that CERF is overseen by the HC in Lebanon and Jordan, UNHCR effectively ran the appeals and submission process in 2013 when the HC was the UNHCR representative (this is no longer the case in Jordan or Lebanon). While RC/HC ‘double-hatting’ and OCHA’s secondary coordination role behind UNHCR in refugee contexts is accepted on principle,²⁶ many interviewees familiar with CERF stated that without a lead coordination role for OCHA, it is “understandable that CERF is less visible to agencies” and that its allocations be less integrated or strategic.

²⁵ In 2012, Syria received \$29.5 million in CERF support through the three RRW requests. In April 2012 an RR request was made in relation to the UN Contingency Plan for Syria and continuing trends in humanitarian needs with newly assessed areas as the crisis evolved; July 2012 due to unrest and deterioration in situation; and in August 2012 for populations displaced by continuing civil unrest.

²⁶ Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice <http://reliefweb.int/report/world/joint-unhcr-ocha-note-mixed-situations-coordination-practice>

Supply vs. demand. Large funding gaps in 2013 and 2015 informed UFE allocations, and anticipated emergency triggers (bombings) drove the RR allocations of 2013. These are both instances of demand driven funding, and counter a minority view expressed by some smaller agencies that because CERF funds “come from within the UN” (i.e., are supply driven), they lack the external accountability that bilateral monies command. However, as described elsewhere, while CERF disbursements are comparatively small relative to overall agency needs, they are part of a ‘patchwork’ of donations that in aggregate allow for scale (geography and caseload) and duration. Both of these dimensions are needed to facilitate the transition from emergency/humanitarian to resilience/development programming, essential to the broader WoS response narrative.

Enhanced coordination: CERF is “one tool among many.” Regarding CERF's aim to enhance coordination and role of HCs, one HC claimed, "My coordination is already enhanced without the CERF amounts we receive here, but it is an additional tool we use." HCs did not report CERF helping to improve cross-sector strategy, as agencies are already doing this through the country appeals, jointly crafted with national authorities. While the CERF monies are welcome, they are not seen as an integral part of agency coordination processes as these are currently structured. In a rapid onset emergency where response and management systems are non-existent or new, CERF can concretely contribute to interagency coordination. But five years into the Syria crisis, the national appeals process is sophisticated and subsumed within the encompassing Whole of Syria Approach.

Surge capacity to ensure credible consultations. In 2013, OCHA Jordan coordinated the UFE and RR consultation processes with a P3 who had no prior CERF experience. With the HC/RC also holding a leadership position in UNHCR, other agencies described their distrust of the process, noting an absence of political neutrality from the lead agency. “When one agency leads an entire response, it’s natural for their coordination to favor their own interests and strategy,” one agency representative observed. Many were hoping the CERF secretariat would deploy surge capacity to help ensure the allocation be inclusive and consensual, not top-down. This quality control did not happen, discrediting the CERF process in the eyes of some agencies. There is no evidence that the HC requested assistance from CERF in this regard, nor is it standard practice for the secretariat to deploy additional staff in such cases.

VIII. UN Agencies’ Capacity Strengthened (PAF Indicator 32)

This output indicator measures to what extent the ability of recipient agencies to respond to humanitarian crises has been enhanced by the availability and use of CERF funds.

Institutions versus humanitarian need, and how the RR and UFE allocations relate to response narratives. There is no cluster system in Jordan or Lebanon, so consultations

for UFE prioritization were perceived as driven by institutional priorities as opposed to empirical quantified evidence of beneficiary needs on the ground. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, CERF was regularly contrasted with the ERF allocation strategy, which is informed by sector leads and therefore results, it was argued, in empirically-based funding priorities that more accurately reflect evolving humanitarian needs. INGO partners also deemed ERF as relatively free from inter-agency politics and allocations based on funding shortfalls. The 2013 RR allocations in support of pre-positioning and contingency planning in light of anticipated bombings near the Syria-Jordan border were unanimously viewed as free of agency interest: contrary to UFE, the RR objectives in this case were not a matter of debate or interpretation.

Another widely held view among smaller agencies was that by using UFE allocations to alleviate budget shortfalls for the bigger agencies (WFP, UNICEF or UNHCR), the onset of 'negative coping strategies'—fallout from decreased cash disbursements in particular, could be prevented. While a legitimate concern, this is a dignity/protection argument, not a strictly life-saving one. So while CERF may help cover lean budgets for a period, does this mean that CERF has been essential to ensuring the continuity of humanitarian operations in this context? One agency manager confessed that had their CERF funding not come through, they could have gotten the same from other key donors. Agency budgets vary greatly along with the spectrum of life-sustaining services offered. But without a control group, we cannot know how much program continuity and beneficiaries would suffer without the UFE window. Stepping back for a moment, it is useful to recall that no single funding source is absolutely critical on its own, and effective funding for large-scale emergencies is always comprised of multiple streams of varying sizes and duration—a collective patchwork of funding.

Large and small agencies naturally have different existential concerns in a highly fluid funding environment, and will compete over a single resource with narrow eligibility requirements. Large agency funding is more fungible (transferable between activities in advance of expected funding from additional sources) than small agencies, which generally lack this latitude. This also explains the frequency with which UFE funding helped small agencies cover a funding gap prior to a larger bilateral commitment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that programming by small agencies is at greater risk of interruption, even termination, without UFE funding. At the same time, the funds allow seed money for new projects that can then be picked up by a bilateral donor. In both Lebanon and Jordan, CERF/UFE helped start new UNFPA programs for women, and was a lifeline for Palestinian refugees from Syria, a chronic humanitarian need yet subject to constant donor fatigue. Large-scale refugee programming is supported by multiple different sources and does not depend exclusively on CERF assistance (UFE).

Cost efficiency of cash transfers. Agencies such as WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF that use the cash transfer system in Lebanon and Jordan assert the added efficiency of this approach over, for instance, NFIs distributed through partner NGOs. Less transaction costs are incurred as the agencies can upload cash directly through an ATM system

custom designed for qualifying refugee and host community families. Direct cash transfers also support local retailers where beneficiaries purchase specific items—halal butchers or manufactured goods from Syria. These arguments were made for the 2015 UFE submission and participating agencies were happy to see CERF accept the value-add and speed of this approach, the perception being that CERF exclusively prefers life-saving investments over life-sustaining or longer-term modes of assistance.

IX. Timely Response (PAF Indicators 33-35)

This output measures timeliness via indicators relating to the number and cause of no-cost extension requests (NCE), utilization of funds, and to what extent CERF fills critical time gaps compared to other contributions.

The majority of agencies interviewed stated that CERF allocations arrived quickly, often under one month. Reporting is light, and the introduction of the interim reporting format is welcomed by OCHA to assist with ongoing oversight and to avoid complications at end of grant, if agencies have been slow to disburse and grant expiration deadlines loom.

Besides the big three refugee agencies, multiple agencies (UNDP, UNRWA, UNFPA) claimed that CERF allocations had enabled them to bridge significant funding gaps at the start of the calendar year while waiting for larger bilateral contracts. Several agencies (UNFPA) also gave examples of CERF funding acting to attract larger donor funds to either scale up or extend the life of an activity.

After events in late 2013 failed to generate the expected spike in refugee influx, UNHCR requested an NCE to target the needs of new arrivals to the Za’atari camp for cash-based winterization assistance, where more than 68,000 new arrivals were registered. The second camp in Jordan, Azraq, was slow to finalize pending government policy decisions. CERF grants were instead used to serve winterization needs for new urban refugees and new arrivals in Za’atari camp.

The Lebanon Humanitarian INGO Forum was asked for feedback on the CERF mechanism in 2014. INGO leaders responded, but claimed they did not know about CERF at the time, despite their partnerships with multiple UN agencies. Since then they have been able to compare CERF and ERF. The UFE window is seen as filling funding gaps for bigger programs, such as food and WASH. Sector coordination is good internally, but between sectors the CERF allocation consultations resulted in no common or integrated strategy. On the positive side, CERF disbursements were noted to be much faster than with ERF.²⁷

²⁷ This is in part due to the registration problems INGOs face in Lebanon, making national NGOs the less controversial partner in the eyes of Lebanese authorities. Working through INGOs (registered or not) instead of public services and ministries, UN agencies in Lebanon risk the wrath of the government as well.

CERF Outcomes: Humanitarian Performance Strengthened

CERF PAF outcome indicators aim to measure the extent to which humanitarian reform processes have been supported along with CERF's contribution to the timeliness, predictability and quality of the response.

X. Humanitarian Reform Process Supported (PAF Indicator 36-37)

These outcome indicators measure the extent to which CERF supports the full Humanitarian Cycle and how CERF has acted as a tool to promote humanitarian coordination, including accountability to affected populations.

There was general acknowledgement of the supporting role that CERF played in the evolving response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon and Jordan, both in terms of providing critical support during the construction of Azraq camp in 2013 and the pre-positioning of emergency supplies in advance of an expected bombing campaign. As response strategies in Jordan and Lebanon adapted to accommodate the pressures on host communities and public services by the refugee influx, CERF allocation priorities in 2015 mirrored this general response strategy by supporting several smaller agencies with social cohesion-type programming. Again, while the overall response strategy evolved towards the resilience narrative between 2013 and 2015, the great majority of CERF disbursements support life-sustaining activities in Lebanon and Jordan, countries with no emergency crisis of their own apart from a massive refugee influx and limited domestic response capacity. Some smaller agencies (FAO, UNFPA) wished to see greater CERF support for their resilience programming. Yet HCs and stakeholders at all levels welcome the additional monies, delivery speed and flexibility that CERF offers.

Accountability to affected populations has evolved in Lebanon and Jordan due primarily to the shift away from NFI support toward direct cash transfers and the near-immediate feedback loop this allows. Agencies do not always know the exact purchases beneficiaries make, but their appreciation or displeasure with the monthly transfer amounts is immediately communicated, much as any social welfare system in developed countries. In addition, the sense of increased autonomy that cash provides to recipients has been documented in numerous studies, and CERF contributions to this program were acknowledged during beneficiary visits and by vendors who manage voucher or credit programs where beneficiaries shop. Regular fluctuations in the monthly amounts received, due to budget shortfalls, elicit immediate reactions from beneficiaries. Refugees cited steep drops in cash transfer amounts as the primary factor in their decision to return to Syria or to emigrate elsewhere.

XI. Predictability and Reliability Enhanced (PAF Indicators 38-39)

PAF indicators for this category measure the extent to which response capacity is strengthened and operationalized with the knowledge that CERF will be a reliable source of funding. It should be noted that the assessment in this respect is large shaped

by the fact that most stakeholders interviewed may have experienced UFE allocations only, and thus do not reflect on the RR window as a reliable standby source of emergency funding.

Predictability related to basic survival services. Evidence-based vulnerability assessment frameworks help to quantify beneficiary needs in an objective fashion, which donors welcome, but they also favor agencies that can best meet these basic survival needs. In Lebanon and Jordan, those agencies most benefitting from the vulnerability assessment frameworks are the three large refugee agencies. For these basic survival needs, CERF has been a reliable and predictable funding option with all three receiving the largest allocations in 2013 and 2015 in near equal amounts. As the response narrative has evolved to include resilience, smaller agencies are benefitting from CERF but cannot count on CERF in their budget forecasting.

CERF an unlikely resilience benefactor. Smaller agencies with a resilience focus recognized that because CERF is by definition an emergency fund, its allocation strategies in any context will logically be dominated by agencies with emergency profiles. The same agencies requested that CERF announce its available funding amounts earlier in the year, in order to facilitate planning, avoid drastic shortfalls and staff layoffs. On balance, large agencies with emergency profiles can and do count on CERF annually, despite not knowing the sums they may receive. Some smaller agencies with resilience or development profiles stated that while they cannot count on CERF because of its emergency profile, they would welcome advance knowledge of probable allocation amounts, and their possible timing. While advance notice would help smaller agencies coordinate the timing of larger bilateral grants, which are often subject to delays, this is not a feasible request given CERF operational parameters.

XII. Quality of Response (PAF Indicators 40-43)

Indicators in this category measure beneficiary coverage, whether outcomes from CERF-supported activities are reported, and how evaluations commissioned by recipient agencies capture CERF contributions.

Expanding definition of beneficiary. Beneficiary coverage has evolved in Jordan and Lebanon as the definition of ‘beneficiary’ itself has been the subject of political interpretation, pressure and ultimately compromise with national authorities, who sought dividends for poorer communities who were informally hosting hundreds of thousands of refugee families from the earliest days of the Syrian conflict. This dynamic is partly explained by the broad prohibition against refugee camps, driving many refugees into urban areas seeking shelter and succor. As exclusively refugee allocations in 2013 evolved to incorporate resilience concerns in 2015, the CERF beneficiary profile adapted accordingly. CERF reporting by agencies distinguishes where possible between refugee and national (host community) beneficiary, in programs that mix the two

beneficiary groups. Palestinian refugees from Syria are a separate class of beneficiary and their programs are run exclusively through UNRWA.

The accuracy of the rate of arrival predictions by refugee agencies has been affected by periodic border restrictions, rate of registration by new arrivals and by the intensity and geography of conflict in Syria. By 2014 the rate of arrivals was agreed to have leveled off, available funding was believed to be adequate and no new trigger events (for the RR window) were anticipated or experienced. In 2015 many of the new resilience projects targeted specific refugee demographics, particularly women.

Monitoring and evaluation capacities and techniques by recipient agencies and their partners were reported as set by bilateral donor formats, combined with their own periodic field monitoring (e.g. WFP's post distribution monitoring). Challenges reported or identified with specific agency M&E were not specific to CERF, as these primarily concerned verification of beneficiary numbers (refugees can be mobile, change residence, or emigrate and still try to claim their monthly cash transfer, for instance).

After Action Reviews (AAR) have been promoted by the CERF secretariat as a tool to support CERF-related processes. According to guidelines,²⁸ AARs should be relatively light processes that offer the HCT and other CERF stakeholders an opportunity to reflect on the overall CERF process, to identify lessons learned and strategic issues for the RC/HC report. The Jordan AAR took place on March 2, 2014 with UNICEF and OCHA participating. While not present for the meeting, regular communication and coordination with UNHCR were ensured. Despite limited participation, the AAR was considered useful to analyze outcomes, given that CERF reports primarily describe activities and outputs.

For the 2013 allocation, a Lebanon AAR meeting was held on May 9, 2014. WHO, UNICEF, UNHCR, and IOM attended the meeting, though other recipient agencies could not. The AAR exercise was finalized with an online questionnaire in June of the same year. At the time of our visit (Q3 of 2015), an AAR was being planned for early 2016.

²⁸ CERF Secretariat, 2014.

Operational Context and Main Findings – Syria

With the Syrian conflict entering its sixth year, the UN estimates that 13.52 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection²⁹. Within Syria, 6.5 million people, including 2.8 million children, are displaced, and displacement continues at an extraordinary rate³⁰. In interviews, senior UN staff noted the inadequacy of the terms ‘chronic’ or ‘protracted’ crisis, which are often applied to Syria in reference to its long duration and the lack of a political solution. The humanitarian response is characteristic of a protracted crisis in that it is required to deal with large and relatively static displaced and other vulnerable populations, whose vulnerability is increasing sharply in the face of a rapidly deteriorating economy, a steep decline in the availability of basic services and severely depleted coping mechanisms. Humanitarian actors in Syria are also required to deal with an ongoing and constant range of acute crises stemming from conflict and insecurity. For interventions in favour of recently displaced populations and for those in besieged or hard to reach areas, a constant state of response readiness is required, given the speed at which the context can change and the extraordinary challenge of obtaining permission, sometimes fleeting, to undertake relief operations. *It is also clear that the constraints placed upon actors operating from Damascus continue to define the operational environment as much as the needs or achievements of the humanitarian community.* As such, there is a constant challenge to be faced by the response, and by all donors and financing instruments including the CERF: how to prioritise resources, which are meagre in comparison to the levels of need, in the face of a constant range of acute crises, with severe access constraints, as well as seemingly endless and blanket need in more accessible areas.

Coordination and constraints in Damascus: UN led humanitarian structures in Syria fit, in many ways, a more standard model than countries in the sub-region. The HC/RC sits over a full OCHA office which convenes a normal range of sector³¹ meetings, an inter-sector coordination group, and an HCT. The Government of Syria co-chairs key sectors via technical line ministries. The HC/RC, with OCHA and via the HCT, inter-sector coordination and sectors, convenes the appeal process for Syria, previously known as the SHARP and in 2016 onwards, the HRP. As described above, however, operations in Syria and consequently coordination, have a number of extraordinary characteristics, largely due to the exceptional constraints imposed on humanitarian actors. Field operations rely very heavily on the Syrian Arab Red Cross / Crescent (SARC), which acts in a dual role as an operational agency and a quasi-Governmental coordination body. A limited number of registered Syrian NGOs (approximately 100) are registered at Governorate level. Very few INGOs are registered to operate in Syria (approximately

²⁹ Humanitarian Response Plan 2016 – OCHA Syria

³⁰ “On average, since 2011, 50 Syrian families have been displaced every hour of every day. The pace of displacement remains relentless. Well over 1.2 million people have been displaced so far this year, many for the second or third time. Increasing numbers of civilians are fleeing and are prepared to risk their lives to reach Europe.” – HRP 2016

³¹ The Syrian regime / Govt does not permit the term ‘clusters’.

14). Although there are limited exceptions, UN Agencies cannot implement via INGOs, who in turn cannot implement via Syrian NGOs. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and Syrian NGOs undertake the vast majority of delivery on behalf of the UN system.

Whole of Syria Coordination: The humanitarian response in Syria has been mounted predominantly from Damascus and cross-border from Turkey, with smaller amounts of assistance passing cross border from Jordan and Iraq, and to an even lesser extent from Lebanon. Until 2014, and even into 2015, coordination between the locations were coordinated in an uneven fashion, and undermined by sensitivity regarding the sharing of information related to operations in Syria. In July 2014, UNSC Resolution (2165) provided a legal basis for assistance cross-border, assistance that had previously been undertaken predominantly by NGOs. The Whole of Syria approach (WoS)³² which followed was conceived in 2014 (with negotiations running through mid-2015). The WoS approach allowed the construction of the whole of Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and was used in the construction of the HRPs from 2015 onwards. WoS brings together over one hundred humanitarian actors focused on response inside Syria.

Summary findings follow below in the order of specific indicators in the CERF Performance and Accountability Framework (PAF), structured on the PAF headings, Inputs, Outputs and Outcomes. Regional and country level ratings for each indicator are attached as Annexes supported by a brief narrative. As in other CERF reviews, the TOR asked for a concise report that can provide the ERC with a “reasonable level of assurance” regarding the achievement of key performance benchmarks while providing the basis for recommendations to improve operational aspects of the CERF and relevant policy issues.

CERF Inputs: Funding & Process

Indicators for the revised version of the CERF PAF aim to assess levels of funding, inclusiveness and prioritization of the allocation process, quality of CERF submissions, quality assurance systems of recipient agencies, reporting processes and timeliness of disbursements following submissions.

The CERF ‘Prioritization Strategy’, which preceded the release of the 2015 UFE allocation focused on *“immediate life-saving needs... prioritizing the most vulnerable... in key locations across Syria.”* Within this broad remit was specific attention to *“humanitarian needs emerging from the severe winter conditions in Syria”*; *“emergency assistance in food, shelter and winter items to... Palestine refugees”*; specifically in *“geographic locations of implementation [which were] prioritised to favour hard-to-reach areas and those with concentrations of urgent life-saving needs.”* As well as clear focus on the CERF’s life-saving criteria, there was a clear pointer to the CERF’s desire to see coherence of action in that *“Proposed interventions will be carried out simultaneously,*

³² <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/whole-of-syria>

and mostly in the same geographical locations with the aim of achieving synergy in the response to save the lives of people in need.” The extent to which CERF allocations were able to support these aims is covered at various points in the analysis below.

I. Funding Availability (PAF Indicator 1)

Given the scale of the conflict in Syria, the country has received relatively few CERF allocations. For a few respondents, both in the region and in the some in the CERF secretariat, it seems counter-intuitive that so few RR allocations had been made to Syria between 2013 and 2015 and that those which had were predominantly driven from headquarters rather than the field. Two allocations were made via the Rapid Response window in 2013, the first in March for \$20.4 million, and the second in September for \$20 million. The first was an automatic allocation as a result of Syria being declared an ‘L3’ emergency; the second as part of a combined \$50 million allocation to the region for propositioning in advance of potential airstrikes and the possibility of resultant population movements. There were no CERF allocations to Syria in 2014. In April 2015 there was an UFE allocation of \$30 million. Given the high rate of international staff turnover in Syria, there was little first-hand recollection of process around the allocations prior to 2015.

In 2013, Syria received the second largest CERF allocation and second largest overall amount of humanitarian funding. In 2015, Syria received the second largest CERF allocation and the largest overall amount of humanitarian funding. Globally, Syria was among the largest single recipients of humanitarian funding in 2013 and 2015 and CERF allocations only amounted to 2.2% of total contributions.

Most notably for the under-funded allocation in 2015, recipient agencies were clear that CERF funding had filled significant funding gaps in time and in for specific projects. It was noted, however, that while the CERF had been well utilised, the funding filled a very small proportion of funding in absolute terms and, as such, it was hard to say concretely that it had been of ‘strategic value’ overall. That said, one agency noted that the CERF had accounted for 20% of their funding for 2015 to date; and the only funding for one key sector.

In Jordan and Lebanon, allocations are noted as having shifted over time in favour of resilience programming. Notwithstanding the severity of the conflict in Syria, there has also been an increased emphasis in programmes which address infrastructure and support to failing systems, as well as the most acutely vulnerable populations. The pattern of allocations in 2013 and 2015, in broad terms, shows an approach which balances large allocations to emergency distributions with smaller ‘balancing’ elements to ‘resilience’ programming. As in the sub-region, however, these allocations were in keeping with the balance / strategy outlined in the annual plans (in this case the SHARP).

For example, for the first RR allocation of 2013³³:

- In the food sector, priority was given to WFP's food distribution pipeline, with smaller allocations to agricultural production, including urban smallholding to increase dietary diversity.
- Also in keeping with the SHARP, the health sector placed priority on conflict related, life-saving medical supplies and services. In parallel, the allocations placed emphasis on support to access to "comprehensive maternal health services including life-saving emergency obstetric care" in primary and secondary health facilities, in areas with IDPs as well as those directly affected by conflict³⁴.

The rationale for prioritisation of the second CERF RR allocation in 2013, given for propositioning based on the possible refugee movements resulting from potential airstrikes, ran as follows at the sectoral level:

- The allocations to the food sector match the pattern identified above – bulk to food a smaller 'balancing' allocation to enhancing food production.
- In keeping with the focus of the allocation on potential airstrikes, the primary health focus was placed on "*lifesaving medicines and supplies including trauma kits, blood bags and blood screening kits, vaccines and first aid kits.*" Again, in parallel, there was an additional prioritisation to emergency obstetrics and delivery kits.

II. Inclusive Prioritization and Transparency of Allocation Consultations (PAF Indicators 2-7)

PAF indicators for inclusiveness and transparency aim to measure the level of engagement of clusters/sectors and implementing partners, status of funding, and needs of affected communities in the strategic prioritization of CERF funding.

From the outset of the review, OCHA staff noted that in order to have a properly inclusive and transparent allocation process, it would be necessary to have a holistic means of considering needs across Syria; i.e. to have a country wide, standardised and evidenced basis, even in crude form, on which to found a discussion of priorities (geographic and / or sectoral). The Whole of Syria approach and the Humanitarian Needs Overview for Syria; both the hard won products of interagency and inter-country collaboration, finally offer the basis for such a comparison and approach. Both, however, were only put in place during 2015, and the HNO only late in the year. Since all CERF allocations pre-date these structures and tools, the collection of projects available in the SHARP, as well as ad hoc planning processes for individual events, have been the frameworks through which CERF allocations have been driven. As such, it is clear that

³³ HC's CERF report for 1st allocation 2013

³⁴ A similar approach was evident in Iraq (as evidenced by the project visit with UNFPA).

the primary metric for CERF allocations has been the gaps in funding of regular UN agency programming, which would be typical for UFE allocations. In this instance, the RR allocations also followed this pattern, including the allocations for airstrikes (additional needs which never materialised). Notwithstanding the very different operating context in Syria, this is very much in keeping with the analysis from Jordan and Lebanon.

CERF and WoS: Thus far, CERF allocations to Syria have passed through Damascus and have been directed to agencies based in Damascus. Allocations to Jordan and Turkey have gone to projects predominantly for refugee programming, i.e. not to cross border operations. In Jordan, the HC noted that it would be a political challenge to divert money allocated ‘to Jordan’ for programming in southern Syria. Obviously these dynamics are shaped by the real challenges faced by UN RC/HCs in balancing their impartial humanitarian remit while retaining relations with the sovereign member states in which they represent the UN system. Whether future UFE allocations to Syria should pass through the WoS architecture is a challenging question, both politically and technically. A clear majority of interviewees felt that in principle, *not* to utilize the WoS architecture going forward would undermine the negotiations and agreements to date. There were significant reservations however, as to how such an allocation might work in practice. Ultimately, a detailed analysis of how such an allocation might work is beyond the scope of this study, but the idea clearly warrants greater discussion.

Consensus and executive decisions: Interviewees indicated consistently that ‘top-line’ allocations, the decisions on which sectors constitute priorities and the ‘envelopes’ for each, are decided by the HC and OCHA on the basis of current knowledge. As was the case in Iraq³⁵, this was viewed as ‘top-down’, but there was little or no dissent over the decisions that were made. These preliminary allocations had been announced in the HCT (which contains non-UN representation) and decisions on programmatic allocations delegated to the sectoral level for a consensus based decision.

Process in each respective sector, as recalled in interviews, was not identical. For the 2015 UFE allocation, however, it is clear that CERF related conversations took place almost exclusively amongst the respective UN agencies in each sector and that allocations tended to be based proportionally on the respective size of each Agency’s programme and / or their funding levels at the time of allocation. Typifying Agency responses, one noted that they been allotted a proportion of the initial ‘top-down’ allocation for the sector and had applied it to current funding gaps in their programme recently submitted to the SHARP i.e. with no external consultation involved. In health, prioritisation was reportedly discussed amongst 10-12 partners and based on joint assessments and available data. On this basis, however, funding was divided between UN agencies in health with no explicit aim at complementarity (below).

³⁵ Please refer to separate report on Iraq CERF allocations for the same period

It is important to note that the operational context in Syria means that INGOs play a limited (or purposely constrained) operational role (see context section above). With very few exceptions, UN agencies cannot use INGOs as operational partners (rather a limited range of NNGOs and the SARC). As such, it is possible to argue that an extensive set of inclusive discussions with INGOs would not add significant value. Major implementers of UN programmes, NNGOs and the SARC, were unaware that they were implementing with CERF funding and played no role in allocation decisions.

Also in keeping with the findings from the sub-region, the relatively small amount of CERF funding, in relation to needs and funding requirements, was clearly a key factor in the CERF's lack of strategic influence.

III. Coherent Country Submission (PAF Indicators 8-13)

PAF indicators for coherency of country submission aim to measure its timeliness, quality, consideration of other funding sources and consistency with CERF life-saving criteria and accountability to affected populations.

As above, for the UFE allocation in 2015, once top level allocations had been made, allocations at cluster level tended to be made between the UN Agencies within each cluster. Programming decisions were then taken internally by individual recipient agencies, before being compiled in sectoral proposals. At best, as was the case with the winterisation plan, the individual agency plans sat within a pre-agreed, thematic strategy, although allocations were done by proportion of planning figures, rather than any other form of prioritisation. By comparison, members of the health sector discussed priorities for the 2015 allocation, but it was stated explicitly in interviews that once the allocations were made to UN agencies, there was no attempt to look at coherence between the projects chosen.

Life-saving criteria: response / contingency / resilience: As noted above, the prioritisation paper for 2015 focuses very much on hard to reach areas and the most acutely vulnerable, mirroring the CERF's life-saving criteria. As outlined in the context section, however, the humanitarian system in Syria faces an overwhelming level of need for both 'acute', conflict related response, the maintenance of basic services in areas with high concentrations of IDPs and for activities in the category of 'resilience', such as crop production to balance the need for food aid³⁶. Anecdotally (and perhaps inevitably) key donors to the crisis are seeking to maximise the impact of their humanitarian funding and tend to earmark (at least softly) their money for the 'sharp end' of the response: hard to reach and besieged areas. Again anecdotally, part of this rationale is

³⁶ One of the key findings of OCHA's Operational Peer Review (OPR) of 2015 is that "Relief must be complemented by self-reliance and livelihoods support", thereby reflecting the need to "invest in the maintenance, restoration and rehabilitation of local infrastructure and systems that underpin the provision of basic services, such as water, electricity and sanitation to all Syrians." The OPR also notes that "this should not be interpreted as an investment in recovery programming, but an application of the early recovery approach that integrates the idea of more sustainable interventions into humanitarian response to make it more effective and efficient."

political, in that donors prefer not to be seen to fund programming in more stable, government controlled areas. Understandably, this leaves the basic services, constant preparedness and 'resilience' components of UN programming in constant competition for funding. Notwithstanding the prioritisation strategy which matches the logic of other donors, the reality of underfunding inevitably direct the CERF to the basic services, 'resilience' and 'preparedness' parts of the broad strategy as well as to the acute response, especially given the severe restraints on access. Although all of these allocations can be justified within CERF's life-saving criteria and can be seen as demonstrating the apolitical and needs-based nature of CERF, it remains, in a sense, a 'Catch-22' for the CERF, most notably for the UFE window.

IV. Agency Capacity, Quality Assurance, Monitoring & Evaluation (Indicators 14-20)

These PAF indicators aim to measure whether agency capacity is taken into account during proposal development, the extent to which agencies respect reporting guidelines, inclusiveness of reporting processes, quality of OCHA support along with the adequacy of contracting, procurement and M&E systems of recipient agencies.

In line with restrictions on access in general, monitoring has been noted as particularly challenging in the context of Syria. Again this is a problem which extends well beyond CERF funded activities and no special techniques or methods were reported as being implemented specifically for these. One Agency noted that approximately 65% of their activities are within range of their field based staff, and subject to regular field monitoring as a result. Where partners were involved in programming, joint assessments, joint visits and triangulation of results were standard practice. For the other 35% of activities in 'hard to reach' areas, remote reporting was used. In this case, CERF reporting requirements were noted as 'less arduous' than internal Agency requirements.

V. Streamlined Review, Allocation, Distribution & Reporting (PAF Indicators 21-24)

No specific issues were raised in respect of timeliness of partnership arrangements with implementing partners, and most partners remained unaware that they were implementing CERF funded activities. Broader observations on the funding cycles and their impacts on timely response are noted below.

Rapid distributions, government delays. As in the sub-region, no specific issues were raised with efficiency of the allocation process, or the speed of disbursement post-allocation, but short preparation time for submissions was a common complaint. The extent of control over programming by the Syrian Government, however, is a much more significant factor on timeliness than the CERF's disbursement of funding. No CERF reports from 2015 were available at the time of the review and it was not possible to get an overall picture of the time taken to pass through to NGOs.

CERF Outputs: Better Response Capacities

VI. Time-Critical Life-Saving Activities Supported (PAF Indicators 25-27)

These output indicators aim to measure to what extent CERF funds allow agencies to gain donor confidence, achieve geographic and sectoral coverage and whether there was recognition by key stakeholders that CERF funding contributes to meeting critical life-saving needs.

Life-saving interventions vs support to Syrian systems: Again noting that prioritisation strategy referred to a preference for ‘hard to reach areas’, at the time of the consultation for the UFE allocation in the first quarter of 2015 there was a collective emphasis on gaining access to Aleppo and part of Idlib. During this time, however, there was no specific trigger in either Aleppo or Idlib, nor any timely or temporary relenting of access constraints. OCHA staff accepted that notwithstanding their constant desire to access these areas, funding, nor indeed the source of any particular funding, had no bearing on their ability to influence access. One agency noted that the UFE money was ultimately allocated to sizable needs in other Governorates. In fact, given the scale of needs across the country, the CERF was viewed in this instance as a small counter-balance to general donor pressure to work only in the hardest to reach areas (see above).

In the WASH sector, the CERF UFE allocation was seen as playing a more significant role. Mirroring the view of the NNGOs on the Syria HRF process, one Agency saw CERF as a very flexible fund with which it was possible to programme holistically for short term, ad hoc projects. In this sense, CERF was seen as standing apart from funding from traditional donors, which tended to be restrictive around permissible activities and often unable to fund a full range of complementary project components. As such, CERF funding was seen as offering significantly higher value for money.

VII. Increased Coordination and HC Leadership (PAF Indicators 28-31)

These output indicators aim to measure how CERF helped improve coordination and enhance HC leadership, how CERF complements other sources of funding and the extent to which the reporting process has fostered joint reflection.

As was the case in Iraq, CERF is seen as playing a very minor but positive role in improving coordination. Recalling the allocation in 2013, one interviewee noted that the UNCT was prominent in initial ‘policy level’ discussions under the HC; but that there was ‘no interference’ from OCHA or the HC in discussions at the sectoral / technical level. This was taken as a positive in the sense that the HC had demonstrated faith in the sector led process. One sector lead saw the CERF allocation process as a positive if challenging experience; one in which Agency interests had to be subordinated to those

of the collective. In the context of Syria, however, it was noted by the same cluster lead, that the role of strengthening coordination was better served by the ERF: both in the sense that it is open to NGOs and in its broader governance board. Another felt that the CERF did not strengthen sector coordination to any significant extent, but had facilitated a conversation about prioritisation. The majority of actors, however, felt that given the small size of CERF allocations in relation to needs, in conjunction with their relative infrequency, there was little or no impact on coordination.

VIII. UN Agencies' Capacity Strengthened (PAF Indicator 32)

This output indicator measures to what extent the ability of recipient agencies to respond to humanitarian crises has been enhanced by the availability and use of CERF funds.

As noted in the sub-region analysis, definitions of 'life-saving' keep pace with the ongoing debate around the overarching response strategy. In Lebanon and Jordan, the response has increasingly been framed in terms of 'resilience': increasingly bringing Government systems and structures into the response framework, with a view to sustaining operations beyond the 'emergency' phase; i.e. life sustaining rather than life saving. While this approach might seem incongruous in the context of Syria, supporting failing national infrastructure in water, health, agriculture and municipal services is increasingly seen as one facet of the response, in parallel to the emergency response capacity required in other locations.

The WHO project which was the subject of the field visit is typical of this approach. Al Mowasat Charity hospital in central Damascus, is funded predominantly by local donations and is the ultimate referral point for a high proportion of IDPs, refugees and other vulnerable sections of society. The hospital is well equipped and well maintained, but suffering from a severe shortage of water under the conditions in Damascus. This shortfall has been met by water-trucking, an expensive and unsustainable solution. With CERF funding, WHO is in the process of installing a back-up water supply, a comprehensive solution with additional roof mounted tanks fed from a borehole on hospital grounds, a pumping system and back-up power supply. Such a project, whilst important, would not meet the requirements of donors whose funding requirements stipulate the most acute needs in hard to reach areas

Pros and cons of agency-led allocations. Echoing the analysis from the sub-region, it is impossible to quantify the impact of CERF allocations on agency capacity overall. As noted, the CERF is seen as a key gap filler by UN agencies, but extremely small in relation to programme size. Arguably, allocations which flow to the largest Agencies have the smallest net benefit for capacity. As in the sub-region and in Iraq, the more 'thorough' and transparent process involved in allocations for the country-based pooled fund were noted as superior in respect of ensuring that response capacity was enhanced in the most critical areas.

IX. Timely Response (PAF Indicators 33-35)

This output measures timeliness via indicators relating to the number and cause of no-cost extension requests (NCE), utilization of funds, and to what extent CERF fills critical time gaps compared to other contributions.

Staff turnover in Syria is relatively high, and there was little recollection of the 'automatic' L3 allocation in 2013 and of allocations in 2011 and 2012. A paper³⁷ for the CERF advisory group (May 2015) noted that the Syria crisis was the first emergency to be 'declared' as 'Level 3'. As such, it was the first to receive an automatic CERF allocation under newly established protocols, previously utilized only for rapid on-set situations. By the time the IASC declared the Syria conflict to be an L3 emergency in January 2013, two years after the conflict began, the CERF had already provided more than \$40 million to humanitarian activities inside the country. In the absence of an operational trigger, *'the resulting CERF application attempted to fill critical funding gaps rather than target new and specific needs like a traditional rapid response application would'*. The paper goes on to quote the HC's perception that in respect of timeliness, the allocation did not add any specific value and in fact resulted in added work at a time when Agencies were busy scaling up and adapting to the other new protocols³⁸.

Humanitarian evaluations routinely uncover significant challenges in mounting timely responses via normal programming and funding modalities to predictable, annual events such as agricultural / planting seasons or winter. In this case, the winter season of 2014/15 provided a specific set of challenges, rooted in the operational context of Syria, but also in the normal, piecemeal organisation of programming and financing. A winterisation plan was prepared in advance of the winter season 2014/15 (although one INGO partner disputed that this had been done in quite enough time, taking in to consideration the lead times for procurement into Syria of 'in-kind' supplies such as NFI kits). As one member of the NFI sector explained, winter was predicted and an appropriate plan developed, but the level of the funding shortfall for the plan only became clear as winter loomed. At this stage in late 2014, a request was made to the CERF rapid response window to meet the shortfall (see above for the process). This request was ultimately rejected, in part on the bases that winter is not a sufficient trigger for the RR and that the application was made to cover a shortage of funding in an existing plan, rather than for a new event. In the recollection of the sector lead, there was confusion as to the status of the application and eventually only informal notification that the application had been declined, prompting additional confusion amongst the sector members. The application was amended for the first UFE round of 2015, once Syria had been identified as a target for the UFE window. In the case of the NFI sector, the amended proposal was based on largely the same set of actors and

³⁷ OCHA (2015): "CERF support to large-scale humanitarian crises: A CERF Advisory Group background paper"

³⁸ For the same reason, L3 'automatic' allocations were not considered in conflict related L3s which followed (CAR, South Sudan, Iraq), indicating that a lesson was learned through experience in Syria.

activities. Winterisation activities funded through this allocation were reported as having been distributed in advance of winter 2015/16.

The specific case of UNWRA in Syria also throws up challenges around the concept of 'timely' response. UNRWA effectively represents a stand-alone sector in Syria, responsible as it is for Palestinian refugees in Syria. In terms of numbers this is, by and large, a static population, albeit one which is subject to the same context as other vulnerable groups. UNWRA's response is more or less consistent during the year, irrespective of the month, and requires a steady stream of monthly funding. In reality, UNWRA remains subject to the same funding uncertainty as any other programme and, in part as a result of donor funding cycles, is often short of money in the first quarter, and pressed to spend and close accounts in the final quarter. The CERF UFE allocation helped to fill this gap in critical areas. It is possible to view this gap filling as a timely intervention, or equally as a stop gap measure in a very inefficient system.

CERF Outcomes: Humanitarian Performance Strengthened

CERF PAF outcome indicators aim to measure the extent to which humanitarian reform processes have been supported along with CERF's contribution to the timeliness, predictability and quality of the response.

X. Humanitarian Reform Process Supported (PAF Indicator 36-37)

These outcome indicators measure the extent to which CERF supports the full Humanitarian Cycle and how CERF has acted as a tool to promote humanitarian coordination, including accountability to affected populations.

Accountability to affected populations: Previous PAF country studies have shown that it is not uncommon for NNGOs, given limited participation in clusters in relation to their numbers, to be unsighted on the existence of the CERF and its processes. NNGOs interviewed for this study stated that in partnerships with UN Agencies in general, they tended to have no input into decisions or strategies for the 'core' programming through which the CERF flows. In their view, decision making was very much top down and that they were 'informed of' rather than 'participants in' operational planning decisions. NNGOs made clear reference to what they felt was 'generic' programming, driven by standardised packages (notably in NFIs). In this respect they felt unable to reflect the views of the affected populations and changes in the operational environment which may have positively influenced approaches.

It was only possible to interview a small number of national partners and these views cannot be taken as a representative sample. It is telling, however, that they hold very contrasting views on programming through the newly strengthened Syria ERF. In the model operated by the ERF, local implementers felt much more able to influence the scope and content of programming and to do so in a way which they felt improved

accountability to affected populations. In this respect, they also echo reflections from Jordan and Lebanon.

XI. Predictability and Reliability Enhanced (PAF Indicators 38-39)

PAF indicators for this category measure the extent to which response capacity is strengthened and operationalized with the knowledge that CERF will be a reliable source of funding.

It is evident that in the case of Syria in the period 2013 to 2015, agencies have not relied on CERF as a reliable funding source, although in this case the term 'significant' funding source is perhaps more useful. The HC acknowledged that CERF had not been used 'proactively' and noted that to call on the CERF for each spike in activity would mean a constant stream of requests.

XII. Quality of Response (PAF Indicators 40-43)

Indicators in this category measure beneficiary coverage, whether outcomes from CERF-supported activities are reported, and how evaluations commissioned by recipient agencies capture CERF contributions.

In keeping with the findings in other categories, the CERF has not been seen as providing a significant quantity of funding. CERF funds were certainly reported on in aggregate with other funding sources in routine programme reporting and evaluations. As was the case in Iraq, reporting to the CERF secretariat, via OCHA and the HC was a relatively low quality. Again, the nature of allocations, gap filling in larger programmes and a lack of collective strategy, does not lend itself to comprehensive, coherent reporting.

Annex: CERF Performance and Accountability Framework (PAF) Indicators

| Inputs: CERF Funding | | | |
|---|--|--|--------------|
| Input I: Funding Available to UN Agencies/IOM | | | |
| # | Indicator | Responsible | Level |
| 1 | Funding available for crises (rapid response & underfunded window) by country. CERF as a percentage of other sources of funding available. | CERF secretariat | Global |
| Input II: Transparent and Inclusive Prioritization and Decision Making | | | |
| # | Indicator | Responsible | Level |
| 2 | Intra- and inter-cluster/sector prioritization process is inclusive of all relevant stakeholders, and adheres to Principles of Partnership (endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform, 12 July 2007). | RC/HC, cluster leads, recipient agencies | Country |
| 3 | Agencies involve their intended implementing partners in CERF project selection and formulation. | Cluster leads, recipient agencies | Country |
| 4 | Demonstrated involvement of affected community in needs assessment and programme design (required for underfunded emergencies and if unavailable for rapid onset, justification and plan for consultation in place). | RC/HC and Cluster Leads/Co-Cluster Leads, Recipient agencies | Country |
| 5 | Analysis of funding undertaken to inform prioritization process and facilitate appropriate direction of funds | RC/HC | Country |
| 6 | CERF underfunded (UFE) country selection/apportionment process at headquarters level undertaken in a transparent manner. | CERF secretariat | Global |
| 7 | Where applicable, the analysis, consultation and prioritization processes for CERF allocation take into consideration Country Based Pooled Funds. | RC/HC | Country |
| Input III: Coherent Country Submission (including complementarity with other sources of funding) | | | |
| # | Indicator | Responsible | Level |
| 8 | CERF submission to the HC is of high quality and consistent with humanitarian priorities. | Cluster Leads, Recipient agencies | Country |
| 9 | CERF request adheres to relevant quality standards and the CERF life-saving criteria. | RC/HC | Country |
| 10 | CERF request is considered timely and appropriate with respect to needs and context. | RC/HC | Country |
| 11 | CERF where applicable uses existing Country Based | RC/HC | Country |

| | Pooled Fund processes and structures to support CERF allocations. | | |
|--|---|---|-----------------|
| 12 | RC/HC allocates CERF funds through a strategy that considers other sources of funding (including Country Based Pooled Funds where these exists) and uses these according to their comparative advantage. | RC/HC | Country |
| 13 | The IASC Principals' 2011 Commitments on AAP demonstrably incorporated into project submissions and reporting as per the guidelines (This includes that agency commitments on such cross-cutting issues as gender, protection, diversity and disability are identified and addressed in the proposed response). | RC/HC, cluster leads, recipient agencies | Country |
| Input IV. Agency Capacity, M/R & E + Quality Assurance Systems in Place | | | |
| # | Indicator | Responsible | Level |
| 14 | Agency performance (capacity to implement within the timeframe of the grant, past performance, speed of distribution and absorptive capacity) is considered when developing and reviewing the proposal. | RC/HC, cluster leads, recipient agencies, implementing partners | Country |
| 15 | Agencies, both at HQ and in the field provide satisfactory (quality and timeliness) inputs (as defined by CERF secretariat guidelines) to the RC/HC CERF Report and the UN Agency/IOM HQ narrative report, which adhere to reporting guidelines | UN agencies/IOM CO and HQ | Country, Global |
| 16 | The RC/HC CERF report is prepared in an inclusive and transparent manner involving relevant stakeholders | UN agencies, cluster leads, implementing partners, OCHA CO/RO | Country |
| 17 | Agencies have the procurement/sub-contracting procedures suited for emergency situations and sufficient staff, access, etc. | UN agencies/ IOM CO and HQ | Country, Global |
| 18 | Agencies receiving grants have internal monitoring, evaluation, quality assurance and accountability mechanisms. | UN agencies/ IOM HQ | Country, Global |
| 19 | CERF secretariat has provided adequate global guidance on the standards for reporting and CERF-related processes. | CERF secretariat | Global |
| 20 | OCHA CO/RO, in support of the RC/HC, provides guidance to agencies, and facilitates input for RC/HC CERF report. | OCHA CO/RO | Country |
| Input V: Streamlined Review, Allocation, Distribution and Overall Reporting | | | |
| # | Indicator | Responsible | Level |
| 21 | Average number of working days between final submission of a CERF grant request package from RC/HC | CERF secretariat, Office of the | Global |

| | and fund disbursement by OPPBA to UN HQ | Controller, ERC | |
|---|--|---|-------------------------------|
| 22 | Average number of working days from disbursement from UN HQ to country office | UN HQ | Country, Global |
| 23 | a) Timely sub-granting arrangements between CERF recipient agencies and their implementing partners. b) Number of days from UN agency/IOM HQ receives CERF funding to first installment disbursed to implementing partners (IPs). c) Number of days from UN agency/IOM HQ receives CERF funding to their implementing partners (IPs) start implementation of CERF funded activities. | Recipient agencies with partners | Country (a), Global (a, b, c) |
| 24 | Overall quality and timeliness of the RC/HC CERF report | HC/RC, UN agencies | Country |
| Outputs: Humanitarian Actors Better Able to Respond | | | |
| Output I: Time-Critical Life-Saving Activities Supported | | | |
| # | Indicator | Source | Level |
| 25 | CERF funds allow agencies to demonstrate capability to leverage donor confidence for future contributions. | UN agency/IOM financial data and qualitative feedback from Country Reviews, After Action Reviews and Evaluations. | Country, Global |
| 26 | Availability of CERF funding recognized by relevant stakeholders (recipient agencies, NGOs, INGOs, Government, other donors) as being fundamental to ability to respond to life saving needs and gaps. | Qualitative Feedback from RC/HC CERF reports, Country Reviews, After Action Reviews and Evaluations | Country |
| 27 | Extent to which gaps, both geographic and sectoral, have been identified and addressed through use of CERF funds. | Country reviews, Project/cluster documents | |
| Output II: Increased Coordination and HC Leadership | | | |
| # | Indicator | Source | Level |
| 28 | CERF contributes to improve coordination and to enhance HC leadership. | Qualitative Feedback from RC/HC CERF reports and Country Reviews, After Action Reviews and Evaluations | Country |
| 29 | Strengthened function of clusters and of inter-cluster forum. | Qualitative feedback from Stakeholders | Country |

| 30 | RC/HC leverages CERF and complementarity between different sources of funding is enhanced. (e.g. funds are used jointly and strategically according to their respective comparative advantages). | Qualitative Feedback from Country Reviews, After Action Reviews and Evaluations, OCHA CO/RO | Country |
|---|--|--|---------|
| 31 | The RC/HC CERF reporting process fosters joint reflection on results achieved with CERF funds and lessons learned | UN agencies, cluster leads, implementing partners, OCHA CO/RO | Country |
| Output III: UN Agencies' Capacity Strengthened | | | |
| # | Indicator | Source | Level |
| 32 | Extent to which CERF enhances the ability of recipient agencies to respond to humanitarian crises. | Qualitative Feedback from Country Reviews, After Action Reviews and Evaluations HQ level bilateral partnership reporting and meetings | Country |
| Output IV. Timely Response | | | |
| # | Indicator | Source | Level |
| 33 | Number and cause of no-cost extension requests. | CERF Internal Tracking, Third Party Monitoring, After Action Reviews, Country Reviews | Country |
| 34 | CERF funds fill a critical time gap as measured in relation to time that other contributions are received. | UN Agency/IOM specific financial data, Qualitative Feedback from Country Reviews, RC/HC CERF reports | Country |
| 35 | Utilization rates of CERF funding. | CERF Financial Reports | Global |
| Outcomes: Humanitarian Performance Strengthened | | | |
| Outcome I: Humanitarian Reform Process, incl. Transformative Agenda, Supported | | | |
| # | Indicator | Source | Level |

| 36 | Extent to which CERF supports the full Humanitarian Programme Cycle and the collective results that the humanitarian community aims to achieve. | Indicators when available. Qualitative Feedback from Country Reviews, After Action Reviews and Evaluations | Country |
|--|---|---|-------------------|
| 37 | Extent to which CERF has acted as a tool to incentivize overall coordination, empowered RC/HC leadership and strengthened accountability, including accountability to affected populations. | Qualitative Feedback from Country Reviews, RC/HC CERF reports, After Action Reviews and Evaluations | Country |
| Outcome II: Predictability and Reliability Enhanced | | | |
| # | Indicator | Source | Level |
| 38 | Response capacity is strengthened given knowledge that CERF is a reliable source of funding. | Qualitative Feedback from UN agencies/IOM | Country |
| 39 | Operations deployed more rapidly due to 'predictability' of CERF as a quick funding source. | UN Agency/IOM reporting | Country |
| Outcome III: Quality Response | | | |
| # | Indicator | Source | Level |
| 39 | Extent of coverage of beneficiary targets in relation to the initial proposal (e.g. number, type). | Monitoring data when available, HC/RC CERF report template, Qualitative Feedback | Country |
| 40 | Agencies' CERF-related outcomes are reported to CERF and the RC/HC on the basis of their M/R & E and quality assurance systems | UN agencies/IOM reporting, third party monitoring, evaluations, Qualitative Feedback from Country Reviews | Country |
| 41 | For the CERF, evaluative processes enable continuous improvement and ensure a quality response. Evaluations are undertaken regularly and there is a management response to recommendations. | Qualitative Feedback from Country Reviews, After Action Reviews and Evaluations Website analytics | Global |
| 44 | Evaluations undertaken demonstrate CERF's contribution to a more coherent and effective quality response. | Qualitative Feedback from Country Reviews, After Action Reviews and Evaluations | Global Country |

