

**Supporting Early Action**  
**Through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)**  
**and**  
**Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs)**

1. Humanitarian pooled funds like CERF and CBPFs (Common Humanitarian Funds (CHFs) and Emergency Response Funds (ERFs)) allow UN agencies and other humanitarian partners to have direct access to flexible, timely and predictable funding to cover critical gaps, address unforeseen needs and complement response efforts in the contexts of protracted conflict and recurrent natural disasters. Within the scope of their mandates, CERF, CHFs and ERFs also support country level humanitarian partners to initiate early action interventions to mitigate the risks of deepening crises. Early action helps to reduce threats to human lives and lessen the pressure on livelihood assets, while also reducing the longer-term costs of humanitarian response.
2. In the context of humanitarian response, early action should be distinguished from the prevention and preparedness programmes that would require multi-year development commitments, often at the institutional and policy levels, to achieve full impact.
3. Early action as it applies to humanitarian pooled funding mechanisms should not be seen as synonymous to prevention or preparedness, but rather, as supporting or promoting quick impact emergency response activities. The key term here is “emergency response” prompted by an “expected” crisis situation necessitating the humanitarian partners to act through appropriate interventions –both in terms of the timing and approach- to avert a potentially larger disaster.
4. In this regard, the Chatham House Study on *Translating Famine Early Warning into Early Action: An East Africa Case Study* published in November 2012 examined the contextual and political complexities of the 2010-2011 drought affected countries in the Horn of Africa in achieving early action. It concluded that humanitarian responses are essential to support affected populations out of protracted vulnerability, and this needs to be supported through short-term responses with a longer-term perspective. Similarly, the IASC Lessons Learning Review on Early Action and Resilience in the Sahel 2011-2012 highlighted that “early response helps to mitigate the impact of the crisis and prevents destitution and selling of assets.” In this report, it was also mentioned that, “a number of quick impact projects were highlighted that helped reduced the impact of the coming food shortage, at a relatively small cost, such as destocking and support to market gardens in Mauritania and early cash transfer in Niger. These interventions diminished the impact of the crisis and were much less expensive than later responses”.
5. Thus, for CERF, CHFs and ERFs, the intention is to support early action as a short-term, quick impact response that serves to bolster livelihoods options and strengthen capacities at the local level to monitor and develop appropriate response approaches. In doing so, CERF and CBPFs are used in a complementary manner by the humanitarian country teams to achieve a more cost-effective response.
6. For CERF, the promotion of early action and response is one of its three main objectives. While CERF does not fund prevention or preparedness activities, it does support early interventions aimed at mitigating the impact of shocks on the lives and livelihoods of crisis-affected populations. In this regard, CERF’s Life-saving Criteria allow the programming of early action elements into emergency response actions that strengthen the local actors’ capacities to react faster in the face of crises.
7. In the independent review of *CERF’s added-value of the Horn of Africa Drought Response 2011* Synthesis Report, one of the lessons learned was that “early response offers and opportunity for CERF to support innovative programming.

8. The CHFs and ERFs, being located and managed at the country level under the overall leadership of Humanitarian Coordinators, are well positioned to respond in anticipation or at the earliest stages of an emergency, therefore ameliorating the impact of natural disasters and conflict on vulnerable population.
9. The *Evaluation of the Common Humanitarian Fund* (Channel Research – March 2011), which focused on the Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sudan CHFs, highlighted the value of these mechanisms in countries that “face both long term and complex conflicts, combined with natural disasters, especially droughts (in Sudan and CAR)”. The evaluators concluded that “the CHF has indeed contributed to improvements in the humanitarian community’s ability to address critical humanitarian needs in a timely and effective manner.
10. The recent *Global Evaluation of Emergency Response Funds* (Universalia - March 2013) highlighted that “ERFs have made positive contributions to the effectiveness of humanitarian programming and leadership of the humanitarian response at the country level, (and that)... the ERF mechanism is much faster than other UN instruments and most bilateral ones.”
11. Further to these findings, this note provides recent examples of CERF-funded early action activities, which mitigated the impact of each crisis, thereby saving money in the later response (see annex below).

*CERF Secretariat and OCHA Funding Coordination Section (FCS)*  
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***ANNEX: Examples of Early Action Projects Funded by CERF***

**I. Early Action Projects Funded by CERF**

**Somalia (Under Funded Emergency in 2011):** The ERC allocated US\$15 million to Somalia in the 2011 First Underfunded Emergencies Round. In January 2011, early warning reports forecasted severe drought conditions and worsening food insecurity throughout the country but primarily in the south. In response, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) prioritized early interventions to mitigate the effects of drought through a combination of emergency response and resilience building. While the underfunded emergency allocation was decided upon in December 2010 based on funding coverage and humanitarian gaps in 2010, the HCT wisely utilized the funds for early action.

**Niger (Rapid Response):** CERF allocated \$6 million as early as November 2011 which constituted a good example of early intervention for food insecurity, based on forecasted trends of food production levels that were much lower than previous years. CERF funds allowed WFP to expand cash-for-work and food-for-work activities supporting an additional 10,000 households in the most affected regions of Tahoua and Tillabéri. WFP benefitted from an existing cash transfer programme and experienced partners but lacked the funding to swiftly scale-up cash programmes. The scaling up of this programme became necessary as a result of the looming food security crisis. The programme helped to create and restore community assets in the areas affected by recurring shocks and vulnerability and at the same time increased the urgent food stocks of the affected people prior to an anticipated early lean season. This early injection of funds helped strengthen the population’s coping mechanisms for the 2012 lean season which was expected to be difficult. Further, CERF funded blanket feeding, provision of Ready-to-Use-Therapeutic Food and distribution of animal feed contributed to the Government plan of supporting vulnerable households affected by 2011 agro-pastoral deficit. Activities were carried out in Tillabéri and Tahoua, the most affected zone by the pastoral deficit,

agricultural deficit and malnutrition. The timely provision of animal feed to some 11,000 households helped to avert livestock losses that would have seriously impacted on the livelihoods and overall food security of affected populations had an early response not been undertaken.

**Mauritania (Rapid Response):** CERF allocated \$4 million in December 2011 to support a combination of regular malnutrition emergency responses such as support of nutrition recovery centres, improvement of water quality, as well as earlier interventions to reduce the vulnerability vulnerable groups such as pastoralist communities. In particular, a de-stocking project from FAO was supported through provision of cash and training to the affected families.

**Myanmar (Rapid Response):** In April 2013, CERF provided nearly \$5 million to ensure vulnerable IDPs had appropriate and flood resistant shelter and WASH facilities prior to the monsoon season. The IDPs were displaced due to inter-communal conflict in Rakhine State and were residing in some 20 temporary camps. According to the government, and verified by a WASH cluster assessment, some 13 rural camps would experience flooding during the fast approaching monsoon season, negatively affecting some 69,000 IDPs. CERF funds supported the construction of elevated shelters for 25,000 IDPs, as well as the provision of safe drinking water and sanitary facilities for 30,000 IDPs in Myebon and Pauktaw townships.

**Lesotho (Rapid Response):** In August 2012, CERF allocated \$6.2 million to address a food insecurity crisis caused by drought and late rains. Early forecast from the Government of Lesotho and monitoring data from humanitarian partners pointed towards an alarmingly low cereal production that resulted in the vulnerability of over 725,000 people, or about one-third of the country's total population. In July 2012, a joint technical assessment mission involving members of the Lesotho UN Disaster Risk Management team and supported by OCHA identified urgent needs for the preparation of a CERF rapid response request, while a Flash Appeal was under consultation. The CERF allocation was made as the first contribution against the Flash Appeal framework, even before its official launching, to jump-start the emergency response well in advance of the next planting season in October 2012. At the same time, the interventions supported by CERF incorporated elements of resilience building of the affected population. An example was conservation agriculture coupled with technical training and inter-cropping approaches. This early and timely action proved to have made lasting effects on the improvement of the food security situation at the community and household levels.