

The UN Central Emergency Response Fund one year on

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has the potential to help millions of people whose lives are devastated every year by emergencies around the world. But that potential has not yet been fully realised.

Oxfam welcomes the progress made by the CERF in its first year of performance and the positive results achieved. However, a number of significant challenges remain. Urgent improvements must be made in order for the CERF to provide a truly rapid response to sudden-onset disasters, to bridge the funding gaps in under-funded emergencies and to become a transparent and accountable funding mechanism.

Summary

Every year millions of people are affected by natural disasters and conflict. In 2006 alone, an estimated 46 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance. Yet, despite continuing reform of the global humanitarian system and increases in humanitarian funding, for many people the help they received was too little, too late, resulting in increased poverty, suffering and death.

In March 2006, the UN launched an expanded and improved Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). The CERF was meant to complement existing humanitarian funding by providing a rapid and more equitable response to crises. In 2006, the CERF committed \$259.3m (of a total of \$299m) for over 331 projects in 35 countries. This included \$182.4m for rapid response and \$76.9m for under-funded emergencies. At the December 2006 High Level Conference in New York, donors expressed their satisfaction with, and confirmed their commitment to, the CERF, pledging \$342m for 2007 (among them were 16 new donors and a growing number of non-Development Assistance Committee (DAC)¹ donors).

Oxfam welcomes the CERF as a key contribution to the reform of the international humanitarian system. However, Oxfam is concerned that, in its first year of operation and despite progress achieved, the CERF is still a long way from reaching its full potential. This briefing paper assesses the Fund's performance and impact to date and makes recommendations for improvement. The most pressing concerns are whether the CERF has the ability to provide a truly rapid response to emergencies and whether it provides truly additional funding for humanitarian response. An assessment of the limited data available shows some real successes in speeding up the humanitarian response and also some very damaging delays.

Underpinning Oxfam's assessment are surveys undertaken in all countries that have received CERF contributions, and others that have experience with UN-led humanitarian responses; interviews with donors and other humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs); and an analysis of official CERF project assessments.² Because of the limited information available, this study is not a conclusive evaluation of the CERF's effectiveness, but rather identifies initial trends and areas of concern from the first year's experience.

Field data reveals that, in many locations, CERF funding has enabled accelerated implementation of life-saving programmes. Analysis also shows that several emergencies have received more aid in absolute terms than in previous years. In particular, under-funded or 'forgotten' emergencies have benefited from the availability of extra funding. However, in cases of extreme under-funding, CERF allocations have been too small to contribute significantly to a more equitable global response.

Despite clear evidence of positive results in some areas, and signs of learning and continuing progress in the administration of the Fund, Oxfam's research also shows that in 2006 the CERF experienced serious administrative and disbursement delays both at HQ level in New York and in the field. Most often it is NGOs who respond first and best to rapid-onset disasters, providing about 80 per cent of service delivery.

However, NGOs are excluded from directly accessing CERF funding. Instead, UN agencies forward a large percentage of CERF allocations to operational agencies in the field – often with significant delays and after charging a significant administrative fee (officially limited to 7 per cent). These shortcomings significantly reduced the CERF's rapid response capacity and might well have negative medium-term consequences for the humanitarian response system as a whole. NGOs' future humanitarian responses depend on improved access to CERF resources and the continued availability of other (bilateral) sources of funding.

The research also reveals a dearth of record-keeping and evaluation, making it difficult in many cases to judge the CERF's impact. Lastly, it has proved extremely difficult to confirm whether donor contributions to the CERF have consisted of 'new' or additional funding. The fear remains that CERF contributions could be funds diverted from other, bilateral humanitarian contributions and thus undermine two of the CERF's key objectives: increasing the availability of aid, and improving results for people at risk through speedier humanitarian response.

Oxfam makes the following recommendations:

1. The CERF Secretariat and UN agencies must urgently increase the speed with which they disburse funds. Crucially, this includes onward disbursement to NGOs and other partners implementing CERF-funded projects to allow truly rapid project implementation. Member States must also consider the long-term objective to expand the CERF mandate to give NGOs direct access to CERF funds.
2. The CERF Secretariat and UN agencies must increase transparency and efficiency by standardising the inclusion of NGOs in in-country CERF decision-making and prioritisation mechanisms, drafting clear guidance for Humanitarian Coordinators and Resident Coordinators. The UN and NGOs must agree upon more effective partnerships to simplify funding relationships. UN agencies must improve their financial management structures as regards NGO allocations and funding disbursement. Overhead costs taken from CERF allocations must be commensurate with adding value and positively impacting on people in need.
3. The UN agencies and implementing partners must ensure wider and deeper impact assessment of CERF-funded programmes through better data recording and analysis. This is vital to enable an analysis of the effectiveness of the CERF.
4. Donors must increase the sustainability and predictability of funding. As the positive impact of the CERF becomes clearer and the concerns outlined in this paper are addressed, they should increase the CERF to a size of \$1bn. Donors must ensure that their contributions to the CERF are 'new' money, strictly in addition to existing humanitarian budgets.

Oxfam notes with satisfaction that many of the issues raised in this paper are already under consideration by the CERF Secretariat. Oxfam is cautiously optimistic about the ability of the CERF to improve the international response to humanitarian emergencies, provided the above urgent improvements are made.

However, the CERF alone cannot resolve all the current challenges of the humanitarian system. Moreover, it cannot be a substitute for the large amounts of long-term funding required in the poorest countries. The CERF is just one part of a much broader humanitarian reform process that is still in its early stages — a process that requires the urgent, consolidated, and sustainable support of donors and the wider humanitarian community.

1. Introduction

In 2005, an estimated 46 million people worldwide were affected by natural disasters or conflict and were in need of humanitarian emergency assistance.³ In 2005, donors committed an estimated total of US\$18bn⁴ to humanitarian assistance, signifying for the fourth successive year an increase in total humanitarian spending. 2005 also saw a surge of new, non-traditional donors of both bilateral and multilateral emergency funding.

However, global humanitarian assistance (GHA) for 2005 was exceptional; of the \$18bn contributed, an estimated \$6bn alone was driven by the relief effort following the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Despite gradual increases in GHA during the 1990s, a decline in GHA is widely predicted in 2006 and 2007. Furthermore, there are no reliable data available on how much of this assistance actually reached the intended beneficiaries, or whether it arrived when needs were most acute.

Despite a groundswell of goodwill and unprecedented levels of emergency aid and development assistance, for too many people help is frequently too little and too late. For example, in 2006 only 63 per cent of the total funding requirements for the United Nations Consolidated Appeals Processes (CAP) were met, leaving a gap of almost \$1,7bn.⁵ So-called 'forgotten' or under-funded emergencies that did not benefit from international media and donor attention received very little funding: the Horn of Africa CAP, for instance, received less than 40 per cent of requested funding and the Sudan Work Plan only 33 per cent, while in 2005 the Benin Refugee Crisis Flash Appeal received less than ten per cent of the funding it required. Before the CERF, the majority of flash appeals did not produce adequate funds to cover the initial phase of emergency operations. Statistical analysis of Flash Appeals from 2002 to 2005 demonstrates that the average (median) response provided only 16 per cent of the identified needs after one month. These shortfalls in humanitarian funding and the global imbalance of assistance effectively result in increased poverty, suffering and death. The UN argues that since the launch of the CERF, the coverage of UN CAPs increased by about three per cent, and more in the case of Flash Appeals (from 16 per cent to 37 per cent of the appeal total).

The CAP is far from an ideal measure of humanitarian need, but to date it has been the best the humanitarian community has had.

In 2006, the international aid community identified and tested a range of reform initiatives with the objective of improving performance, maximising impact, and increasing the timely and reliable flow of more effective and equitable emergency funding.⁶ At the heart of this reform agenda lay the CERF. A reform of the

funding mechanisms for humanitarian action was badly needed. Oxfam has welcomed this and other reform initiatives and is motivated to engage directly with them, both in its global advocacy and in its humanitarian response operations on the ground.

Since its inception, the CERF has made progress in setting up and/or streamlining administrative procedures and in allocating resources to rapid humanitarian response and to under-funded emergencies. In his September 2006 report to the General Assembly, the former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, claimed that the CERF had 'made great progress toward its objectives of promoting early action and response to reduce loss of life; enhancing response to time-critical requirements based on demonstrable needs; and strengthening core elements of humanitarian response in under-funded crises'.⁷

At the High Level Conference held in New York in December 2006, donors acknowledged this progress by renewing their commitments and by pledging significant extra resources. However, questions remain as to whether the CERF is sufficiently living up to its objectives and realising its full potential.

Box 1: How the CERF works

The CERF was set up in accordance with the General Assembly Resolution 60/124 of 15 December 2005 in order to promote early action and response to 'reduce loss of life; enhance response to time-critical humanitarian requirements; and strengthen core elements of humanitarian response in under-funded crises'.

It is administered by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), who is supported by a New York-based Secretariat and a 12-member Advisory Group selected from across the humanitarian community (including donor and NGO representatives). The Advisory Group does not have any decision-making power but offers expert advice and policy guidance to the Secretary-General, through the ERC, on the use and impact of the Fund.

The CERF entails a loan capacity of up to \$50m and a grant facility with a target ceiling of up to \$450m (pledges in 2005/06 amounted to \$299m and in 2006/07 to \$342m). The ERC has allocated approximately two-thirds of the Fund to rapid response and one-third to existing 'under-funded' emergencies, while maintaining a minimum reserve of \$30m (the maximum allocation for a single emergency under the rapid response window). UN agencies may apply for funding under the rapid response window in order to finance 'core life-saving' programmes in emergency situations.

Generally, needs are identified in-country by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)⁸ in consultation with cluster leads and NGOs (now referred to as 'humanitarian partnership country teams'). The relevant UN Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) applies for funding. Under the under-funded emergencies window the ERC identifies eligible countries

for grants following a statistical analysis of under-funded CAPs and consultations with the IASC and humanitarian Resident Coordinators (RC), and provides each with an allocation of funds. HCs/RCs in these countries are then asked to prioritize under-funded life-saving projects in consultation with humanitarian partnership country teams to send an application to the CERF. Resources may also be granted for emergencies without an appeal, or to severely under-funded sectors in otherwise well-funded appeals. In addition, the ERC has a mandate to identify other under-funded, or 'neglected', emergencies and to highlight specific needs. CERF funding for under-funded emergencies is allocated twice a year: in 2007, this will occur in February–March and in July–August. In exceptional circumstances the ERC may also approve ad hoc grants.

In the absence of a comprehensive impact assessment or of project evaluations, it is very difficult to conclusively verify assertions made on behalf of the CERF.⁹ Any evaluation is further complicated by the fact that CERF allocations often represent only partial funding of larger and/or longer-term projects.

Marking the first-year anniversary of the CERF on 9 March 2007, this briefing paper assesses the performance of the Fund and its impact to date, and recommends urgent issues for improvement. Oxfam has undertaken surveys in all the countries that have received CERF contributions and in others that have had experience of UN humanitarian responses. It has also conducted interviews with donors and with other humanitarian NGOs, and has examined a large number of CERF project assessments.¹⁰

The following analysis discusses the feedback received, highlighting areas of concern as well as those aspects that were understood to have worked particularly well. Given the absence of comprehensive data and the lack of common indicators, Oxfam's study does not purport to make a comprehensive or conclusive evaluation, but rather identifies some initial trends and areas of concern from the first year's experience. Its conclusions must be understood as preliminary and as a starting point for further assessment.

Furthermore, the CERF represents just one piece of a greater puzzle, i.e. the overall humanitarian reform process and the performance of the global humanitarian response. Any conclusions drawn on the performance of the CERF cannot be seen in isolation from the performance of the system as a whole.

2. Implementing the CERF

Rapid response: some progress made, but challenges remain

One key objective of the CERF is to 'enhance the response to time-critical humanitarian requirements'. According to field data provided by UN agencies and a survey conducted by Oxfam, in many locations CERF funding has enabled accelerated implementation of life-saving programmes.

- In Kenya's drought-affected north-eastern regions, for example, health, food, agriculture, and water and sanitation (watsan) projects (starting between March and May 2006) proved instrumental in strengthening an emergency response that helped some 3.5 million people. Here the mechanism is thought to have worked very effectively, despite serious delays in the disbursement of funding.¹¹
- In Timor-Leste, funds requested in early June 2006 were received by UN agencies within a few days, allowing a fast response to a rapidly increasing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The International Organisation of Migration (IOM) and UNICEF, in conjunction with local government, were able to rapidly improve living conditions in IDP camps around Dili and distribute rice rations to the districts of Baucau, Liquisa, Ermera, and Bobonaro.
- In Darfur, food security was identified as a priority in May 2006 and cereal rations were restored to IDPs in June before the rainy season. This was despite disbursement delays.

However accelerated implementation was not always achieved through the rapid disbursement of funds. Often it depended on the ability of UN agencies or implementing partners to pre-fund or borrow on the basis of promised CERF allocations.

Field data reveal an element of learning and improvement in the speed of disbursement, as the CERF Secretariat became more established, processes were standardised, and field agencies became more familiar with the mechanism.

- Sudan provides one example of how the disbursement of funds has speeded up. The first allocations to Sudan took an average of 48 days to be disbursed to UN agencies assisting over 200,000 IDPs in Darfur (including 100,000 in

camps around Gereida in southern Darfur) and some 14,000 Chadian refugees in the border towns of Azaza and Galu. A second allocation took only a week.

- Kenya provides a similar example, with rapid-response funding after the floods in November/December 2006 being approved and disbursed very swiftly. In contrast with the CERF's drought relief funding in Kenya, UNICEF reported that approval was given for \$1m of funding for flood-related programmes within 24 hours, and that the CERF Secretariat disbursed funds within a week.

Despite such positive feedback, field data also reveal ongoing significant flaws in the speed of disbursement of funds and the start of projects. This is true of both the original disbursement to UN agencies and of the subsequent onward disbursement of these funds to implementing partners. In many cases, UN agencies further disburse funding to a national or international NGO, or to a national government institution. It was impossible to obtain conclusive information on the amount of onward disbursement worldwide. However, CERF field data from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Liberia show that onward allocation to NGOs can be as high as 70 per cent of CERF allocations to specific local areas or as low as under 1 per cent. In the DRC of the \$38m allocated by the CERF, up to February 2007 64.3 per cent was disbursed to NGOs or government agencies. In Liberia, 19 out of 23 projects (83%) that were approved for CERF funding were NGO projects. The majority of the projects were chosen from the CAP Midyear Review 2006.

NGOs often have greater operational capacity in the field and invaluable local knowledge, putting them in a better position than UN agencies to respond rapidly to an emergency. However, field data show that onward disbursement of CERF funds is all too often extremely slow and inefficient. For example, Oxfam's survey showed lengthy delays in the onward disbursement of CERF funds in the DRC. Data received from the CERF Secretariat on Liberia also shows delays in onward disbursement to NGOs as much as some UN agencies' effort to speed up the process of disbursement.

In many instances delays were caused by other elements of the international humanitarian system, and not by the inefficiency of the CERF *per se*. Often delays were due to the time-intensive and challenging process of carrying out adequate needs assessment and prioritisation exercises. In other cases they were due to insufficient partnership agreements between UN agencies and

NGOs. At times they occurred because of cumbersome work processes within UN agencies.

In some cases much time was lost between the first reporting of the crisis, submission of applications to the CERF, and the start of field programmes. Sudan (which has received several grants under both of the CERF's funding windows) is one of the most striking examples. In early 2006, the worsening security situation in Darfur required an immediate response to kick-start some of the projects included in the 2006 Sudan Work Plan and to complement others. Although an application for CERF funding was submitted in May and approved shortly afterwards, the CERF Secretariat only disbursed funds to UN agencies in the field in July. On average, the time lag between the date of application for CERF funding and disbursement of funds to UN agencies was 43 days in Sudan, 45 days in DRC and 58 days in Liberia.

In other cases, the allocation of funding was made shortly after applications were received, yet it took far too long before the necessary Letter of Understanding (LoU) was completed and/or funds were disbursed. In Somalia, for example, disbursement delays to UN agencies varied in length between 14 and 96 days (counted from application to disbursement). This had potentially extremely harmful implications for the up to 2.1 million people in need, particularly in the drought-affected areas of central and south Somalia. In other cases, such as in Chad, UN agencies reported long delays between allocation and disbursement, yet once the LoU was signed, the funding was received within a few days. Where records of onward disbursement to implementing agents are available, they often show even greater delays.

Funding was sometimes received only after the local situation had changed significantly or when the height of the crisis had passed. In Kenya, for example, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) received its second disbursement of rapid-response funding in June 2006, four months after the worst of the drought in the north-east of the country. Apart from this delay, however, most of the disbursements occurred between March and May and, as a result, most UN agencies and implementing partners, including Oxfam, reported positive feedback on using CERF funds to respond quickly to Kenya's drought in affected areas.

It is to be hoped that, with the recent CERF standardisation of administrative processes, adjustment of field-based UN agency accounting systems, and vigorous training of UN field staff and NGOs, the process of disbursement will speed up in the near future.¹² However, even if funding is speedily disbursed from the CERF Secretariat to UN agencies, significant delays still remain at the field level as UN agencies forward funds to implementing partners. These administrative delays undermine capacity for

rapid reaction and project implementation, and also undermine the effectiveness of the CERF as a rapid-response funding mechanism.

On the basis of existing data, it is not possible to comprehensively or conclusively assess the degree to which the availability of CERF resources has accelerated programming or how many recipients have benefited from it. However, it is clear that if the CERF is to improve the speed of humanitarian response, and not just provide an additional pot of money for UN agencies, its rapid response capacity must be greatly improved. In particular, as a large number of CERF-funded projects are implemented by non-UN agencies, it is vital that the disbursement and onward disbursement of allocations to implementing partners are greatly accelerated and simplified.

Oxfam would be happy to make a full table entailing details on case study project allocation, disbursement and implementation available to interested researchers.

Is enough aid reaching those in the greatest need?

In 2006, several emergencies received more aid in absolute terms than they did in previous years; in part, this was because of the new CERF. In 2006, the CERF committed \$259.3m (of a total of \$299m) for over 331 projects in 35 countries. This included \$182.4m for rapid response and \$76.9m for under-funded emergencies. Evidence shows that under-funded emergencies benefited from the availability of extra funding. For example, in Somalia CERF allocations made possible life-saving projects in the health, water and sanitation, and livelihoods sectors.

In some cases, the provision of CERF funding and the recognition that went with it may have acted as a catalyst for increasing the overall availability of funding from other sources (though there is limited evidence to sustain this argument). CERF funding also filled critical gaps and ensured the continuation of programmes in places such as the DRC, Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan, and Chad.

However, in cases of extreme under-funding, CERF allocations were too small to cover existing needs. This was the case in Chad and the DRC, the latter of which suffered an enormous gap of more than \$342m, or 51 per cent, between funds requested in the CAP and those received in 2006 (although DRC was the largest allocation from the CERF to any one country at \$38 million in 2006).

There remains a very valid concern that significant amounts of funding (officially seven per cent) are being withheld by UN

agencies as overheads and are therefore not being translated into new and better programmes to benefit people in need. This is exacerbated as UN agencies 'outsource' CERF-funded programme implementation to other agencies, including NGOs, which then also charge for overhead costs (again officially up to a maximum of seven per cent). This could effectively result in double or triple (if CERF Secretariat overheads are taken into account) overhead costs subtracted from CERF allocations.

Most importantly, protracted long-term emergencies such as those in the DRC and Niger cannot effectively be addressed by short-term relief programmes. They require consistent and broad financial and political support and leadership that addresses and helps to improve the entire system, from health care and social welfare to food security. CERF funding can, however, highlight the plight of these countries and bridge crises in the short term through the provision of 'seed' funding. This would be in the hope of identifying more profound and longer-term financial and political solutions.

A fully funded CERF of \$500m would comprise only between 1.7 per cent and 3.7 per cent of global humanitarian funding.¹³ The CERF alone clearly cannot address the global shortfall in humanitarian funding. The UN reports that on average CERF funds increased coverage of UN Consolidated Appeals in 2006 by about 3 per cent, and more in the case of Flash Appeals (from 16 per cent to 37 per cent).¹⁴ However, the average shortfall in appeals is many times that figure.

To adequately address this significant funding shortfall and to prevent the continued loss of lives, donors must significantly raise their contributions and address gaps such as that frequently arising between relief and development responses. They should aim to increase the size of the CERF to the UN's requested \$500m. This funding must be provided clearly in addition to, and strictly not as a replacement for, existing humanitarian funding commitments. As the positive impact of the CERF becomes clearer through more effective impact assessment, and the key challenges outlined in this paper are addressed, donors should increase the CERF to a size of \$1bn.

Box 2: DAC donors must step up to the mark

Increasing the CERF to a target size of \$1bn is not unrealistic. Doing so would require a contribution of roughly \$1.14 per person in 'rich countries' (Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries). In order to achieve this, donors not yet contributing to the fund, or contributing relatively small amounts, such as the USA, Japan, Italy, Austria but also Germany and France and petroleum exporting states must step up to the mark.

By comparison, military spending in DAC countries, at approximately \$752.8bn in 2005, translates into roughly \$857 per capita (based on a DAC population of 878.5 million).

At the same time, Oxfam calls on the new ERC to continue to interpret his allocation mandate broadly, with a view to spending the maximum possible amount of the CERF each year. Once the Fund grows beyond the mandated \$500m, the allocation model that provides two-thirds for rapid response but just one-third for under-funded emergencies should be reviewed.

Furthermore, it is vital that OCHA, UN agencies and NGOs urgently work together to improve collective needs assessments that provide accurate measures of humanitarian need in different settings and improve impact assessments to establish to what degree measured need has been met. This is vital in order to ensure that humanitarian responses respond to needs (including CERF funding allocation) and to ascertain the effectiveness and positive impact of the CERF.

'New' money?

It is difficult to determine from national Official Development Assistance (ODA) and humanitarian budgets whether or not donors' CERF contributions represent 'new' or 'old' money. Oxfam defines new money as funds that are additional to other humanitarian contributions. In order for the CERF to be an effective funding mechanism, donor contributions must comprise 'new' money. Sweden, the United Kingdom (in 2006) and Norway – three of the largest donors to the CERF – have indicated that all money pledged to the CERF is 'new' money.¹⁵ Funds from Ireland, another major donor, have also been contributed in addition to other humanitarian contributions, while the Netherlands, another key donor, has indicated that 50–75 per cent of its funding is additional to current Dutch humanitarian aid levels.¹⁶ The 2006 contribution from the United States, however, is not considered to be entirely new money. As the CERF is designed to complement, not replace, other humanitarian funding sources, it will not be as effective in addressing humanitarian need if

contributions are made to the detriment of other, bilateral humanitarian contributions. Recycling 'old' money into the CERF compounds the legitimate concern of some NGOs that the CERF adds an unwarranted layer of bureaucracy and overhead costs. It would undermine one of the CERF's key objectives: providing additional resources to under-funded crises and programmes.

Inclusiveness

CERF decision-making is essentially a top-down process, granting significant influence to the ERC and Humanitarian Coordinators. While field data reveal some evidence of the CERF improving UN inter-agency co-ordination (e.g. in the Horn of Africa) and UN agency/implementing partner co-ordination (e.g. in Liberia and Mozambique), feedback also provides ample evidence of frustration at its hierarchical nature and implementing agencies' lack of direct access to funding. No direct funding relationship exists between the CERF and NGOs or local government, thus excluding a significant amount of humanitarian (rapid) response capacity from direct access. Instead, with varying degrees of intensity, NGOs participate indirectly, via their involvement in field-based co-ordination or prioritisation mechanisms.

Furthermore, UN agencies disburse a significant amount of CERF funding to implementing partners, although currently it is impossible to identify the exact amount of funding provided to NGO-led projects. This results in several layers of overheads. It also risks defeating the objective of rapid response, as CERF allocations have to jump several administrative hurdles before project implementation can commence.

The table below shows the number of NGO partners that had received CERF funds through UN agencies by July 2006 (there are currently no data available on the number of implementing partners for the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The data were drawn from UN agency reporting matrices, as listed on the CERF open source website between March and July 2006.¹⁷

Table 1: Number of NGO partners receiving CERF funds through UN agencies (to July 2006)

Agency	WFP	UNICEF	UNHCR	WHO	IOM
National NGOs	17	26	4	3	3
International NGOs	28	30	8	3	—
Total	45	56	12	6	3

Source:

<http://ochaonline2.un.org/Default.aspx?alias=ochaonline2.un.org/cerf>
(accessed by the authors between October 2006 and February 2007).

Several representatives of international NGOs who responded to our survey voiced frustration regarding the central role of UN agencies, which they saw as cumbersome or less effective in responding rapidly to a deteriorating situation. Moreover, many were frustrated at being relegated to a status of ‘junior’ implementing partner. Of greater concern might be the lack of direct access to CERF funds and decision-making by local NGOs and government. In particular, in protracted crises local public mechanisms play a primary role; their intervention is sometimes more effective and often more sustainable than that of international agencies, whether UN agencies or NGOs.

Several donors and NGOs have stated their concern regarding the lack of direct NGO access to CERF funds. Some have called for a change in the CERF’s mandate to enable direct NGO access or, alternatively, for pre-approval of selected NGOs to fast-track their applications for CERF funding and for a fixed percentage of CERF funds to be pre-allocated to NGOs. Beneficial as such reforms would be, the current political dynamics in the General Assembly appear to make it unlikely that such a change would be approved in the short term. Oxfam therefore believes that, at the same time as advocacy towards this goal is pursued, all stakeholders should also focus on the administrative and operational changes needed to provide maximum benefit for beneficiaries under the current system.

Keenly aware of the shortcomings presented by the exclusion of NGOs and the still-limited speed of onward disbursement, the CERF Secretariat is currently testing various innovative funding mechanisms to increase the participation of NGOs. Examples include allocating funding directly through cluster leads (which are also UN agencies), as in Liberia, or pre-positioning funds using the Rapid Response Mechanism, as in the DRC. Oxfam strongly supports efforts towards a more inclusive and flexible CERF. Mechanisms of this nature should be further developed

and strengthened until such time as direct NGO access to CERF funds can be negotiated. NGO/UN agency partnership agreements also need to be strengthened and simplified. The CERF's Advisory Group must urgently address the question of reasonable overheads for both the 'pass-through' agency and the implementing partner.

Predictable funds

Field data suggest that the availability of CERF resources has increased the predictability of funding in some contexts and therefore has facilitated humanitarian programmes and rapid response. Positive feedback was received in particular from Timor-Leste, Kenya and Sudan. In some cases anticipated funding allowed agencies to respond rapidly and to jump-start or maintain programmes even before monies were disbursed.

However, field agencies also suggested that the nature of CERF allocations – which are inherently small and short-term – limited predictability and utility. CERF allocations could only be supplemental to ongoing programmes or in the nature of a 'bridge' until further and longer-term funding could be secured. CERF funding was not sufficient or long-term enough to support substantial programmes that addressed the causes of protracted crises – rather, it led to 'quick fix' projects. Some agencies also criticised the relatively rigid implementation timeline, as this prohibited responses to rapidly changing environments. Such programming is particularly difficult in protracted crises or in complex and volatile areas of operation. This reinforces the need for the CERF to complement, rather than be a substitute for, other humanitarian funding.

Prioritisation

Many responses to Oxfam's field survey suggested that existing prioritisation mechanisms such as the UN's cluster approach and pooled funding¹⁸, though time-intensive, benefited common agenda-setting and needs assessment. As a result, these mechanisms facilitated the comparatively speedy disbursement and implementation process of CERF allocations. They may also have contributed to more accurately targeted and more flexible aid based on local needs assessment.

In September 2006, the report of the UN Secretary-General came to the same conclusion, and highlighted the complementarity of the various reform mechanisms.¹⁹ Field data also stress that prioritisation processes have in some cases facilitated the participation of NGOs and have strengthened transparency,

institutional understanding, and lessons learned. While NGOs are excluded from CERF decision-making processes, HCs and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee frequently base their requests and allocations on a relatively inclusive prioritisation process that includes NGOs.

However, the inclusiveness of prioritisation mechanisms is highly dependent on the personality and professional experience of individual HCs and on the nature of the emergency. Not all NGOs are able to engage meaningfully with these mechanisms, due to capacity constraints; nor do all NGOs or donor agencies choose to participate. This could be for reasons of independence, efficacy, maximising control, or even speed of response. The system therefore benefits larger, usually international organisations and tends to exclude small and, in particular, local organisations.

Prioritisation mechanisms are inherently undermined by a lack of standardisation, comprehensive data, common indicators, criteria for the allocation of funding and transparency of information flows. Furthermore, they do not exist in all countries that have received CERF allocations.

In order to improve the response capacity of the CERF, these prioritisation and needs assessment mechanisms should be further strengthened, broadened across other areas of operation, and standardised. In order to strengthen their complementarity, their administrative requirements should be simplified and harmonised. This would ease the administrative burden on country teams and on implementing partners.

Transparency, administration, evaluation

While initially administration of the CERF was deemed to be slow and complicated, it has shown signs of significant improvement over the past 12 months. The CERF Secretariat has streamlined, and in many cases standardised, processes. For instance, agreeing on a LoU to enable the disbursement of funds originally caused long disbursement delays for a number of UN agencies in the DRC and Côte d'Ivoire, among other countries. With templates now on the web, the process has been simplified and standardised. Moreover, field staff are being trained to raise awareness and understanding of the CERF. Furthermore, up-to-date data on project level disbursements to all countries is now publicly available on the CERF website. All of this should result in simplified application procedures, decision-making, and disbursement.

While field data indicate a degree of ignorance and misinformation regarding the CERF, they also indicate clear signs

of learning, as individuals and organisations become accustomed to the new mechanism.

Of great concern are the lack of mandatory and comprehensive project impact assessments and evaluations. The burden of reporting and evaluating has been placed on UN agencies and, depending on their contracts with implementing partners, to some extent on NGOs. There is no standardised reporting system, nor have common indicators been identified. The CERF internal interim evaluation set for 2007 is expected to look at the establishment of a performance management framework. However, meaningful impact assessment depends on agencies' willingness to provide standardised data at the project level. It has been argued that any more burdensome reporting requirements might reduce the speed of project implementation. With some significant exceptions, donors have so far officially shown little interest in monitoring how their money is spent or whether it achieves its objective in addressing humanitarian need. For the time being, the majority of donors seem satisfied with CERF reporting and await the forthcoming external evaluation.

The CERF Secretariat and recipient UN agencies will have to make a comprehensive effort to improve data recording and impact assessment in order to ascertain if objectives are being achieved.

Impartiality and equity of resource allocation

*According to the NGO Development Initiatives: 'In spite of the manifest support throughout the global community for the principle of adequate and equitable humanitarian assistance, there is still a huge disparity between the funds made available for different situations. As measured by the CAP, only one-third of needs were met in the five least-funded emergencies, compared with over three-quarters in the five best-funded emergencies.'*²⁰

While it can by no means be expected to completely solve this problem, the CERF is meant to help address funding imbalances, and has done so in several cases, including in the DRC, Zimbabwe, and Sudan. However, it has not tipped the global balance towards a more equitable response.

When supporting the CERF, donors relinquish control over their contributions to the ERC and HCs. In theory, this increases impartiality on the basis of funding criteria. However, many donors and implementing agencies have questioned the clarity and utility of the CERF's funding criteria. Furthermore, the system grants significant influence to the ERC and HCs in allocating resources with limited, formalised checks and balances. This is of some concern given the frequent multi-hatted nature and multiple responsibilities of HC posts (e.g. lead on prioritisation

mechanisms, such as pooled funding or clusters, CERF, CAP, etc.) and quite varied levels of experience and expertise in humanitarian issues. It raises even more questions within an integrated mission in which HCs may also have political and military responsibilities.

This further highlights the need for greater and more formalised inclusiveness of all stakeholders and, for example, for standardised involvement of clusters and sectors in prioritisation exercises and in decision-making. The UN and the CERF Secretariat must further develop detailed guidelines on the allocation of resources for under-funded emergencies. UN Humanitarian Co-ordinators must be held to account for effective leadership of a prioritised humanitarian response based on clearly assessed needs. Lastly, UN efforts at strengthening and reforming the pool of experienced HCs must be strongly supported and accelerated.

3. Donors and the CERF

With CERF pledges for 2007 already reaching \$343m, and a total of \$400m expected, the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is moving closer to its goal of a total fund of \$500m. While Oxfam recognises that this is a great improvement on the contributions for 2006 (\$299m), it is still a long way from covering the shortfall in the global response to humanitarian need.

At the latest High Level Conference on the CERF, held in New York in December 2006, 16 new donors and a growing number of non DAC countries made pledges for 2007. Even CERF recipients (namely Lebanon, Timor Leste, Indonesia, Philippines and Djibouti) pledged funds for 2007 in order to acknowledge the CERF's success. Traditional donors welcomed these new additions and stressed the CERF's quality of strengthening donor co-ordination. However, a number of wealthy, influential donors were noticeably absent. Austria, Italy, the United States, Canada, Japan and petroleum-exporting states have yet to make a pledge to CERF. The CERF Secretariat also failed in attracting significant donations from private donors. And some members criticised the absence of the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO). Many donors deemed the political and financial support of more donors and a commitment to close co-ordination crucial in assuring the Fund's future success.

ECHO contends that its unique operational capacity enables it to respond to rapid-onset disaster at least as quickly as, or in fact quicker than the CERF. ECHO funds non-UN projects and

programmes directly (for example between 50-60 per cent of its operational budget is directly allocated to NGOs), increasing the speed and inclusiveness of the response to rapidly deteriorating situations. ECHO also has a clear approach to needs assessment and strong principles regarding project impact assessment. Its budget is drawn from member states contributions and is unlikely to grow significantly over the next three years. Investing in the CERF would thus, ECHO argues, simply establish an additional layer of bureaucracy. ECHO contributions to the CERF could also not be deemed 'new' money as they would be drawn from its existing humanitarian budget.

In order to take full advantage of ECHO's unique experience and ways of working, Oxfam believes that ECHO's independent funding for emergencies should be upheld and that ECHO should not be pressed to contribute to the CERF under the present circumstances. However, in-country co-ordination between the CERF and ECHO is necessary and will have to improve to prevent duplication and the funding of multiple short-term micro projects. The EU should furthermore use its substantial international leverage to urge non-traditional donors to fully engage with the ongoing reform process, including the CERF. It should help the UN to engage with, for example, states in the Middle East that not only have the financial resources to support the CERF, but are also situated in a region that has already benefited from CERF funding and is likely to do so in the future.

Predictable contributions

The predictability of funding is vital to the success of the CERF. Only financial commitments over a number of years will secure long-term, predictable funding. Thus far, only the UK, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, Netherlands, and Ireland have made multi-year commitments to the CERF. Canada has made a statement that it will make multi-year commitments once it is satisfied with the organisation, structure, and management of the Fund. A number of other important donors, e.g. Germany, are or claim to be constrained by domestic legislative restrictions that prevent multi-year financial commitments. While the UN expects existing donors to renew their pledges in the coming years, this cannot be taken for granted, and further efforts must be undertaken to guarantee multi-year commitments or an alternative solution to sustainable funding in the future.

Are rich countries contributing their fair share to the CERF?

The disparity in donor contributions is striking. This is especially evident if donors' contributions are compared with their gross national income (GNI). In the following table, Oxfam has calculated what each rich country's contribution should be, based on its share of GNI, in comparison with what it has actually pledged, if the UN is to reach its target of a CERF totalling \$500m. Oxfam has chosen DAC donors, excluding ECHO, for this study.

Table 2: Rich countries' fair share of CERF funding (listed by actual funding pledged)

DAC country	Actual funding pledged (\$m)	Fair share of total funding required (\$m) (of \$500m)	Actual share of fund as % of fair share (\$500m)
United Kingdom	83.23	34	245%
Norway	57.00	4	1,377%
Netherlands	53.30	9	593%
Sweden	52.00	6	934%
Ireland	26.00	3	1,036%
Spain	19.95	17	121%
Denmark	8.80	4	228%
Switzerland	8.38	6	136%
Australia	7.91	10	80%
Finland	6.67	3	226%
Germany	6.65	43	16%
Luxembourg	5.32	0.5	1,182%
Belgium	2.93	6	52%
France	1.26	33	4%
New Zealand	1.00	2	63%
Portugal	0.26	3	10%
Austria**	0	5	0%
Canada*	0	16	0%
Greece	0	3	0%
Italy**	0	26	0%
Japan*	0	75	0%
United States*	0	195	0%

* Has either pledged or contributed in 2006, or has expressed an intention to contribute in 2007.

** Has neither pledged nor contributed funds in the past.

Source: Oxfam GB, 2007.

The large funding discrepancies between traditional donors are clearly evident. 2007 was the United Kingdom's second year as the largest financial supporter of the CERF, while Norway topped the 'fair share' list. Also contributing over 10 times their fair share

were Luxembourg and Ireland. What this survey illustrates is the widespread support for the CERF and the consistently generous donors in Scandinavia. However, it also shows the exceptionally poor support of several key donors, for instance the USA, Japan, the petroleum exporting states and several EU nations, with Italy, Austria but also Germany and France the obvious examples. Europe overall has been the most significant regional donor.

At the time of writing, a number of important donors had not yet announced their contributions for 2007. Their absence from the pool of donors is politically significant and does not go unnoticed by others. The US, Japan, and Canada have indicated that they may pledge funds in the future.

Donor assessment of CERF to date

Most donors recognise that the CERF is integral to the UN humanitarian reform agenda and consistent with good humanitarian donorship objectives of achieving efficient, principled, and accountable humanitarian assistance. The overall response to date has been positive with regards to the performance of the Fund. While the CERF may not have reached its optimal level of performance in its first year of operation, most donors are pleased with the advances made and are optimistic about its future operational capacity. As a result, at this stage many are reluctant to criticise the mechanism and are instead waiting for an official evaluation of its effectiveness.

As part of this study, Oxfam had informal discussions with a number of donors including representatives of Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Japan, the Netherlands, Germany, the United Kingdom and the USA. From these interviews and information from the December 2006 High Level Conference, the following themes have been identified as key concerns for donors in 2006/07. Most of these issues have been raised by donors and NGOs alike.

Timeliness

As already mentioned, administrative and disbursement delays have been a concern for many actors, including donors. However, a number of the administrative hurdles have now been removed or reduced. It is hoped that this will prevent some of the lengthy disbursement and project implementation delays experienced in 2006.

Nevertheless, speed of response will continue to involve the balancing of competing interests. Some donors surveyed felt that speed should never compromise transparency or inclusiveness, in either the prioritisation process or the response to emergencies. Others were less convinced of this and favoured ensuring a rapid

response to humanitarian need – one of the CERF's key objectives. This balance will need to be negotiated and monitored in 2007. It is to be hoped that improvements in the area of prioritisation and co-ordination, and new CERF mechanisms strengthening inclusiveness of NGOs, in the future will allow the balance to tip in favour of speed.

Inclusiveness

Several donors have also voiced concerns regarding the limited or 'secondary' role of NGOs in the CERF, which brings into question the Fund's effectiveness in the field. While most parties agree that NGOs must be involved in the prioritisation process, there is disagreement as to their role beyond this level.

Preventive action

While the CERF is seen to have performed well in responding to neglected and rapid-onset crises, it has been weak on preventive action. Indeed, preventive action is not a direct CERF objective. However, a number of donors felt that, particularly in crisis-prone areas and in ongoing emergencies, it is just as important to prevent further problems as to respond to the immediate crisis. Other donors stated that the CERF should stick to its original mandate, as other mechanisms were designed and better placed to undertake preventive action.

Impartiality of funding allocations

To date, approximately 59 per cent of the CERF's rapid-response commitments, and all but one of its commitments for under-funded emergencies, have been for countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Some donors have questioned the impartiality and equity of this allocation, despite the clear evidence provided in CAP statistics. The prominent role of the ERC and the criteria used for funding allocations have also been called into question. This issue requires further negotiation and a tighter definition of allocation criteria.

4. Progress achieved, but serious challenges remain

The CERF has the potential to significantly improve the way the world responds to rapid-onset conflict and natural disasters, but experience to date shows that it is a long way from reaching its full potential. The Fund's first year of operation shows both this potential and these challenges.

It is too early to make a comprehensive assessment of the CERF's impact on those in need. This will require a full impact analysis, which demands much better data recording at field and headquarters level as the Fund develops, and is beyond the scope of this paper.²¹ Nevertheless, Oxfam notes that much has been achieved over a relatively short period of time in establishing and improving the Fund. The CERF has achieved positive results in several locations and Oxfam is cautiously optimistic that it will increase and improve the humanitarian response, provided its remaining shortcomings are addressed.

In order for the CERF to ensure that it meets its objective of improving rapid and predictable responses to disasters, there is an urgent need for the following actions.

1. The UN (the CERF Secretariat and UN agencies) must increase the speed and predictability of disbursement.

Equally important is the speed of onward disbursement by UN agencies to NGOs and other implementing agencies. In order to achieve this, the UN must:

- Identify and agree upon more effective partnerships with implementing agencies; increase and standardise the inclusion of NGOs in in-country prioritisation mechanisms and CERF decision-making by drafting clear guidance for HCs and RCs on this matter and holding them accountable to it; and simplify NGO access to CERF funding. Member States must consider the long-term objective to expand the CERF mandate to give NGOs direct access to CERF funds. Until this can be agreed upon, other more direct funding relationships need to be developed to increase the speed of disbursement to NGOs and other implementing partners. The objectives must be both to speed up the rapid response to emergencies and to reduce administration costs. For instance, CERF resources could be allocated and disbursed by HCs (with the administrative support of OCHA or UNDP) -- as it is done in countries that have pooled funding mechanisms. Alternatively, the CERF Secretariat could broaden the present pilot programme of allocating pre-funding to selected agencies to enable a truly rapid response mechanism (as currently piloted in the DRC and through the Humanitarian Response Fund for the floods in Somalia).
- Continue standardising and simplifying the administration of the CERF. This includes speeding up the allocation and particularly the disbursement of funds, reducing transaction and administrative costs at HQ and field level making overhead charges commensurate with

adding value and improving the response to people in need, further increasing the transparency of allocation of funds and application procedures, and vigorously training staff up to and including HC level.

- Establish more detailed criteria for the identification of under-funded emergencies and the allocation of CERF resources in order to increase predictability and impartiality.

The new ERC should continue to interpret his allocation mandate broadly, with a view to spending the maximum possible amount of the CERF each year. Once the Fund grows beyond the mandated \$500m, the allocation model of two-thirds for rapid response and one-third for under-funded emergencies should be reviewed.

2. Donors should increase the sustainability and predictability of funding.

- Donors need to make significant, long-term and sustainable commitments to the CERF, without borrowing from existing humanitarian funds.
- Donors should commit themselves to increasing the CERF to the total of the UN's requested \$500m. In due course, and as the positive impact of the CERF becomes clearer, donors should increase the size of the CERF to \$1bn.

3. The CERF should complement other reform initiatives.

- The UN Secretariat should standardise the inclusion of NGOs within prioritisation mechanisms that underlie the pooled funding approach, the cluster approach, and the CERF by drafting clear guidance for HCs and RCs on this matter and holding them accountable to it.
- In order to better co-operate with such prioritisation and needs assessment mechanisms, agencies (including NGOs) need to build in-house capacity and support increased transparency and improved exchange of information.

4. The UN should ensure wider and deeper impact assessments of CERF-funded projects.

- The CERF Secretariat, UN agencies and implementing agencies must improve data recording and project evaluation on the basis of common indicators. UN agencies must also ensure the collection and provision of standardised data on the amount and timing of CERF

funding passed to NGOs and other implementing agencies. Doing so is vital in assessing the impact of the CERF and in ensuring that it is working on behalf of those in need of humanitarian assistance.

- In close consultation with the relevant civil society the CERF's Advisory Group should set targets for improving the speed of disbursement and response to humanitarian emergencies. Progress against such targets could provide important benchmarks for donors to increase funding beyond the current target of \$500m.

None of these recommendations is beyond the capacity of current humanitarian donors or the overall humanitarian system. However, they require a consolidated and urgent commitment. An adequately and sustainably financed CERF that truly enables rapid response to humanitarian crises would go a long way towards improving the international humanitarian system and responding to humanitarian need.

Of course, the CERF on its own will not solve all the shortcomings of the current humanitarian system. It cannot replace the long-term and massive funding that is required in the poorest countries. It is just one part of a much broader humanitarian reform process that is still in its early stages, and which requires the urgent and sustainable support of the wider humanitarian community.

Notes

¹ The Development Assistance Committee is the principal body through which the OECD deals with issues related to co-operation with developing countries.

² Oxfam gratefully acknowledges the field data made available by the CERF Secretariat.

³ Development Initiatives (2006) *Global Humanitarian Assistance 2006*, p.28. London: Development Initiatives.

⁴ Development Initiatives defines global humanitarian assistance (GHA) as the sum of total bilateral emergency and distress relief from DAC donors + total emergency and distress relief from the EC + total multilateral contributions to UNHCR and UNWRA + a share of multilateral contributions to WFP. See *Global Humanitarian Assistance 2006*.

⁵ The UN Financial Tracking Service figures include all Consolidated and Flash Appeals for 2006. See UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs *Relief Web: Financial Tracking Service*.
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⁶ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2006) 'Guidelines: Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF): Grant Component'.
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⁷ UN Secretary-General (2006) *The Central Emergency Response Fund: Report of the Secretary-General*, p.1. Geneva: General Assembly Economic and Social Council.

⁸ **The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)** is an inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making. It involves the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. Under the leadership of the ERC, the IASC develops humanitarian policies, agrees on a clear division of responsibility for the various aspects of humanitarian response, identifies and addresses gaps in response, and advocates for effective application of humanitarian principles. The IASC was established in 1992 following General Assembly Resolution 46/182. The aim of the **cluster approach** is to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies by ensuring that there is predictable leadership and accountability in all the main sectors or areas of humanitarian response. It aims to deliver more strategic responses and better prioritisation of available resources by clarifying the division of labor among organisations, better defining the roles and responsibilities of humanitarian organisations within the sectors, and providing the Humanitarian Coordinator with both a first point of call and a provider of last resort in all the key sectors or areas of activity. **Sector or Global Cluster Leads:** Nutrition - UNICEF, Health - WHO, Water/Sanitation - UNICEF, Emergency Shelter: IDPs (from conflict) - UNHCR / Disaster situations - IFRC, Camp Coord/Management: IDPs (from conflict) - UNHCR / Disaster situations - IOM, Protection: IDPs (from conflict) - UNHCR Disasters/civilians affected by conflict (other than IDPs) - UNHCR/OHCHR/UNICEF, Early Recovery - UNDP, Logistics - WFP,

Emerg. Telecommunications - OCHA/UNICEF/WFP.

⁹ The CERF Secretariat and Advisory Group have recently redefined the CERF's evaluation and accountability requirements. All recipient agencies are required to provide one annual report to the ERC, outlining their projects' beneficiaries, objectives, and results, and financial information on expenditures. Furthermore, agencies are responsible for programme evaluation; no formal CERF project evaluation has yet been completed. An independent review of the CERF is expected in 2007, to be followed by an external evaluation in 2008.

¹⁰ Oxfam gratefully acknowledges the field data made available by the CERF Secretariat. We would happily make available to interested researchers further details on our sources and the extent of our survey.

¹¹ This allocation was made during the first month of the operation of the CERF when delays occurred most frequently due to the lack of consensus on administrative procedures.

¹² So far the CERF Secretariat has completed humanitarian reform workshops, with a half day of training on CERF that included UN Agency, OCHA, and NGO staff in Panama, Nairobi, Bangkok, Dakar, and Johannesburg. It has also completed a two-day training of trainers in New York for 20 staff to develop a roster of staff trained as "surge capacity" to prepare CERF proposals. Similar trainings, including NGOs are planned for Geneva (March 2007) and Africa (before June 2007).

¹³ These figures are based on Oxfam's estimates of total global humanitarian funding for 2006, taking into account global humanitarian funding for 2005 and figures for 2004, which are more consistent with earlier humanitarian assistance trends. It is impossible to accurately calculate global humanitarian assistance in 2006, given the dramatic increase of aid in 2005 due to the tsunami response, which skews the average for the past five years.

¹⁴ UN Secretary-General (2006) *The Central Emergency Response Fund: Report of the Secretary-General*, p.4. Geneva: General Assembly Economic and Social Council.

¹⁵ Swedish, British and Norwegian representatives: informal interview with the author, 2006/7.

¹⁶ Dutch representative: interview in person with the author, 2006.

¹⁷ Data were gathered between March and July 2006. Very little new data are available on CERF projects implemented by NGOs, beyond the full table on country case study implementation, which Oxfam would happily make available to interested researchers.

¹⁸ 'Pooled funding' mechanisms, currently being piloted in the DRC and Sudan, allow donors to put their contribution into a central pot administered by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator. Such a central fund is meant to enhance the speed, predictability, and flexibility of funding and to ensure that funds are targeted to the most urgent priorities.

¹⁹ UN Secretary-General (2006) *The Central Emergency Response Fund: Report of the Secretary-General*, p.10. Geneva: General Assembly Economic and Social Council.

²⁰ Development Initiatives (2006) *Global Humanitarian Assistance 2006*, p.3. London: Development Initiatives.

²¹ The forthcoming official external evaluation of the CERF, planned for 2008, might shed some light on the Fund's overall performance. However, concern remains that this evaluation will not undertake any meaningful project impact assessment, but rather will concentrate on the performance of the mechanism at headquarters level. This could mean, for example, a focus on the speed of disbursement of funds to UN agencies, without taking into account the complexities of onward disbursement or the impact on beneficiaries.

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In addition, this paper is informed by a large number of interviews with key donor representatives, Oxfam case study surveys, and internal UN country reports.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper, please e-mail: advocacy@oxfaminternational.org.

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<p>Oxfam America 226 Causeway Street, Floor 5, Boston, MA 02114-2206, USA Tel: +1.617.482.1211 E-mail: info@oxfamamerica.org www.oxfamamerica.org</p>	<p>Oxfam Hong Kong 17/fl., China United Centre, 28 Marble Road, North Point, Hong Kong Tel: +852.2520.2525 E-mail: info@oxfam.org.hk www.oxfam.org.hk</p>
<p>Oxfam Australia 156 George St., Fitzroy, Victoria 3065, Australia Tel: +61.3.9289.9444 E-mail: enquire@oxfam.org.au www.oxfam.org.au</p>	<p>Intermón Oxfam (Spain) Roger de Llúria 15, 08010, Barcelona, Spain Tel: +34.902.330.331 E-mail: info@intermonoxfam.org www.intermonoxfam.org</p>
<p>Oxfam-in-Belgium Rue des Quatre Vents 60, 1080 Brussels, Belgium Tel: +32.2.501.6700 E-mail: oxfamsol@oxfamsol.be www.oxfamsol.be</p>	<p>Oxfam Ireland Dublin Office, 9 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2, Ireland Tel: +353.1.672.7662 Belfast Office, 115 North St, Belfast BT1 1ND, UK Tel: +44.28.9023.0220 E-mail: communications@oxfamireland.org www.oxfamireland.org</p>
<p>Oxfam Canada 250 City Centre Ave, Suite 400, Ottawa, Ontario, K1R 6K7, Canada Tel: +1.613.237.5236 E-mail: info@oxfam.ca www.oxfam.ca</p>	<p>Oxfam New Zealand PO Box 68357, Auckland 1145, New Zealand Tel: +64.9.355.6500 (Toll-free 0800 400 666) E-mail: oxfam@oxfam.org.nz www.oxfam.org.nz</p>
<p>Oxfam France - Agir ici 104 rue Oberkampf, 75011 Paris, France Tel: + 33 1 56 98 24 40. E-mail: info@oxfamfrance.org www.oxfamfrance.org</p>	<p>Oxfam Novib (Netherlands) Mauritskade 9, Postbus 30919, 2500 GX, The Hague, The Netherlands Tel: +31.70.342.1621 E-mail: info@oxfamnovib.nl www.oxfamnovib.nl</p>
<p>Oxfam Germany Greifswalder Str. 33a, 10405 Berlin, Germany Tel: +49.30.428.50621 E-mail: info@oxfam.de www.oxfam.de</p>	<p>Oxfam Québec 2330 rue Notre Dame Ouest, bureau 200, Montréal, Quebec, H3J 2Y2, Canada Tel: +1.514.937.1614 E-mail: info@oxfam.qc.ca www.oxfam.qc.ca</p>
<p>Oxfam GB Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK Tel: +44 (0)1865.473727 E-mail: enquiries@oxfam.org.uk www.oxfam.org.uk</p>	

Oxfam International Secretariat: Suite 20, 266 Banbury Road, Oxford, OX2 7DL, UK
Tel: +44.(0)1865.339100. Email: information@oxfaminternational.org. Web site: www.oxfam.org

Oxfam International advocacy offices: E-mail: advocacy@oxfaminternational.org
Washington: 1112 16th St., NW, Ste. 600, Washington, DC 20036, USA Tel: 1.202.496.1170.
Brussels: 22 rue de Commerce, 1000 Brussels, Belgium Tel: +322.502.0391.
Geneva: 15 rue des Savoises, 1205 Geneva, Switzerland Tel: +41.22.321.2371.
New York: 355 Lexington Avenue, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10017, USA Tel: +1.212.687.2091.

Linked Oxfam organizations. The following organizations are linked to Oxfam International:
Oxfam Japan Maruko bldg. 2F, 1-20-6, Higashi-Ueno, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110-0015, Japan
Tel: + 81.3.3834.1556. E-mail: info@oxfam.jp Web site: www.oxfam.jp
Oxfam India B55, First Floor, Shivalik, New Delhi, 1100-17, India
Tel: + 91.11.26693 763. E-mail: info@oxfamint.org.in Web site: www.oxfamint.org.in

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Fundación Rostros y Voces (México) Alabama No. 105 (esquina con Missouri), Col. Nápoles, C.P. 03810 México, D.F.
Tel/Fax: + 52 55 687 3002. E-mail: comunicacion@rostrosyvoces.org
Web site: www.rostrosyvoces.org