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## PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

**Hundred and Sixth Session**

**Rome, 21 - 25 March 2011**

**EVALUATION OF FAO'S WORK THROUGH THE CENTRAL  
EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUND (CERF)**

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1. This cover page provides the background and key issues for the attention and guidance of the Committee on the attached *Evaluation of FAO's work through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)* and the *Management Response*.

### *Background*

2. Created in December 2005 and launched in March 2006, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF, or the Fund) was established to support more timely and reliable assistance to those affected by armed conflict and natural disasters, through a grant facility of up to USD 450 million per year and a loan facility of USD 50 million. FAO's share of the CERF allocations is 11 percent of the total. Within FAO emergency and rehabilitation programmes, the share funded by the CERF has risen over the years from 7 percent in 2006 to 12 percent in 2009, making CERF the third largest source of funds for these programmes.

3. The Evaluation of CERF-funded projects was undertaken by the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) in 2009-2010 to provide feedback and guidance to FAO's management on operational processes, constraints and projects achievements so far.

### *Key issues in the Evaluation report*

- The Evaluation concludes that FAO provides an important humanitarian contribution to communities affected by crises by supporting their self-reliance and local food availability through time-critical agricultural interventions. Its contribution to saving lives is often indirect, but squarely within the CERF criteria in this respect.

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- The CERF represents a key financial instrument for FAO because it provides early funding, allowing a response to the most pressing needs after a sudden-onset disaster or early enough during a slow-onset disaster to be effective (e.g. for locust control).
- Although there have been recent improvements in procurement procedures, timeliness of response remains the main factor constraining the effectiveness of FAO emergency programmes.
- Efficient and timely execution of projects was found to be correlated with FAO emergency capacity, which is variable among countries. An effort to raise the capacity of FAO country offices to manage small emergency projects is necessary.
- FAO field staff lack standard processes, tools and information systems to facilitate and document financial management, procurement, contracting and monitoring at the country level. While emergency procurement and contracting have increasingly been decentralized to the field, the corporate accounting, budgeting and management systems have not been adapted to local requirements.
- Current management information systems do not permit a rapid and seamless flow of budgetary and implementation information from the field to headquarters. This hampers the capacity of headquarters to track project performance against benchmarks in real time. FAO should develop appropriate applications and tools for the country level, connecting them with headquarters in integrated information management systems.
- The work of FAO in support of both development and disaster risk management over many years allowed the Organization to forge strong links with leading institutions in these areas. Such long-term investment and partnerships with stable organizations proved invaluable to implement short-term disaster prevention or response interventions, as and when need arose.
- Partnerships were generally strong, making effective use of the comparative advantages of non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, governments and UN organizations. Efficient execution was strongly correlated with the capacity of Implementing Partners. However, many of the partners stressed the importance of getting good technical support and capacity building from FAO rather than just funding.

#### *Management Response*

4. FAO Management welcomes the Evaluation of FAO's interventions funded by the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Management fully agrees with the positive findings highlighting the importance of FAO's role in emergency and rehabilitation work, and the crucial role of the CERF as a key financial instrument for FAO. The overall conclusion reinforces the FAO Strategic Framework, Strategic Objective I (SO-I) and its team towards improved preparedness for, and effective response to, food and agricultural threats and emergencies.

5. FAO Management fully accepts fourteen of the 18 recommendations addressed to the Organization, including those on needs assessment and priority setting, efficiency and timeliness, and results. Management accepts three and partially accepts two of the recommendations in relation to partnership and coordination, and partially accepts two of the recommendations related to equity and targeting.

6. The recommendations will be addressed during the current and next biennia. The implementation of some of the recommendations will require additional resources, and extrabudgetary funding will have to be mobilized by the SO-I team to support further FAO's effectiveness in responding to emergencies.

7. The CERF Secretariat fully accepts two, partially accepts one and rejects one of the four recommendations directed at the CERF. The findings of the Evaluation were presented by FAO at the CERF advisory board meeting in October 2010. CERF prepared a specific management response to the Evaluation of FAO's interventions funded by the CERF that will be shared at its next advisory board meeting in April 2011.

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*Guidance sought*

8. The Programme Committee may wish to:
- reaffirm its desire to review major evaluations of FAO emergency and rehabilitation-related topics.
  - review the actions proposed by Management to address the recommendations, in particular those related to needs assessment and priority setting, partnerships and coordination, and results.
  - take note of the comments by the CERF Secretariat.





# **EVALUATION OF FAO INTERVENTIONS FUNDED BY THE CENTRAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUND (CERF)**

## **Extended Summary**

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**January 2011**

## Abbreviations

AGPS	Seed and Plant Genetic Resources Service (FAO)
CBO	Community-based Organisation
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator (UN)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IFI	International Financing Institution
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IP	Implementing Partner
JFFLS	Junior Farmer Field and Life School
LoU	Letter of Understanding
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN)
OED	Office of Evaluation (FAO)
RC	Resident Coordinator
RR	Rapid Response
SFERA	Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (FAO)
UFE	Under-funded Emergencies
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
WFP	World Food Programme

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Background</b> .....	8
1.1 <i>The Evaluation</i> .....	8
1.2 <i>The CERF</i> .....	8
<b>2. Findings</b> .....	9
2.1 <i>CERF funding to FAO</i> .....	9
2.2 <i>Needs assessment and priority setting</i> .....	9
2.3 <i>Project design and quality assurance</i> .....	10
2.4 <i>Efficiency and timeliness</i> .....	11
2.5 <i>Partnerships and coordination</i> .....	12
2.6 <i>Equity and targeting</i> .....	13
2.7 <i>Results</i> .....	13
2.8 <i>Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting</i> .....	17
<b>3. Conclusions</b> .....	17
<b>4. Recommendations</b> .....	19
<i>Needs assessments and priority setting</i> .....	19
<i>Project design and quality assurance</i> .....	19
<i>Efficiency and timeliness</i> .....	19
<i>Partnerships and coordination</i> .....	20
<i>Equity and targeting</i> .....	21
<i>Results</i> .....	21
<i>CERF-directed recommendations</i> .....	22

# Extended Summary<sup>1</sup> of the Evaluation of FAO Interventions Funded by the CERF

## I. Background

### *1.1 The Evaluation*

1. The evaluation of Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) funded projects was undertaken in 2009-2010 to provide feedback and guidance to FAO's management on operational processes, constraints and projects achievements so far, and to account for the use of CERF funds to the CERF Secretariat, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, donors, governments of countries affected by crises and other stakeholders. The Evaluation was meant to be forward-looking and to contribute to improved relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of emergency activities carried out by FAO with CERF funding in the future. It was timed to serve as an input in the food security sector for the five-year global evaluation of the CERF, foreseen in 2010-2011.

2. The Evaluation included initial briefings in Rome and New York, visits to OCHA regional offices in Dakar, Bangkok and Johannesburg, a portfolio review of all FAO CERF-funded projects, an analysis of key corporate databases, and eight case studies in a purposeful sample of countries (Cuba, Kenya, Lesotho, Myanmar, Niger, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and a regional project on red locust control in Southern Africa). In each of the countries, OED utilized the services of two or three independent national consultants to conduct the case study. The case study consultants met with the broadest possible array of partners and beneficiaries in country and produced country reports which served as a basis for the present synthesis report. Two previous evaluations in Syria and Tajikistan that had covered CERF projects in 2009 also informed the present evaluation.

### *1.2 The CERF*

3. Created in December 2005 and launched in March 2006, CERF was established to support more timely and reliable assistance to those affected by armed conflicts and natural disasters, through a grant facility of up to US\$450 million per year and a loan facility of US\$50 million. Since FAO has had limited use of the loan facility, the Evaluation focused on the grant component, which is further divided in two "windows": one for rapid response (RR), receiving two thirds of the grants, and another one for under-funded emergencies (UFE), covering the remaining third. The objectives of these grants are to:

- a) promote early action and response to reduce loss of life;
- b) enhance response to time-critical requirements; and
- c) strengthen core elements of humanitarian response in under-funded crises.

4. Specific activities eligible in the agricultural sector include the provision of farming inputs, emergency livestock vaccinations, control of major transboundary pests such as locusts and spot repairs of agricultural infrastructure.

5. The CERF is managed by the UN's Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), who consults with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HC) in country to determine priorities for the use of funds. In this function, the ERC is supported by a CERF Secretariat hosted by OCHA, and

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<sup>1</sup> The full evaluation report in English and the case study reports can be found on the Evaluation Website.

counselled by an Advisory Group of 16 experts representing donors, recipient governments and NGOs.

## II. Findings

### *2.1 CERF funding to FAO*

6. Since its inception, the CERF has provided more than US\$1.5 billion to address humanitarian needs around the globe. The share of these CERF allocations entrusted to FAO is 11 percent of the total. Within FAO emergency and rehabilitation programmes, the share funded by the CERF has increased over the years from 7 percent in 2006 to 12 percent in 2009. The CERF represents a key financial instrument for FAO as it provides early funding, allowing response to the most pressing needs shortly after a sudden-onset disaster or early enough in a slow-onset emergency to be effective (e.g. for locust control).

7. FAO proposals are reviewed swiftly, approved and funded yet the pace is not as quick as was intended. Over the evaluation period (2006-2009), the time from the first submission of a proposal to receiving the funds took on average 35 days for the RR window, and 51 days for the UFE window. The large number of UFE projects, which are processed only twice a year tends to delay approval, including for RR projects at these times of year. Data recently communicated by the CERF Secretariat shows that the speed of project document processing has improved in 2010, following the hiring of additional staff towards the end of 2009.

### *2.2 Needs assessment and priority setting*

8. All country case study reports concluded that the needs were correctly assessed and that CERF projects responded to these needs in a relevant manner. The CERF places significant emphasis on multi-stakeholder needs assessments. Guidelines and policy documents describe a transparent, inclusive and multi-sectoral process conducted by UN teams and governments and with the participation of NGOs. In the sample, true multi-sectoral and inter-agency needs assessments only took place in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. In other countries, needs assessments tended to remain sector-specific even though they were typically conducted by several agencies (e.g. FAO, WFP and the respective governments). In Myanmar and Cuba, the needs assessments were conducted by a single organization (FAO and the Government's civil defence unit, respectively).

9. The evaluation found that multi-stakeholder need assessments, by offsetting possible biases within each stakeholder, can promote a form of peer review and therefore reinforce objectivity, accuracy and transparency in identifying needs and setting priorities. This does not mean that each needs assessment must involve a holistic approach. Convening multi-agency needs assessments can take time. The frame of analysis and the partners best placed to conducting it must be based on the apparent nature of the problem, sometimes circumscribed to a single sector.

10. Well-functioning UN Country Teams and clusters can help reach consensus on priorities. A critical factor here is the personalities involved. The UN RC/HC represents the most important actor. The CERF “programme theory” postulates that the UN country team should arrive at clear priorities under the chairmanship of the RC/HC. However, some RC/HC tend to distribute the CERF allocation among UN agencies to avoid conflicts, thus diluting its potential effectiveness. HCs and cluster chairs have to negotiate tradeoffs between the need for clear priorities and the necessity to reach a consensus on those priorities through an inclusive process, all this under severe time pressure.

### *2.3 Project design and quality assurance*

11. CERF applications for grant funding follow a specific template in which each project proposal is no more than two pages long. The template includes a succinct description of the project objectives, activities, expected outcomes, implementation plan and budget. Proposals must include information on how CERF funding will be used to support life-saving or core humanitarian activities. The total amount requested from the CERF cannot be 100% of the total budget for the project, as CERF funding is expected to complement other funding sources. The budget uses CERF-specific headings which are different from those FAO normally uses. This means that financial reporting from FAO to CERF cannot be entirely automated and involves some manual steps.

12. CERF proposals are prepared by agencies’ country offices and then collated, negotiated, endorsed and submitted as a package by the RC/HC to the ERC. FAO Headquarters has therefore little role in their preparation and sometimes learn about a proposal only after it has been submitted to the ERC.

13. A number of reasons have been given in support of a systematic review of CERF proposals by FAO headquarters prior to their approval, some more valid than others. The Evaluation found that the Seed and Plant Genetic Resources Service (AGPS) has adopted the best approach under the circumstances. AGPS has stated that each proposal for seed distribution should include specific language to the effect that the crops and varieties will be based on the preference of beneficiaries, adaptation to local agro-ecological conditions and recommendations by the concerned agricultural governmental authorities, and that the seed will be up to FAO quality standards<sup>2</sup>. This provides useful and rapid input to the formulation process, promotes corporate standards and places clear targets against which implementation teams can later be held accountable.

14. Technical units in headquarters are often not in a position to second-guess field offices in terms of the relevance of a particular activity. Nevertheless, they can insist that the activity follows best practice and technically sound processes. Projects that are rapidly designed and implemented cannot be innovative and complex; they generally follow standard processes to deliver fairly basic assistance, to avoid becoming unwieldy and/or technically unsound. The evaluation found that in the case of CERF, the tendency toward small, rapidly designed projects following fairly standard, simple and technologically unambitious approaches is commendable and deserves to be re-enforced.

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<sup>2</sup> FAO seed quality standards for emergency projects are available in: [Guiding Principles for Seed Provision in Response to High Food Prices](#), FAO 2008.

## 2.4 Efficiency and timeliness

15. In spite of recent improvements in procurement procedures, insufficient timeliness of response remains the main constraint to the effectiveness of FAO emergency programmes. Farming inputs are often distributed at the tail end of the planting season, although best practice would be to distribute them before the season to allow farmers to properly plan their use.

16. Both FAO and the CERF Secretariat collect data on the approval and funding process. For rapid response projects, all project funds should be committed within three months and all project activities completed during the following three months, starting from the date FAO receives the project funds (“disbursement value date”), which is taken to be the project start date. For under-funded emergency projects, the rule is that all project funds must be committed by the end of the approval year or June of the following year for a second tranche.

17. Based on a review of 142 projects approved from March 2006 to May 2009, combining CERF Secretariat and FAO data, project review, approval and funding are too often not as rapid as it was intended to be. The Fund’s goal was to provide aid workers with sufficient funding to jump-start operations within 72 hours of a disaster<sup>3</sup>. In practice, funds were made available on average 35 days after the first submission of a UNCT proposal to the ERC for the rapid response window, and 51 days after first submission for the under-funded window. These periods include the following stages:

- *“Fine-tuning” of the formulation:* after review of the first submission sent by the UN RC/HC, the CERF Secretariat issues comments to the country team, that, when integrated by FAO country office, result in the final submission by the RC/HC;
- *ERC approval:* once the proposal submitted by the RC/HC is deemed acceptable by the CERF secretariat, it is forwarded for approval to the ERC who communicates his agreement to the RC/HC and the FAO Director-General through a scanned, emailed letter;
- *Disbursement:* based on the proposal, a more detailed Letter of Understanding (LoU) is prepared, signed by FAO and counter-signed by the ERC in New York to allow OCHA to disburse the funds;
- *Bank transfer:* the time for funds to reach the FAO bank account.

18. Table 1 displays the average duration of these steps for the two CERF windows. On average, “fine-tuning” a project takes two weeks, ERC approval takes another two weeks, and disbursement and bank transfer yet another two weeks. However, these periods do not include project formulation and negotiations with the RC/HC at the country level, a step which can easily take another two weeks and is not yet recorded in a systematic fashion at headquarters or by country offices.

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<sup>3</sup> Jan Egeland OpEd in the Wall Street Journal, Oct 25, 2005.

**Table 1: Average durations for formulation, approval and disbursement of CERF projects to FAO (in calendar days)**

Milestones	Rapid response window			Underfunded emergencies window	Overall average
	Soaring food prices projects	Other projects	Average RR window		
Project fine-tuning (from first to final submission)	26	9	12	19	15
ERC approval (from final submission to ERC approval)	9	12	12	18	14
Disbursement (from ERC approval to disbursement)	5	7	6	7	6
Bank transfer	5	6	6	7	6
Total (from first submission to receipt of \$)	45	33	35	51	41

## Notes:

- Not inclusive of preparation and negotiations at the country level.
- Based on 142 projects approved from 2006 to 2009: 48 underfunded and 94 rapid response, 18 of which for soaring food prices.

19. The short timeframes imposed by the CERF have led FAO to shorten its delivery periods, but there is room for further progress. The Organization's access to the Fund is predicated on time-critical criteria. Unfortunately, the impressive financial and geographic expansion of the FAO emergency and rehabilitation programmes over the past decade has not been supported by a systematic institutional effort to raise operational capacity across the board at country level. In addition, the current information management systems of FAO do not permit a rapid and seamless flow of budgetary and implementation information from the field to headquarters. This hampers the capacity of headquarters to track project performance against benchmarks in real time.

### ***2.5 Partnerships and coordination***

20. While FAO emergency capacity in country is an important factor in the quality of CERF project implementation, it is not the only one. There are also issues of technical expertise. Admittedly, the need for partners with a strong field presence and technical capability is more important when the response and/or the context are complex.

21. Experienced organisations with a well established field presence tend to make better use of CERF funds. Their long-term presence and autonomous financial strength also enable them to continue to serve the beneficiaries after the CERF support is over. It is not always possible to find such partners, in particular in countries struck by a sudden disaster, but in most sample countries, FAO could rely on a useful combination of long-standing NGOs/CBOs, surveillance systems and governmental institutions to help scope, plan and deliver CERF-funded assistance.

22. Partnerships were generally an area of strength, making use of the comparative advantages of NGOs, CBOs, governments and UN organizations. Efficient execution was strongly correlated with the capacity of Implementing Partners (IPs). Some NGO partners complained about administrative deficiencies. Many sought to place the relationship on a more equal footing and stressed the importance of getting good technical support and capacity building from FAO rather than just funding. The instrument used by FAO to document and administer partnerships (Letters of Agreement) is unfit for purpose and is currently being revised.

23. Long-term partnerships forged by FAO's development work over the past decades often proved very helpful when implementing short-term emergency interventions. The most effective CERF-funded projects in the sample were those which provided surge capacity to actors with pre-existing field presence and emergency or development programmes, helping them address a particularly acute crisis or threat at a particular time.

### ***2.6 Equity and targeting***

24. In most of the reviewed projects, clear beneficiary selection criteria were stated in programme documentation and contracts with IPs. However, these criteria were often adapted at field level to take into account the perspectives and recommendations of communities. Generally these local modifications tended to weaken targeting criteria and broaden the set of eligible beneficiaries.

25. Given the short timeframe of CERF rapid response projects and the risk of bias in establishing distribution lists, the Evaluation recognizes the need for more general targeting guidelines focussed on process, especially for easily shared items such as seed or fertiliser, leaving it up to capable NGOs and communities to transparently select broad groups of deserving households at the field level. This approach would minimize tensions, be perceived as more equitable at the community level, save time in terms of planning, coordination and packaging (bulk packaging is cheaper and faster than packaging individual kits), and the result would not be significantly different.

### ***2.7 Results***

26. Based on the evidence from the eight country case studies, the Evaluation concludes that FAO used its CERF funding to provide an important humanitarian contribution to communities affected by crises through time-critical interventions geared to protect self-reliant livelihoods. Its contribution to saving lives was often indirect – the exception being zoonoses which impact directly on human health – yet fit within the CERF guidelines on how to interpret the life saving criteria. Interventions can be classified in two broad *modus operandi*:

- Pre-crisis: interventions that attempt to control the escalation of a “biological threat” to productive assets and human health, such as livestock vaccinations or locust control operations; and
- Post-crisis: distributions of farming inputs such as seed, fertilizer, tools, livestock and livestock feed to mitigate the effects of a crisis on livelihoods after it has run its course.

#### ***2.7.1 Results per type of assistance***

27. The pre-crisis *modus operandi* seems to work better for locust control than for livestock disease control, mainly on account of pesticides being storable goods with a long shelf life, and hence available faster than some vaccines. The locust control project in Southern Africa could rapidly mobilise pesticides from aging stocks in Mali using the FAO “pesticide triangulation” programme. In contrast, the vaccines for Rift Valley Fever, Peste des Petits Ruminants or Anthrax in Kenya and Lesotho had to be tendered and in some cases produced by the supplier on demand from FAO. As a result, these vaccinations arrived late in the development of the outbreak, sometimes too late to be effective.

28. Preventive control (i.e. regular vaccinations in the case of diseases, systematic surveys and control of hopper bands in the case of locusts) is generally considered more cost-effective than fighting declared outbreaks. In some of the sampled countries (e.g. red locust in Tanzania), a preventive control operation had failed to control the threat early enough and the CERF was called upon to face an escalation of the risk. As evidenced in this particular project, there is a risk that the availability of emergency assistance to control declared outbreaks may reduce developing countries’ concerns about outbreaks, and hence mollify their commitments to supporting strong, permanent surveillance and preventive control systems. However, these two approaches cannot be seen as mutually exclusive. There are synergies between strong preventive capacity and efficient emergency response. As explained above, partners with long-standing field presence and technical expertise – such as national veterinary services or regional locust control organisations – are best placed to make good use of emergency funding when a particular situation gets temporarily out of control. It is therefore crucial for FAO and its national and regional partners to maintain a robust preventive veterinary and locusts control capacity, in order to prevent crises but also to mitigate them effectively when they occur. Emergency funding from donors can never replace strong, durable preventive control systems; in fact the latter are best placed to make good use of the former.

29. The second *modus operandi* above – the replacement of productive asset lost in a disaster in an attempt to protect and/or rebuild productive, self-reliant livelihoods – functions as an insurance policy in the sense that it protects livelihoods against risks. The evidence from the case studies is that this type of livelihoods protection projects provides valuable assistance to populations in need. Therefore, a number of UN agencies (FAO as well as WFP, ILO and others), many NGOs and most prominently the Red Cross movement are increasingly investing in emergency livelihoods projects.

30. Not surprisingly, the approach works best when relevant, good quality aid is delivered in sufficient quantity, to the right people, and on time for its optimal utilisation. From the evidence at hand, the performance of CERF-funded FAO projects against these criteria was as follows:

- **Quality:** the assistance provided by FAO and its partners has generally been of good quality and well known to the farmers. Some problems occurred when the varieties / breeds / types of items distributed were not the same as those currently used in the target areas. With seed and livestock, the only reason for using new varieties not known to the target groups during a rapid response project should be that known local varieties are not available.
- **Quantity:** what FAO gives is variable but often quite small as compared to the losses incurred by beneficiaries. This is typically the case when small CERF allocations meet with the large needs generated by sudden onset disasters. On the one hand, small kits tend to reduce the impact of CERF-funded, FAO-implemented projects. On the other hand, there is a risk that too large an assistance, usually provided free of charge, may create dependency and undermine more sustainable input supply mechanisms. Farmers can often complement the assistance with seed and other inputs procured on their own. The case of Niger, where FAO has invested significant efforts and resources over the past decade to develop sustainable input shops operated by farmers organisations, is an apt example of this problem: the Evaluation

concluded that emergency assistance could undermine the input shops viability and recommended to use the shops to deliver assistance through a voucher system in times of crisis rather than develop parallel input distribution channels. Similarly, the free fertiliser distributions undertaken under soaring food prices projects benefited farmers in the short-term but may contradict the long standing position of FAO and IFIs against broad-based fertiliser subsidies and in support of more sustainable, market-based fertiliser supply systems.

- Targeting: the assistance was generally well distributed, the best performance being achieved when IPs and communities opted not to focus the assistance too narrowly on the most vulnerable households.
- Timeliness remains a problematic area, in spite of improvements brought to FAO's procurement procedures in recent years, such as increased decentralisation. FAO emergency teams tend to adopt optimistic views about the time it takes to identify, procure and distribute farming inputs and thus underestimate the time frame. The goal is generally set to distributing the assistance at the beginning of the planting season. In practice, it is often distributed during and sometimes at the tail end of the planting season. Best practice is to distribute before the season to allow farmers to properly plan their use of the inputs. Cropping calendars are highly variable even within a given target area and a finer awareness and respect of these local variations is desirable.

31. Another important criterion determining impact in emergency responses is coverage. However, most of the evaluated CERF projects formed part of a broader response involving a number of projects from a variety of donors, and the present evaluation was not geared to look at those entire responses. Hence, it is not in a position to systematically assess in all country case studies the degree to which CERF funding, usually fairly small, helped FAO reach adequate coverage of livelihood needs beyond the few thousand beneficiaries targeted by each individual project.

#### *2.7.2 Results vs. CERF criteria*

32. The evaluation TORs included questions about how well FAO assistance fits the CERF funds allocation criteria, i.e. whether FAO programmes funded by the CERF delivered time-critical assistance, whether they satisfied the CERF life-saving criterion (e.g. by reducing life-threatening coping strategies), and whether the CERF funding available to FAO for "underfunded crises" contributed to more equitable responses to agricultural emergencies worldwide. Additionally, another relevant question is whether the UFE window strengthened core elements of the humanitarian response in under-funded crises or whether it tended to support secondary interventions.

33. On the latter issue, most projects approved from the UFE window were designed to complement or upscale central, core activities of the response, as they should. Only very few of them displayed a tendency to use the UFE window to experiment with more complex approaches than RR projects (e.g. JFFLS in Kenya).

34. The results are also clearly positive as far as the time-critical criterion is concerned. The seasonality factor sets FAO apart from other recipients of the CERF. It constitutes a fundamental constraint to agricultural interventions everywhere, including but not only emergency ones, be they intended to contain an emerging crisis or to mitigate its effects. All the evaluated projects tried to address time-critical needs relative to seasons or the cropping calendar, even though not all succeeded in doing so. While for other agencies, a two week delay is simply that, for FAO, a two week delay can mean a 6 month or 1 year delay if a cropping season is missed.

35. As far as the life-saving criterion is concerned, the Evaluation concludes that protecting livelihoods does save lives, although this link is generally indirect. Crises can exacerbate resource-based conflicts (e.g. among pastoralists or between pastoralists and crop farmers). The loss of one's means of livelihood can lead to destitution, famine and/or the adoption of risky or socially unacceptable coping strategies such as getting into unsustainable debt, selling assets, theft, cattle rustling or prostitution. However, most of the communities met during the evaluation had access to potentially less risky behaviours to earn a living, such as seasonal migration in search of jobs or, in some of the areas with a strong food deficit, access to food aid.

36. Moreover, when FAO projects did evidently and directly save lives, this was perceived by local stakeholders not as the central aim of the intervention but as a side effect: e.g. the vaccinations against zoonoses such as Rift Valley Fever or Anthrax were in the mind of local actors mainly aimed at protecting livelihoods and functioning markets, even though they also saved the lives of an undermined number of pastoralists, livestock traders, meat sellers and consumers<sup>4</sup>. The central aim of livelihood protection interventions is to protect secure, self-reliant and dignified lives.

37. The life-saving criterion cannot be interpreted in a strictly literal and direct manner. The IASC and the CERF Secretariat have, through a transparent and participatory process, managed to operationalise the life-saving criterion into precise sectoral guidance delimitating what types of interventions form legitimate use of CERF funds. The resulting guidelines, entitled "CERF Life-Saving Criteria and Sectoral Activities"<sup>5</sup>, provide a list of supported agricultural interventions which the Evaluation found adequate and well prepared<sup>6</sup>. Almost all the reviewed projects fell squarely within these guidelines.

38. It is natural and appropriate that the work of FAO be considered of lesser priority immediately after a disaster than the more immediate life-saving work of relief agencies. However, once the undernourished are being fed and major health threats are brought under control, safeguarding productive livelihoods and restoring a local food production capacity quickly become priorities for national governments and affected populations. This is reflected in a broad consensus among the humanitarian community that time-critical agricultural activities with a direct and immediate impact on food availability and the livelihoods of families affected by an emergency are legitimate recipients of the CERF. The CERF criteria were meant to prevent mission creep towards recovery and keep the funds focussed on the most pressing humanitarian needs. They were not meant to limit the CERF exclusively to palliative relief operations.

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<sup>4</sup> The Government of Kenya reported 148 human deaths as a result of the 2006-2007 RVF outbreak.

<sup>5</sup> CERF Secretariat, 7 August 2007.

<sup>6</sup> The control of livestock diseases contagious to humans (zoonoses) could arguably be given more visibility in the guidelines since it constitutes the most directly life-saving form of agricultural intervention, but it is already authorized as a sub-set of livestock vaccination campaigns.

## ***2.8 Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting***

39. Substantive reports on the use of CERF funds are prepared annually at the country level by recipient agencies, consolidated by the RC/HC, forwarded to the CERF Secretariat and the ERC for quality control, and ultimately published on the CERF website. Timeliness in reporting has been improving according to the CERF Secretariat but remains an issue for all agencies. The Secretariat is not in a position to confirm the veracity of those reports independently. Consolidated CERF UN Country Team (UNCT) annual reports would benefit from more ground-truthing and peer review by the UNCTs and implementing partners. More attention to timelines (i.e. date of procurement and delivery to recipients) also appears in order, especially when reporting on rapid response projects.

### **III. Conclusions**

40. FAO provides an important humanitarian contribution to communities affected by crises by supporting their self-reliance and local food availability through time-critical agricultural interventions. Its contribution to saving lives is often (although not always) indirect but within the CERF guidelines on how to interpret the life saving criteria. FAO's reliance on CERF grants remains moderate so far and reflects a broader trend towards pool funding of humanitarian assistance. In most countries visited by the Evaluation, FAO appropriately used CERF funding in synergy with other funding tools having longer time horizons.

41. This synergy is also operational. The work of FAO in support of both development and disaster risk management over many decades allowed the Organization to forge strong links with perennial institutions and actors. As explained in previous sections, such long-term investment and partnerships with stable organisations proved invaluable to implement short-term disaster prevention or response interventions, as and when the need arose. The most effective CERF-funded projects in the sample were those that helped a group of actors with an established field presence and programmes to address a particularly acute crisis or threat requiring surge capacity for a limited period of time.

42. In spite of the limited size of its funding, the CERF represents a key financial instrument for FAO because it provides early funding, allowing a response to the most pressing needs shortly after a sudden-onset disaster or early enough during a slow-onset disaster to be effective (e.g. for locust control).

43. FAO projects funded from the CERF tend to be small, rapidly designed and follow fairly standard and simple approaches. This is appropriate for projects that must be implemented over 6 to 10 months. A few more complex projects in the sample performed rather poorly during implementation.

44. Most projects were found relevant. The only concern in terms of relevance pertains to the soaring food prices projects approved in 2008. The delivery of subsidised farming inputs for a few months will at best provide temporary relief to a small number of farmers and have a marginal impact on food prices.

45. The CERF was found very professionally managed, dependable, balancing flexibility with rigor and promoting a coherent and prioritized response to needs. It also supports the cluster approach indirectly, by giving UN agencies a small and temporary "head-start" immediately after a disaster. Proposals are quickly reviewed, approved and funded, but not as quickly as was intended.

46. FAO does not need to wait for the bank transfer to start implementing a project: as soon the project has been approved, field staff are allowed to pay for initial expenses by drawing from the FAO

SFERA advance mechanism. For rapid response projects, implementation can usually start a month or a month and a half after the disaster or crisis escalation they are supposed to address.

47. The main concern highlighted by the Evaluation pertains to efficiency and timeliness. Timeliness and seasonality, being central to livelihoods projects deserve greater attention from programme staff. They need to be better aware of the typical delivery durations to expect from various procurement approaches. They also need to take better account of local cropping calendars and how the sowing seasons may vary from one locality, elevation or agro-ecological zone to the next. Such enhanced knowledge of procurement and delivery timeframes and of local cropping calendars would allow them to deliver farming inputs before the sowing season in most locations, rather than during it as is often currently the case. It may also help them judge when catching the next cropping season is possible and when it is not.

48. Efficient and timely execution of projects was found to be correlated with FAO emergency capacity in country, which is variable: as one would expect, countries with a large emergency portfolio tend to host large, experienced emergency teams while countries with no or a small emergency portfolio have staff lacking skills and experience to design and implement rapid emergency projects. An effort to raise the capacity of regular programme country offices to manage small emergency projects is necessary. Also, FAO field staff lacks standard processes, tools and information systems to facilitate and document financial management, procurement, contracting and monitoring at the country level. While emergency procurement and contracting have increasingly been decentralised to the field, the corporate accounting, budgeting and management systems have failed to adapt. The current information management architecture does not permit a rapid and seamless flow of budgetary and implementation information from the field to headquarters. This hampers the capacity of headquarters to track project performance against benchmarks in real time. Given the progress made in recent years to improve country office connectivity, FAO should develop appropriate applications and tools that will work at the country level, connecting them with headquarters in integrated information management systems.

49. Finally, the invaluable role that FAO's implementing partners have played in the success of the reviewed CERF-funded projects needs to be stressed. Given that local capacities are key to providing timely and effective assistance to populations in need, there is some reason to hope that if FAO management and administrative capacity could be raised in a methodical and systematic manner at the country level, the Organization and its partners can implement excellent emergency livelihoods protection programmes in the years to come.

## IV. Recommendations

50. The Evaluation makes a number of recommendations, most of them addressed to FAO and a few mainly addressed to the CERF Secretariat. All of the recommendations have been discussed with concerned stakeholders. They are highlighted below:

### *Needs assessments and priority setting*

1. Building upon its development programme and long term presence in most countries, FAO should continue to mobilise knowledgeable specialists from the government, pre-existing development projects and NGOs to participate in needs assessments.
2. Time permitting and where appropriate, FAO should strive to participate in multi-stakeholder needs assessments to buttress objectivity, accuracy and transparency in identifying needs and priorities after disasters that are likely to have affected many sectors.
3. In the most disaster-prone countries, the Organization should continue to support early warning systems and/or the collection of simple livelihoods profiles and agricultural calendars developed on the basis of farmers' own knowledge initially captured at needs assessment time and further refined throughout the response under the aegis of the agriculture or food security cluster (or a similar coordination mechanism).

### *Project design and quality assurance*

4. A standardisation of CERF project technical approaches is desirable from a quality control viewpoint, following the approach developed by the Seed and Plant Genetic Resources Service. By virtue of their short duration, CERF projects must use simple and standard approaches and concentrate on replacing the most urgently needed production assets to ensure some level of food production and incomes, rather than aim at increasing food production levels as compared to pre-crisis times (see also Recommendation 20).

### *Efficiency and timeliness*

5. If confirmed by the 5-year evaluation of the CERF, seasonal delays in the approval of CERF projects, due to a large number of UFE projects to be processed at specific times in the year, deserve consideration by the CERF Secretariat with a view to "insulate" rapid response projects from this effect, i.e. ensure that the approval process for RR projects remains unaffected by delays in the UFE window.
6. Programme staff need to be better aware of the typical delivery durations to expect from various procurement approaches and should start procurement and contracting as early as possible; "pre-procurement" (starting procurement before the official project start date) should become the rule for CERF Rapid Response projects; repeat orders

are a very powerful tool for rapid delivery, when based on previous tenders that were well conducted and answered to by a sufficient number of suppliers.

7. Taking greater account, and in some countries developing a more precise knowledge of how cropping calendars change from one locality, elevation or agro-ecological zone to the next would allow field teams to better schedule delivery and provide farming inputs *before* rather than *during* the sowing season, it as is often the case currently. It may also help judge when catching the next season is doable and when it is more realistic to aim at subsequent seasons (see Recommendation 8).
8. Based on the selected procurement approach and possibilities of a repeat order or not, programme staff should make an educated guess about whether or not asking for CERF funds to “catch the next crop”. As a rule of thumb, if one can do a repeat order or sole source contract with a supplier that has the goods in stock, one should expect a lead time of one to two months from procurement start to delivery of the inputs to farmers. This lead time jumps to a bare minimum of 3 months, and more likely a period from 4 to 6 months if the procurement needs to be tendered nationally or internationally.
9. To support and manage the early response to emergency situations, the FAO development-oriented staff at country level need to acquire “emergency expertise” through the provision of an ongoing and specific awareness-raising and implementation training programme. This may require to integrate emergencies in corporate training programmes, and to devote resources either from the FAO regular programme budget or from donors to training staff and consultants at the country level on the management of emergency programmes.
10. The FAO corporate information management systems need to catch up with increasingly decentralized operations. Ultimately, the Oracle systems used by FAO for accounting, managing human resources and processing procurement orders should be expanded to support field operations, including accounting, LoAs tracking and the monitoring of procurement. As developing and rolling out these applications at the country level may take some time, an emergency operations management tool kit is required in the interim.<sup>7</sup>

### *Partnerships and coordination*

11. FAO, while upholding the humanitarian principle of neutrality, should continue to develop working relationships with governmental and non-governmental actors, with a preference for actors having long-term commitment and good community links in the targeted areas, to allow faster and more effective emergency programmes and to facilitate sustainability and the transition into subsequent recovery and development programmes.
12. FAO should include core implementing partners in the scoping, design and specification of proposed interventions more than is currently the case; FAO should

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<sup>7</sup> This recommendation is in line with recommendations 5.2 and 5.3 from the Evaluation of FAO’s Operational Capacity in Emergencies.

also support valuable projects designed directly by partners themselves, when appropriate.

13. To equalize the relationship with implementing partners, the new FAO Manual Section 507 and new partnership instrument should be completed as soon as possible and made available to operational teams.
14. Just as donors and FAO sometimes require local partners to give visibility to their assistance by putting their logos on boards or publications (“downward visibility”), FAO should systematically include the logos of its implementing partners in project completion reports and brochures to recognise the importance of their contribution (“upward visibility”).
15. Support from FAO to IPs in the form of technical assistance and training during emergency responses should ideally be conveyed by national experts with strong field experience.

### *Equity and targeting*

16. In the immediate response to a disaster, and hence in most CERF rapid response projects, targeting for asset replacement projects should focus at the village level (selection of most affected villages). In the interest of saving time and protecting cohesion/social capital at the community level at a time when they need it most, the targeted communities should be provided with the opportunity to decide how they want the proposed inputs distributed in a transparent way.
17. Just as FAO headquarters have delegated implementation for some larger procurement activities to field offices, there may be opportunities to improve the effectiveness of procurement by delegating procurement of some items to the implementing partners<sup>8</sup> or directly to the beneficiaries through a voucher system, especially when the type of inputs to supply varies significantly from one locality to the next. Experience from the pilot voucher-based distributions in Africa should be incorporated into FAO procedures and emergency operations management tool kits. However, when used in the context of a CERF project, input fairs should be kept as simple as possible, avoiding complex work-for-vouchers schemes.

### *Results*

18. FAO should always procure varieties/breeds/types that are the same as those currently used in the target areas and are familiar to beneficiaries, particularly in the emergency and early rehabilitation phases.
19. FAO and other organisations involved in livelihoods should continue to advocate, on behalf of the very communities they are trying to help, for livelihood protection as a legitimate humanitarian issue, recognising however that this line of work differs from

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<sup>8</sup> This is currently not allowed by FAO procurement rules and needs to be discussed as part of the ongoing review of the LoA tool.

palliative relief operations in that it aims to support the resilience of experienced economic actors whose technical know-how deserves respect and attention during needs assessment, selection of deliverables and timing of their delivery (see recommendations 3, 20 and 7, respectively).

*CERF-directed recommendations*

20. The “life-saving” criterion of the CERF should continue to be interpreted flexibly as a bulwark to focus the funds on humanitarian needs, including the protection of self-reliant livelihoods and food availability through time-critical agricultural interventions in accordance with CERF sectoral guidelines.
21. The CERF Secretariat should amend the narrative report format so that each and every CERF annual country report contains, per sector and for each agency, a timeline of interventions, including the dates for procurement and delivery of assistance to beneficiaries.
22. Clusters and the UNCT should be required to systematically review narrative reports and the performance of each project annually, with a view to providing some degree of peer review and improving report quality. Along the same lines and similarly to what is often the case during needs assessments, the clusters and UNCT could usefully evaluate responses and learn from the experience as a group.