1. Introduction

The evaluation of Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPF) has two main purposes: to improve accountability and learning, and to examine the results of the humanitarian action supported by CBPFs between 2015 and 2018, with the purpose of drawing lessons on what has worked well. It also identifies challenges to their effective functioning and provides recommendations on how to continue to strengthen CBPFs as a funding mechanism in support of timely, coordinated and principled humanitarian response for affected people. The evaluation will contribute to greater transparency and accountability for key stakeholders.

This global summary report synthesizes the findings of the country case studies, remote interviews, document review and online survey responses against the questions outlined in the evaluation matrix.

Figure 1: Map of CBPFs

During the evaluation period, CBPFs were operational in the following 18 countries: Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Nigeria, Myanmar, Pakistan, occupied Palestinian territory, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Turkey and Yemen. The Colombia fund closed at the end of 2018. The Haiti fund closed in 2015 and is not part of this evaluation.

Please note: The evaluation case study countries include Afghanistan, Iraq, occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), Somalia and South Sudan (dark blue)

[1] During the evaluation period, CBPFs were operational in the following 18 countries: Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Nigeria, Myanmar, Pakistan, occupied Palestinian territory, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Turkey and Yemen. The Colombia fund closed at the end of 2018. The Haiti fund closed in 2015 and is not part of this evaluation.

2. Approach

The team used a mixed-methods approach for data collection and analysis. The table below provides a summary of evidence sources for the evaluation.

Table 1: Summary of data collection methods and sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tools and methods</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country Participation</td>
<td>Country visits to Somalia, South Sudan, the Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt), Iraq and Afghanistan. It conducted additional remote interviews with informants in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Yemen and Syria cross-border Funds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document and literature review</td>
<td>280 documents cited in the case study reports, the inception report and this synthesis report. The evaluation drew from a repository of 5,763 documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key informant interviews</td>
<td>683 key informants participated in the evaluation - 39 per cent female and 61 per cent male.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement</td>
<td>705 community members participated in gender disaggregated focus group discussions in 20 CBPF-funded projects across the five case studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online survey</td>
<td>Stakeholders across all 18 CBPFs received an online survey available in English, French and Arabic. A total of 1,387 individuals participated, with 1,276 submitting completed survey responses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Evaluation context

Between 2015 and 2018, CBPFs have grown, both in terms of the number of donors and in the volume of contributions, increasing in size by 64 per cent (see Figure 3 below). In 2018, the funds received a total of $950 million from 34 donors. In 2018, there were 18 CBPFs; the Colombia Humanitarian Fund closed in late 2018 and the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund was launched in February 2019.

Figure 2: Total donor paid pledges to CBPFs 2015-2018[3]

During the evaluation period, Yemen was the largest fund, receiving a total of $549 million. South Sudan was the second largest CBPF in terms of funding.

4. Evaluation findings

**Evaluation question 1: Is the management of CBPFs fit for purpose and do they operate efficiently?**

While CBPFs continue to rely mainly on traditional OECD-DAC donors, they have grown significantly: from $578 million from 19 donors in 2015 to $950 million from 34 donors in 2018. This is due to the contribution they make to strengthening the humanitarian system, supporting response and enabling donors to meet Grand Bargain (GB) commitments. Early and predictable donor contributions to CBPFs are crucial to their operating, providing adequate time to prioritize funds strategically and to use them to complement other funding.

Multi-year funding to CBPFs has remained static at 27 per cent over the last two years, with a modest increase in absolute funding from $241.8 million in 2016 to $255.2 million in 2018. Between 2016 and 2018, just three donors provided 97.5 per cent of multi-year funding to CBPFs: Belgium, Sweden and the UK (the UK accounted for 63.6 per cent of the total). Given the volatility in the timing of donor contributions, multi-year commitments could assist the HC and the HFU to plan allocations better as long as they know when to expect the contributions. They also provide a degree of assurance that HFU cost plans can be funded across years. Therefore, it would be helpful if more donors provided multi-year funding.

While there has been an increase in the size of many of the CBPFs, the evaluation encountered few clear resource mobilization strategies (Somalia was the exception). OCHA’s policy is that country office resource mobilization strategies should include specific actions for the CBPF to avoid duplication of efforts and competition for funding from the same donors. However, there was little evidence of this being done systematically. This was despite the Secretary-General’s ambitious target that 15 per cent of HRP funding in a country with a CBPF should be channeled through this mechanism.

**Challenge:** CBPF fundraising lacks coherence and there is considerable scope for OCHA to more clearly outline a strategy to achieve its target of CBPFs to account for 15 per cent of HRP funding.

Donors provided consistently positive feedback on risk management, comparing OCHA favorably to other UN agencies. However, this achievement is fragile and the risks that OCHA has to manage are likely to increase as it takes over the Managing Agent (MA) responsibilities in four countries in 2020 and if aspirations to grow the funds to 15 per cent of HRP funding are realized. This underlines the need to ensure that there is adequate staffing capacity for risk management, particularly at headquarters level, both now and to accommodate anticipated growth in the future.

---

OCHA has standardized the CBPFs considerably during the evaluation period though they retain the flexibility to adapt to specific country contexts. Developed and maintained with minimal resources, the Grant Management System (GMS) has been an important tool for ensuring standardization, promoting an inclusive agenda and helping to deliver GB commitments. Given the GMS’s critical role in all CBPF processes, the lack of investment in its maintenance poses a significant risk to the smooth operation of the funds.

Figure 4: HFU and CBPF-Section staffing costs in comparison with fund size, 2015-2018

Improvements in the capacity of Humanitarian Financing Units (HFUs) during the period under evaluation, means that the funds are better placed to address challenges. However, despite the considerable growth in CBPF contributions, headquarters level capacity to support the funds has reduced slightly which, along with vacant posts, has meant that staff have been overstretched. The continuing effectiveness of the funds will require that the CBPF-Section and HFUs are consistently adequately resourced, that surge staff are available and that staff with the right skills and profile are recruited in a timely way.

Lessons: In several countries, feedback from donors and local/national NGOs (NNGOs) revealed that CBPF capacity assessments were being used as a benchmark, or a prerequisite for other donors to consider entering into funding agreements with NNGO partners. While this indicates a reassuringly high level of confidence in these assessments, it also highlights the importance of HFUs maintaining the rigor of these processes.

Lessons: In the early years of the Iraq Humanitarian Fund, HFU capacity was inadequate and, even after the gap had been identified it took too long to increase staff numbers to the required level. Being able to adequately resource new or scaled-up CBPFs is an important lesson that can be drawn from the case study.

Evaluation question 2: To what extent are CBPFs supporting partners to meet the most urgent humanitarian needs in a way that is timely and is consistent with Grand Bargain priorities?

CBPFs are broadly aligned with HRP, but they are also responsive to new needs. The evaluation found that they promote inclusive and transparent allocations to priority needs. While timeliness has improved over the evaluation period and CBPFs are often faster than many other donors, it is important to recognize the trade-off between speed and quality programming.
CBPFs have been successful in shaping the humanitarian system and have been called upon to promote a growing range of cross-cutting issues, including gender, age, protection mainstreaming, assisting Persons with Disabilities (PwD) and accountability to affected populations (AAP). While this confidence is encouraging, the weight of expectation places considerable pressure on the funds despite their limited scope to address the systemic challenges that hinder the delivery of this progressive agenda (such as partner implementation capacity or a siloed cluster structure that is a barrier to multi-sectoral programming that meets the needs of affected communities in a holistic way).

**Good practice:** The development of allocation strategies that are evidence-based and outline tightly-defined geographic and sectoral priorities increase focus, reduce the number of submissions and in so doing, can increase the efficiency and timeliness of the allocation and disbursement process.

**Challenge:** Humanitarian organizations have paid insufficient attention to strengthening their capacity to understand and integrate cross-cutting issues. All actors should make greater efforts to ensure that specialist organizations, including gender-, age- and disability-focused agencies, are adequately resourced and empowered to inform and contribute to the response. This will require time, commitment and an investment in partnership building.

**Box 1: The use of integrated responses by the Somalia Humanitarian Fund (SHF)**

In line with the revised HRP of May 2017, the SHF financed integrated responses in both its Standard Allocation and Reserve Allocations from May 2017 until 2019, allocating funding envelopes for groups of clusters as well as individual clusters. The SHF is flexible about the modalities used to deliver multi-cluster projects, such as a small number of partners working to deliver multi-cluster projects in a specific area of operation or the deployment of Integrated Emergency Response Teams for life-saving health, WASH, shelter/Non-food items and nutrition response (with the option of incorporating food security and protection depending on critical needs in the selected areas) or partners targeting the same beneficiaries with several, multi-cluster activities.

[5] Data was obtained from OCHA’s Grant Management System, September 2019.
[6] It is noteworthy that the integrated approach is a requirement for some allocations, but not for others.
With a focus on humanitarian response, CBPF projects may be as short as six or nine months in duration. However, increasingly questions are being asked about the relevance of short project timeframes, particularly in protracted crises. This is because it is difficult for partners to deliver sustainable approaches to address longer-term needs and to pay adequate attention to cross-cutting issues and establish effective systems to ensure accountability to affected persons in short-term projects with no guarantee of continued funding. The limited multi-year funding which CBPFs receive from donors makes this a challenge. Concerns also exist about the importance of balancing requests for longer-term funding allocations with the principled nature of CBPF funding, which compels funds to focus on addressing the most urgent needs. The evaluation found that fund-level decision-making on issues such as these, was generally sound.

CBPFs have achieved a balance between significantly increasing funding to local and national NGOs and maintaining a focus on funding ‘best-placed partners’; in many contexts NGOs are the best placed partners and CBPFs have supported them to deliver assistance. Funds have also promoted localization through greater NGO representation in governance and decision-making fora and some capacity strengthening. Nevertheless, practice varies considerably between funds (such as in allowing pass through of funding, setting targets for the proportion of funding for NGOs, and in the provision of training and support), and there is scope to strengthen guidance in order to promote a more consistent approach.

Figure 6: Percentage of CBPF funding allocated to NGOs by country, 2015-2018[8]

Box 2: Example of CBPF approaches to increasing support to NGOs[9]

While the South Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SSHF) has no specific policy on localization or working with NGO partners, there is clear evidence of a shift towards channeling more funding through local and national actors. Allocation strategy documents emphasize that the response should be ‘as local as possible, as international as necessary’ and make specific references to Grand Bargain commitments on localization. During the evaluation period, the SSHF had put in place a number of measures to increase NGO access to funding. One of these is favoring support for frontline activities that tend to be delivered by INGOs and NGOs. Although the SSHF has funded UN agencies to procure core pipeline items, strategy papers for specific allocations repeatedly stressed the primacy of frontline activities, stating that UN agencies will only be considered for funding of frontline projects ‘where there is a compelling justification that doing so represents best use of the limited resources available’. Other measures included a rule that prevented ‘pass-through’ funding by UN agencies or INGOs to NGOs; a lowering of the minimum grant amount for NGOs from $200,000 to $100,000; and additional weighting for NGO projects during project proposal review processes (NGO projects automatically get extra points in the scoring process).

Evaluation question 3: In what ways do CBPFs contribute to strengthening the outcomes of leadership and coordination?

Cluster staff were routinely positive about CBPFs contributing to strengthening cluster coordination by bringing partners to the table and enabling clusters to implement their strategies. CBPFs also act as an important convener for the diverse members of the humanitarian community, which has strengthened broader inter-agency collaboration.

HCs value CBPFs for strengthening their leadership and offering an operational tool for funding HRPs, filling gaps and advancing humanitarian priorities. On a few occasions, HCs have made decisions with which donors or Advisory Boards disagreed or which were not considered transparent. While these issues have been resolved, they have placed considerable strain on the fund and the respective HC. The evaluation endorses the authority that HCs have to take decisions on how funds are allocated as part of their leadership role but it also welcomes the process that has been agreed with donors to escalate significant concerns.

While CBPFs rely heavily on the HC's leadership, fund performance is also dependent on the capacity of the broader humanitarian system, and in particular, OCHA Heads of Office, fund managers and cluster coordinators. The evaluation found a strong correlation between the effectiveness of the fund and the capacity and competence of this constellation of actors, with a weakness in one affecting the performance of the whole fund. Beyond capacity, personalities, leadership styles and trust all have an important influence on how the fund works and what it can achieve. This is the factor that individual actors have the least scope to influence or control.

The evaluation received generally positive feedback about the ability of multi-hatted HC/Resident Coordinator (RC)/Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) to prioritize the humanitarian aspects of their role, but there were concerns raised about the extent to which they could access, coordinate or influence development funding. In the case study countries visited, outside of humanitarian assistance, the development aid architecture was either only partially developed or funding allocations were bilateral and, therefore, outside the influence of the HC/RC/DSRSG. This limited the HC's scope to use CBPF funding to complement other funding sources, beyond Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) allocations. Although there were a few good examples of the complementary use of these two pooled funding mechanisms, there is a clear need to strengthen guidance and share good practice.

Evaluation question 4: In what ways do CBPFs contribute to improving humanitarian response and making a difference to people's lives?

The evaluation collected strong evidence that CBPFs have contributed to providing timely, coordinated and principled assistance. While fund prioritization and allocation processes directly contribute to meeting the principles of humanity and impartiality, the principles of independence and neutrality are influenced by perceptions and actions of the broader humanitarian system.

CBPFs have made considerable progress in attempting to meet donor demands for results reporting. Nevertheless (or perhaps because of this) donor appetite for a better understanding of how CBPFs contribute to improving humanitarian
response and making a difference to people's lives continues to grow, particularly in the absence of similar reporting from other partners. Qualitative evidence gathered during the evaluation shows that the funds have contributed to saving lives, alleviating suffering and maintaining dignity though this is harder to measure because the humanitarian system generates very little outcome and impact-level data.

**Figure 7: Total affected persons targeted and reached across all CBPFs, 2015 – 2018**

![Figure 7: Total affected persons targeted and reached across all CBPFs, 2015 – 2018](image)

**Figure 8: Total affected persons reached across all CBPFs, 2015 – 2018**

![Figure 8: Total affected persons reached across all CBPFs, 2015 – 2018](image)

**Evaluation question 5: In what ways do CBPFs contribute to improving humanitarian response and making a difference to people's lives?**

Across the case studies, partners used CBPFs to fill gaps in the response as well as leading and catalyzing responses to both slow and rapid onset crises. There were examples of how CBPFs have supported early action in response to droughts in Somalia and Afghanistan. The Somalia fund is also a good example of how CBPFs can promote more sustainable approaches to humanitarian response in a protracted crisis without straying away from their mandate and into financing resilience-building activities.

[10] Data was obtained from the CBPF Business Intelligence Portal, September 2019.
[11] Beneficiary data presented in the figures in this section should be treated with caution because it contains errors of inclusion (i.e. double counting).
[12] The chart shows a reduction in the number of people reached in 2018 compared with prior years but this is due to a change in how the figures were calculated. Rather than reporting results based on the year in which the funding was allocated, the annual reports showed results reported in 2018, regardless of whether the projects had been funded in 2017 or earlier or 2018. As with the chart above, the 2018 beneficiary numbers include duplication as well.
[13] Data was obtained from the CBPF Business Intelligence Portal, September 2019.
Box 3: Making a difference to people’s lives in Somaliland – an individual story

"I used to work on rain fed agriculture. After the cyclone, most villagers left because they had lost all their crops. The village was so beautiful before the cyclone but it destroyed everything. The government found the community and saw the damage that the cyclone caused. When I heard from the Ministry of Agriculture and the village elders that ADO was going to provide assistance, I was the first to return to the village and register for the project. Before ADO arrived, we had no assistance. ADO provided $5 as cash for work so that people built a small dam or shallow well. ADO provided support based on people’s previous means of livelihood. There were three groups in the community - farmers who used irrigation (received seeds plus pumps), farmers who used rainwater (received seeds and help with a water pan) and pastoralists (received goats). They provided seeds for onions, watermelons and vegetables so that we could restart rain fed agriculture. There are 12 people in my household and I take care of my elderly mother so I am very happy that ADO has provided water for cultivation. I am very grateful to ADO."

The evaluation documented examples of CBPFs funding preparedness in conflict settings such as in Iraq and Yemen. These highlighted the challenges of predicting the impact of conflict on population displacements and humanitarian needs because of the complex range of evidence that has to be collated for informed decision-making. They also demonstrate the difficulties of balancing a response to existing unmet humanitarian needs on one hand and putting in place measures to meet and/or reduce expected humanitarian needs on the other.

Discussions with affected people revealed that recipients of CBPF-funded assistance were generally positive about its timeliness and relevance with output data suggesting the considerable role that CBPFs have played in delivering humanitarian services. However, there were weaknesses in partner capacity to understand the differential effect of humanitarian crises on different groups, particularly women. In general, women tended to be less involved in consultation processes and program design and to have less access to feedback and complaints mechanisms than men.

Box 4: The role of the Iraq Humanitarian Fund in responding to an influx of IDPs from Hawiga, Iraq[14][15]

In September 2017 military operations to retake Hawiga from the Islamic State caused massive displacement. The fifth IHF RA of $14 million was used to provide essential assistance to displaced communities. The IHF developed an allocation strategy to prioritize multi-sectoral assistance in and around Hawiga and neighbouring Shirqat. Through this allocation, 18 partners implemented 23 projects to reach over 492,000 people affected by the conflict with urgently needed shelter/NFIs, health, WASH, protection, education and MPCA.

5. Summary conclusions

CBPFs are fit for purpose to respond to the humanitarian crises of today – both in terms of funding neglected aspects of response, as well as providing life-saving assistance. They are also adaptable and able to accommodate changes in humanitarian priorities and program approaches. This includes a significant contribution to advancing GB priorities.

OCHA has invested in its management and support of the funds by strengthening the HFUs and establishing rigorous compliance and risk management procedures. However, the increase in the size of the CBPFs and the complexity of the contexts in which they operate, means that they remain fragile and there continues to be a need for OCHA to nurture and support them to ensure that they are future-ready. This will require that CBPFs learn lessons about how to prepare for crises, alongside re-asserting their humanitarian mandate to ensure they are not stretched beyond what they are able to deliver.

By keeping a focus on the delivery of principled humanitarian assistance, while using the flexibility that has been hard-wired into the funds, CBPFs can maintain their relevance in the future. However, for CBPFs to maximize their impact, the humanitarian system as a whole and the wider aid architecture need to make progress in addressing important gaps which includes overcoming sectorial silos, strengthening the delivery of cross-cutting issues, measuring outcomes and putting in place complementary funding.

6. Summary recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#1</th>
<th>Strategic leadership of Pooled Fund Management</th>
<th>IMPORTANT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem statement</td>
<td>While OCHA’s change process addressed coherence in the management of pooled funding, CBPFs and CERF continue largely to co-exist rather than cohere and there is considerable scope for OCHA to strengthen commonalities at both strategic and operational levels.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>Outline a common vision and strategy for CBPFs and CERF that maximizes effectiveness, reaffirms their role in the humanitarian financing architecture and sets out a clear path for the achievement of their expanded funding targets.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#2</th>
<th>Revise guidance and promote good practice</th>
<th>IMPORTANT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem statement</td>
<td>CBPFs exist in a dynamic humanitarian context and have themselves changed as they have sought to deliver effective assistance. These changes in humanitarian policy and CBPF practice offer important opportunities to strengthen guidance and promote good practice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>Revise global guidance and promote good practice to strengthen CBPF performance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#3</th>
<th>Global support</th>
<th>IMPORTANT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem statement</td>
<td>CBPFs have grown considerably over the evaluation period. Although fund management capacity has increased at country level, there are often critical gaps. At headquarters level, capacity has stagnated, making it difficult to provide HFUs with the strategic and operational support that they need to function effectively.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>OCHA, and the CBPF-Section specifically, should ensure it has the human resources capacity to meet the current needs of CBPFs (including for the four funds that are transitioning from UNDP) in addition to being future-proofed to ensure high quality support as the funds grow to meet the expanded funding target.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#4</th>
<th>Resource mobilization</th>
<th>IMPORTANT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem statement</td>
<td>While funding for CBPFs has increased over time, the evaluation found that CBPF resource mobilization aspirations and responsibilities lacked clarity. There is also no coherent strategy to galvanize collective resource mobilization efforts at field and headquarters levels.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>Develop a global level strategy to achieve the expanded 15 per cent funding target that outlines a coherent approach to resource mobilization. At a fund-level, ensure that OCHA country office resource mobilization strategies include a clear set of actions in order to ensure coordination and to strengthen accountability for resource mobilization.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Risk management and monitoring</td>
<td>CRITICAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem statement</strong></td>
<td>While donors regard OCHA's risk management mechanisms for CBPFs as robust, their trust could be undermined easily. OCHA must continue to ensure that it provides high quality support and guidance on risk management from headquarters level, particularly in areas where responsibilities are unclear and require clarification, or where capacity is insufficient and needs to be strengthened.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation</strong></td>
<td>The CBPF-Section should continue to strengthen its capacity and guidance to address headquarters and fund-level risks. It is essential that any changes take adequate account of the forthcoming transition in MA responsibilities as well as the aspirations for the expansion of the funds.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#6</th>
<th>Fund leadership</th>
<th>IMPORTANT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem statement</strong></td>
<td>CBPFs have been effective in shaping the humanitarian system and so are called upon to promote a growing range of cross-cutting issues and Grand Bargain priorities. While this is a sign of their success, it also presents risks as funds become over-burdened with expectations of what they can do. These challenges can become acute when the broader humanitarian system is unable to play its full role in delivering fund processes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation</strong></td>
<td>The AB, led by the HC, should play a more significant role in articulating a strategic vision for each CBPF that outlines priorities for action and moderates expectations of what the fund is able to achieve to ensure that it is commensurate with humanitarian coordination and partner delivery capacity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>