

UNICEF and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)



May 2017

Background

Since its establishment, CERF has supported UNICEF's humanitarian operations in 91 countries with millions of children receiving critical lifesaving, and protection programmes. In December 2016, this support surpassed US\$1.1 billion to respond to sudden onset, acute emergencies and to complex and protracted crises which are unheard, unseen, and underfunded.

CERF continues to be a valued and reliable partner for UNICEF's humanitarian work. In 2016 only, UNICEF received a total of US\$ 105 million in CERF grants, 39 countries received support through the rapid response (\$69.5M-69%) window, while 15 countries were funded through the under-funded window (\$35.9M-34%). In line with the trend of the past several years, UNICEF received about 25% of CERF global funding and remained the second largest recipient agency.

Results of this important partnership are best reflected in the faces of the millions of children that CERF has supported and helped save over more than a decade.

Programme highlights

The narrative below highlights some of the significant achievements that have been made with the CERF funding in 2015 and 2016:

2016 CERF impact in response to acute emergency situations: During the cholera outbreak in Somalia, CERF funds enabled UNICEF and its partners to reach 65,000 affected people and their families (a total of 390,000 people) with hygiene promotion messages through radio spots, information, education and communication materials, and temporary access to safe water through distribution of water disinfection tablets. An estimated 12,000 people in the areas most affected by the outbreak had access to safe water through 30 shallow wells and installation of hand pumps. The safe water and sanitation conditions at the facility level were also improved with 10 health facilities being provided with WASH facilities including water storage tanks/bladders, sanitation and hand washing facilities to help control infection.

2016 CERF impact in reaching children in Protracted and Underfunded Crises: In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, CERF funding was critical to ensure the availability of essential medicines to treat pneumonia and diarrhea, the two major childhood killers of under-five children. Nearly 700,000 children received treatment with essential medicines for pneumonia in 94 counties reducing childhood mortality through preventive and curative services. The funding also supported the procurement and delivery of Oral Rehydration Salt (ORS) to treat 1.5 million under five children for diarrhea.

2016 CERF impact in response to onset crisis: After the 7.8 magnitude earthquake in Ecuador, CERF Rapid Response Funds enabled UNICEF and its partners to support 38,700 people with access to safe drinking water and 13,200 people with improved sanitation services reducing the risk of the spread of disease. CERF funds were also crucial to reach 2,861 families through family protection support preventing family separation, and preventing situations of negligence, exploitation and violence against children. Furthermore, psychosocial support was provided to 6,847 vulnerable children. UNICEF trained 70 professionals from government and non-government organizations as psychosocial coordinators and about 800 young psychosocial volunteers. 250,000 children and 12,000 women were assisted through nutrition supplies complementing the State's Health and Nutrition response initiatives.

2015 CERF impact in reaching children on the move "Migration and Refugees": With the CERF funding, UNICEF continued to scale up the provision of WASH services in host communities in Jordan and Lebanon. Across the region, UNICEF continued to support polio immunization to ensure that the Middle East remains polio free and responded to disease outbreaks, including cholera in Iraq and hepatitis A in Jordan. UNICEF provided 332,000 children in vulnerable families and vulnerable areas with cash grants, winter clothing and blankets.

2015 CERF impact in the facilitation on Rapid Response Mechanisms: In South Sudan, CERF Rapid Response funding enabled UNICEF and other humanitarian actors to provide emergency lifesaving assistance to 135,655 people, including more than 88,900 children, displaced by conflict in Unity and Upper Nile states through the distribution of nearly 28,000 survival kits. The survival kits were an innovative solution to the response challenges faced by the humanitarian community when humanitarian needs were rapidly

rising due to the escalating conflict in Greater Upper Nile with diminished humanitarian access and people were fleeing to increasingly remote locations in search of safety from the fighting and attacks. The CERF-funded survival kit project therefore played a vital role in the humanitarian response in South Sudan during the project period, allowing partners to provide assistance in locations where needs were severe and which were often otherwise inaccessible.

Working with partners

The results highlighted above would not have been possible without close collaboration with our partners. UNICEF is committed in working with wide range of partners to ensure fast, effective and efficient delivery of CERF funds to save and improve lives of children in humanitarian settings. Timely release of sub-grants to those frontline partners is critical part of the response.

In relation to the analysis of data on sub-grants under the 2015 CERF projects, the timing of the UNICEF disbursements to partners improved as compared to 2014. However, there are still projects where UNICEF appears to be slower in the start of implementation. Here, the data is put in context of UNICEF's commitment to children and draws attention to the following facts:

- **Almost 40 per cent of all CERF sub-grantees were funded through UNICEF projects.** In 2015, CERF reported a total of 1018 sub-grants to implementing partners. Of this amount, UNICEF, the second largest recipient of CERF funds, reported 397 sub-grants (39 per cent of the total)
- **Every cent counts for local partners and more importantly for children.** In value for money, for every \$1 dollar of CERF funding that UNICEF received in 2015, 42 cents was sub-granted to implementing partners.
- **More than 75 per cent of the CERF funds that UNICEF sub-granted in 2015 went to international and national NGOs.** This is in line with the work that UNICEF is doing to strengthen the capacity of implementing partners, particularly National Non-Governmental Organizations (NNGOs). NNGOs received \$12.8 million (28%) of the CERF funds that were provided to sub-grantees by UNICEF.
- **UNICEF works in multi-sectors,** as such, CERF grants have spanned interventions in multiple sectors, including projects in education, health, nutrition, water and sanitation, and protection.
- **Timely completion of CERF projects:** The measurement of UNICEF's success in sub-granting to partners is not only in the timeliness or the value, but also how many projects are completed in a timely manner. In 2015, UNICEF, 98 per cent of projects were completed in a timely manner (only 2 non-cost extensions out of 130 grants).

While UNICEF remains strongly committed to continue to improve the effectiveness and efficiency in delivery of CERF funds, there are systemic and contextual constraints which also require a collective effort on part of the humanitarian community to overcome. Beyond constraints such as access and insecurity that often impede the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance, the availability of competing short term funding with strict conditions that need to be prioritized, the clearance processes required from host Governments by NGO partners, the protracted approval process for partnership agreements by some international NGO partners have also been found to lead to delays in implementation of activities. In order to effectively meet the growing challenges of increasing number, size and complexity of emergencies, we as the humanitarian community must work together.

Against this context, there has been a net improvement in the overall timeliness of UNICEF's disbursements to partners between 2013 and 2015.

On implementation timing:

- The highest proportion of CERF-funded activities in 2015 (**46 per cent**) of RR sub-grants **started within the first month of receipt of CERF funds.** This represents a 9 per cent increase in comparison to 2014. By the end of the second month, 66 per cent of RR-sub grants had started with the implementation.

On disbursement timing:

- For UNICEF, emergency response activities always commence within 24 hours, and the country offices are assured of access to the internal loan mechanism, Emergency Programme Fund (EPF) within 48 hours of request from which, they can disburse immediately to partners while awaiting donor and CERF grants.
- The data for 2013 and 2014 shows that disbursement of 58 per cent of CERF sub-grants took place **within the first three months to enable further scale up of response.** 2015 data indicates further improvement in timely disbursement of CERF sub-grants, with **66 percent of sub-grants disbursed within the first three months in 2015.** Furthermore, the number of sub-grants for which the first payment to UNICEF implementing partners was issued within one month of CERF disbursement increased from 22 per cent in 2014 to 26 per cent in 2015.

Measures UNICEF implemented to accelerate disbursement

Since 2014, UNICEF has implemented a number of key measures to improve disbursement of funds to partners. As a result, the improvement is confirmed by the positive trend in 2015 data of our disbursement rates. The measures undertaken include:

- **Partnership Cooperation Agreements (PCA) guidance and forms** governing UNICEF's partnerships with NGOs were updated in 2015 to support effective and timely finalization of agreements. UNICEF country offices in complex, high threat environments were among the first to be trained on the PCA guidance.
- **In 2015, UNICEF conducted trainings on PCA agreement** with NGO partners in London; InterAction in Washington; and with ICVA in Geneva. A partnership manual was also developed to facilitate timely partnership agreements and transfer of resources.
- All UNICEF country offices that receive CERF funding are **sensitized on the importance and commitment to timely disbursement of CERF funds to implementing partners**. The latest follow up with regional and country offices was done in April 2017.
- **In 2015, monitoring and oversight of timely grants implementation was strengthened**. UNICEF instituted a 20 weekdays "trigger" to ensure that disbursement of funds to partners take place within 20 weekdays from receipt. Non-disbursement triggers an alert on the UNICEF global dashboard which is actively monitored by regional offices and headquarters.
- The timeliness of CERF disbursements is one of the three **key performance indicators** for performance of country management teams.
- Improved processes in HQ resulted in **significantly faster issuance of budget for CERF grants**. Country offices receive CERF funds within 48 hours of receipt of the CERF approval letter.
- **In 2015, in coordination with the CERF Secretariat, UNICEF conducted a series of webinars** with over 25 UNICEF country offices to increase awareness on the importance of timely disbursement of funds to partners. UNICEF is planning to conduct a new series of tailored trainings in 2017.
- To enable consistency and accuracy by country offices in their engagement with CERF in the field, UNICEF updated its **CERF guidance in 2017**. Key updates include information on application procedure, accelerated disbursement of CERF sub-grant to partners, financial management, and updates on evaluation. The guideline also provides information and procedure on fraud related issues.

Conclusion

UNICEF remains strongly committed to continue to improve effectiveness and efficiency in delivery of CERF funds for life-saving assistance and protection for millions of children and their communities. In 2017, UNICEF intends to continue with guidance, improvements in procedures, and trainings to its country offices on the strategic focus of the CERF, allocations, and the importance of accelerating disbursement of sub-grants to partners.