



WEBINAR SUMMARY

Central Emergency Response Fund: The 1 Billion Dollar Question

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The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is one of the fastest and most effective ways to support rapid humanitarian response for people affected by natural disasters and armed conflict. It provides rapid initial funding for life-saving assistance at the onset of humanitarian crises and critical support for poorly funded humanitarian response operations. Since its inception in 2006, CERF has provided more than \$4.3 billion to humanitarian action in 96 countries through flexible unearmarked contributions from more than 125 UN Member States and observers, corporations, and individuals. Under his Agenda for Humanity, the Secretary General has called for CERF's annual funding to be increased from \$450 million to \$1 billion by 2018. An expanded CERF will channel more flexible unearmarked funding through prioritisation processes under the leadership of Humanitarian Coordinators. With a general funding gap growing year after year, ensuring that CERF funds are allocated to achieve the greatest impact in meeting urgent needs of people affected by a crisis remains key.

Panellists

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What will an expanded CERF concretely mean for field leaders?

An expanded CERF by 2018 will strengthen the strategic impact and added-value of the fund as it opens up the possibility of allocating larger grants for individual emergencies while reducing the transaction costs. It will also mean more unearmarked funding for Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams to prioritise and leverage improved leadership, coordination, and coherence.

What does a strong CERF request look like?

South Sudan: A Rapid Response (RR) request put forward by the Humanitarian Coordinator in South Sudan (2014) showed clear focus and complementarity with other funding sources. The request asked for funding to complement allocations undertaken by the South Sudan Country-Based Pooled Fund (CBPF) to fund enabling sectors. For example, CERF funded sectors such as Camp Management, Logistics and Security which enabled life-saving activities that were covered by the CBPF. The request was highly focused and highly targeted.

Yemen: CERF allocations to Yemen in 2015 illustrate how a crisis can receive multiple CERF allocations, both RR and Underfunded Emergencies (UFE), with very specific targeting within each allocation. Following the spread of conflict in early 2015, the Humanitarian Coordinator requested \$25 million from CERF for an immediate life-saving response. As the conflict escalated, more support was required to enable humanitarian action and, as a result, CERF allocated another \$2.5 million for Emergency Telecommunications and Logistics in July and another \$15 million in September to address new needs due to an influx of IDPs. More recently, in October 2016 CERF provided \$2 million in response to a cholera outbreak in priority areas in Yemen.

In countries where there are no OCHA offices, what are the steps for submitting a CERF request?

While having an OCHA team in-country can offer valuable support in identifying eligibilities and requirements, it is possible for agencies to submit requests for CERF funding without the direct support of OCHA at the field level. **In countries without the presence of OCHA, the Resident Coordinator's Office leads the CERF process.**

Are agencies in slow-onset emergencies eligible for CERF allocations?

Slow-onset contexts facing challenges such as droughts, climate change, food insecurity, and others, are eligible for CERF funding so long as a significant change in the situation on the group can be demonstrated. For example, since the beginning of 2015, some \$120 million has been allocated to 19 different countries affected by El Nino. For RR applications related to slow onset disasters, CERF urges applicants to review and complete the RR Concept Note prior to engaging in a full-fledged application.

How long does it take from the moment a request is sent to CERF until a decision is made?

The hallmark of CERF is its speed in getting funding out to operations that need it the most. **When the decision to allocate funds is taken, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) will announce this together with the size of the allocation within 12 to 48 hours.** A CERF allocation can be backdated by 6 weeks to account for expenses acquired by agencies while the request was finalised. In cases where the triggers may not be as clear-cut or the ability to spend requested funding due to for example lack of access, the decision by the ERC to allocate fund may take longer.



Stephen Tull

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In Chad, food insecurity, population displacement, and protection concerns are exacerbated due to the conflict in neighbouring countries. Additionally, access to basic lifesaving services such as health facilities and clean water is a challenge, and natural disasters such as droughts and floods further undermine the already fragile livelihoods of the most vulnerable communities. To address the challenges, the Humanitarian Coordinator has made use of grants provided through both the CERF RR and the UFE window.

In a context where the needs are many, how can the Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team prioritise the use of CERF grants?

- **Ensure a crisis-based needs and gap analysis.** While prioritisation is done throughout the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) process, it is at times not relevant for a CERF request process. In a situation of multiple crises, the first step is to establish the humanitarian response gap for each crisis, the needs, the number of affected people, the operational capacities and the available funding etc. The second step is to prioritise the cluster response based on the severity of the needs, the operational capacity of agencies, and their implementing partners. In Chad, such a process led to the prioritisation and allocation of the entire CERF UFE allocation to the crisis in Southern Chad for life-saving intervention in three sectors (health, nutrition, and food security) with some additional specific interventions in WASH, education and shelter.
- **Provide a clear timeframe and matrix of responsibilities** for transparency and accountability of the CERF process. This to avoid that the allocation process is seen as biased by favoritism or opacity. To ensure full transparency, the Chad Humanitarian Country Team has developed a country operational guide based on CERF guidelines and rules to clarify roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder involved in the process. The guidance also include a chart illustrating the keys steps of the decision-making process.
- **Ensure clear management of the process.** If available in the country, make use of OCHAs expertise in guiding discussions at the field level, with the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) and at cluster level to define lifesaving interventions and budget allocations by priority sectors. In Chad, OCHA has helped in ensuring compliance with CERF guidelines and criteria, as well as facilitating an inclusive process. OCHA also offered their support to agencies in developing their proposals, which contributed to the improvement of the quality of the proposals and resulting in less back and forth exchanges with the CERF secretariat.
- **Keep the leadership informed through a feedback cycle.** It is indispensable that the Humanitarian Coordinator is part of a functioning coordination system that informs decision-making processes. For the CERF UFE allocation in Chad (2016), the Humanitarian Country Team played a key role in the prioritisation process when the decision was made to allocate almost the whole CERF amount to CAR related crises.
- **Provide consultations with a broader group of stakeholders** (including Gov. and donors). It is important to interact with key stakeholders and donors in the country to be informed and aware of their programs and funding for the humanitarian response in question. For the recent CERF UFE in Chad, consultations with donor and government counterparts helped the Humanitarian Country Team in prioritising urgent food security residual needs by knowing that the World Bank was addressing critical agricultural activities.

How can the Humanitarian Coordinator ensure that the required information to fulfil the CERF criteria is available when making a request?

Make use of coordinated multi-sectoral needs and gaps analysis to identify top priorities. In Chad, the past two RR allocations for Lake Chad Basin have been triggered by Inter-Cluster or Inter-Agency assessments. These assessments – one of them using the Multi-Cluster Initial Rapid Assessment methodology – helped in creating an Emergency Response Plans to address critical needs in the region. These plans were then used as the basis for the CERF allocation process.

Use the ICCG to navigate competition for funds among agencies and clusters. To ensure a transparent and inclusive allocation process, the Humanitarian Country Team in Chad asked for recommendations on the use of the CERF allocation from Clusters and the ICCG. After validation by the Humanitarian Country Team based on these recommendations, the same delegation of authority is used for the discussion among cluster members to prioritise and address critical and urgent needs. In addition, the HC asked OCHA to attend the sectoral discussions to ensure full transparency and fairness in the process as well as to empower the Clusters in their strategic role.

Fill knowledge gaps about CERF guidelines.

Provide regular refreshers on the guidelines to inform existing and new staff. For the last three CERF allocations in Chad, the Humanitarian Country Team organised a webinar with the support of the CERF Secretariat to reinforce the knowledge of the guidelines by those involved in the process. These refreshers sessions on the CERF guidelines reportedly led to more qualitative strategic discussions.

Ensure up-to-date knowledge of the funding picture.

Engage with in-country donors and the Government to establish an up-to-date overview of the funding situation and imminent plans. In Chad, the OCHA office undertook consultations with UN agencies and key NGOs to establish an overview of the funding situation while engaging in all three CERF allocation processes in 2016. Additionally, the HC and OCHA carried out consultations with key government and donors

P2P Support Webinar Summary – CERF

This summary is a combination of presentations from the webinar and broader learning from the P2P Support team. To listen to the full webinar and to access recordings of past webinars, visit the website: <http://www.deliveraidbetter.org/>