

Report - Lessons Learned Exercise

Regional Humanitarian Fund for West and Central Africa

December 2022

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Acronyms

AAP	Accountability to Affected People
ABs	Advisory Boards
CbO	Community-based Organization
CBPF	Country-based Pooled Funds
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CO	Country Office
CVA	Cash-Voucher Assistance
ERC	Emergency Response Community
GAM	Gender and Age Marker
GMS	Grant Management System
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HQ	Headquarters
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
ICCG	Inter-Cluster Coordination Groups
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations
L/NAs	Local/National Actors
L/NGO	Local/National Non-Governmental Organizations
MS Teams	Microsoft Teams
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PFMB	Pooled Fund Management Branch
PSEA	Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
R/HC	Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator
RC	Resident Coordinator
RHFU	Regional Humanitarian Financing Unit
RHFWCA	Regional Humanitarian Fund for West and Central Africa
RhPF	Regionally-hosted Pooled Fund
ROWCA	Regional Office for West and Central Africa
SONAH	Synergie des Organisations Non Gouvernementales Humanitaire (Niger)
SPONG	Secrétariat Permanent des Organisations Non Gouvernementales (Burkina Faso)
UN	United Nations

Executive summary

The Regional Humanitarian Fund for West and Central Africa (RHFwCA) was established in June 2021 as an innovative funding model to support humanitarian operations in West and Central Africa. This region, consisting of 24 countries, faces significant challenges such as food insecurity, environmental issues, and underdevelopment, exacerbated by COVID-19 and climate change. In particular, the Sahel region, comprising Liptoko-Ngourma and the Lake Chad Basin, has seen a significant deterioration in the humanitarian situation, with around 26 million people in need of urgent assistance.

The RHFwCA is the first Regionally-hosted Pooled Fund (RhPF) and aims to bring the benefits of pooled funding to new and underserved locations in West and Central Africa. It helps to address broader regional and cross-border dynamics. It serves as a valuable tool for enhancing humanitarian access for organizations working in remote communities where some international organizations have limited or sporadic presence. The Fund supports the humanitarian response in each country, prioritizing urgent needs while promoting regional coordination and synergies between the countries' allocations. The Fund has initially given strategic priority to countries in the Sahel sub-region, supporting the humanitarian response to most pressing needs in Niger and Burkina Faso, working with partners that can effectively deliver assistance to the most underserved locations and reach the most vulnerable populations in difficult-to-access areas.

This report presents the key findings and recommendations from a lessons learned exercise after the first year of the operation of the RHFwCA in Niger and Burkina Faso. Conducted from September 15th to November 15th, the exercise included consultations with key stakeholders including Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs), donors, Advisory Boards (ABs), inter-cluster coordination groups (ICCGs), and registered partners/sub-partners, as well as a review of data collected from the Grant Management System (GMS). The exercise was facilitated by a joint team from OCHA's Regional Office for West and Central Africa (ROWCA) and the Pooled Fund Management Branch (PFMB) at headquarters (HQ).

Overall, the lesson learning exercise concluded that the RHFwCA brings funding to the region, addresses humanitarian needs through the provision of flexible funding to local and national partners working in hard-to-reach areas. Key findings included the efficient and timely establishment of the Niger and Burkina Faso country envelopes, effective response to regionally observed priorities and needs in complementarity with the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and the RHFwCA's instrumental role in promoting localization. Stakeholders appreciated the timeliness and flexibility of the eligibility process. Local and national actors with limited prior experience of undergoing comprehensive capacity assessments were offered additional support, which was appreciated and can be made more systematic across other Funds as well. The RHFwCA demonstrated complementarity between the two country envelopes, with scope to continue to enhance regional synergies.

1. [Introduction](#)

The RhPF in West and Central Africa was established in June 2021, with an initial focus on the Sahel. The first two country envelopes were opened in Niger in July 2021 and Burkina Faso in November 2021, with support from OCHA ROWCA and its Regional Humanitarian Financing Unit (RHFU) based in Dakar, as well as the two OCHA Country Offices. The first allocations from these country envelopes were launched in September 2021 in Niger and March 2022 in Burkina Faso, for a total amount of \$32.5 million. At the time of writing, new allocations in both countries totaling \$18.5 million were launched. Since its inception, donor contributions to the Fund have reached around \$70 million¹.

In August 2022, an exercise was conducted to gather lessons learned and inform the continued development of the Regional Fund. This included moderated discussions with HCs and ABs in Niger and Burkina Faso, as well as with ICCGs and donor representatives based in-country, regionally, and at global HQ. It also included an online survey with operational partners and sub-partners² in Niger and Burkina Faso, and a desk-based analysis using data from OCHA's GMS and the Country-based Pooled Fund (CBPF) [Data Hub](#).

This Report presents the results of the review, including its objectives, key stakeholders consulted, methodology used, findings, and recommendations, as well as suggestions for the way forward

2. [Background and context](#)

Despite generous contributions by donors, humanitarian funding has not kept pace with the increase in requirements experienced throughout the Sahel. The funding coverage of the HRPs in the Sahel has decreased from 60 per cent in 2019 to 56 per cent in 2020 and 52 per cent in 2021. This decrease is found in almost all essential sectors.

The Regional Humanitarian Fund was developed as a concept to extend the positive experience of OCHA CBPFs to new geographies with interlinked crises, and as a more cost-effective mode of operation, supporting the humanitarian response where establishing one or more CBPFs may not be justified or feasible. The Fund would be a tool to support cohesive approaches to needs arising from connected issues, anchored in country envelopes and local decision making.

Against this backdrop and following the decision of the ERC/USG to establish the Regional Fund, two country envelopes were activated in Niger (July 2021) and Burkina Faso (November 2021). The new funding mechanism was established and operationalized under the leadership of respective RC/HCs in those two countries, with support from ROWCA and the two OCHA country offices.

In August 2021, both ABs developed and endorsed the Operational Manual for the Regional Fund³. Key stakeholders were sensitized, partner organizations were registered and assessed against a set of eligibility requirements, and a first allocation was conducted in each country - in September 2021 for \$12.5 million in Niger; and in March 2022 for \$20 million in Burkina Faso⁴.

¹ Contributions as of 10 March 2023. For real-time funding information, visit the [CBPF Datahub](#).

² Sub-grantees participating in project implementation in collaboration with a primary fund recipient partner.

³ Two country-level addenda to the Operational Manual were developed, including the respective HCs' Vision Papers.

⁴ At the time of drafting the report, discussions are ongoing to activate the third envelope of the Fund in Mali.

The first allocation under the Niger envelope was launched at a crucial time when the response was significantly underfunded, with only 19.5% of HRP financial requirements secured as of September 2021. This allocation funded 22 emergency projects, focused on addressing humanitarian needs in border areas and supporting localization efforts (22% of the funding was given to national and local partners). The Burkina Faso envelope was launched in the final quarter of 2021, with most activities related to its startup, including the first allocation, taking place by mid-2022. The allocation provided a vital injection of resources, enabling non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to increase their emergency response efforts in the most remote and affected areas (19% of the funding was given to national and local partners).

In both Niger and Burkina Faso, the RC/HCs launched a second allocation towards the end of 2022. Undertaking these simultaneously provided a chance to deliver fuller synergies between the country allocations in a true regional approach. The allocations prompted discussions between the two RC/HCs and the respective Advisory Boards, the inter-cluster coordination groups, and the implementing partners, and the identification of coordinated approaches to address priority needs in common border areas in a regional manner. For example, these simultaneous allocations focused on displacement issues on both sides of the border as a common driver of needs. This prompted more discussion and information sharing between Niger and Burkina Faso ABs, ICCGs, and partners to foster inter-country collaboration and coherence between approaches and allocations.

3. [Objective](#)

The lessons learned exercise aimed considered the initial year of the Fund from July 2021 to June 2022, taking stock of practices and approaches and providing recommendations to optimize the potential of the Fund going forward. More specifically, the exercise looked at the following:

- **Fund management:** Was the Fund able to direct resources to the needs in a timely, efficient, and risk-aware manner?
- **Programming:** Has the Fund been an effective vehicle to advance localization and other priority cross-cutting issues?
- **Overall effectiveness:** Has the Fund been an effective vehicle to support more actors and better meet humanitarian needs in new geographical areas?
- **Stakeholders' expectations:** Were the expectations of key stakeholders met?

4. [Methodology](#)

The methodology consisted of a series of consultations with key stakeholders either directly involved with the Fund or having interests related to the Fund during its first year of operation. These included donors, the HCs, ABs, ICCGs, and registered partners⁵. The analysis was further informed by desk review and analysis of information about the partner and project portfolio.

- **Moderated discussions** with in-country, regional and HQ-based donors.
- **Moderated discussions** with the ABs in Niger and Burkina Faso.
- **Group Discussions** with ICCGs in Niger and Burkina Faso.
- **Online survey** with registered partners and sub-partners.
- **Desk review/analysis** based on available data on the CBPF GMS and CBPF Data Hub.

⁵ Registered partners refer to humanitarian organizations that were involved in the process of registration and consideration of eligibility, without necessarily receiving funding during the subsequent allocation processes.

5. General observations

The following general observations are drawn from the discussions and findings from the survey and desk review. They are presented here as a brief snapshot and a preamble to the key findings and recommendations.

Stakeholders expressed interest in the new funding tool and engagement in the lesson learning exercise, testifying to the important role the Fund had played in responding to humanitarian needs in the region. Areas of improvement were identified to enhance Fund processes and optimize its functioning.

The establishment of the two country envelopes was generally perceived as quick and well-conducted. The participatory approach and processes were identified as strengths and critical elements supporting the Fund's transparency and decision-making. Contracting, disbursement and information sharing were perceived as areas for further efficiency gains as ways of working are consolidated.

Efforts in support of localization and strategic partnerships between INGOs and local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs) was seen as an avenue the Fund should continue to explore and strengthen, as it contributes to improved access and enhanced acceptance, facilitating community engagement and fostering accountability to affected populations.

The sequenced establishment of the two country envelopes in Niger and Burkina Faso did not allow for a full expression of regional approaches and synergies at the opening of the first country envelope in Burkina Faso. This evolved with the opening of the second country envelope in Niger the simultaneous twos, both Niger and. Opportunities for regional synergies will increase over time as the number of country envelopes in operation and allocations increase. To illustrate, at the time of undertaking the lesson learned exercise two new allocations were being conducted in parallel in Niger and Burkina Faso, addressing common priorities including displacement-related needs on both sides of the common border, with discussions and information sharing between RC/HCs, ABs, ICCGs, and partners.

6. Key findings and recommendations

6.1. The first two country envelopes of the Fund in Niger and Burkina Faso were established and operationalized quickly and efficiently. Stakeholders noted positively the short time from activation of the country envelopes to conducting first allocations, around three months for both countries. The process included the development of the Operational Manual and country addendums, the establishment of ABs, development of allocation strategies, eligibility reviews for 113 NGOs, and the review of 74 project proposals. At the time of writing, 100 partners are eligible to receive funding, and 56 projects are being implemented to assist 1.7 million affected people. Innovations included remote preliminary assessment of partners' capabilities to engage with the Fund and the broader coordination system, and conducting remote orientation sessions for prospective partners, especially local and national organizations, in liaison with NGO forums.

Recommendations from participants:

- The lessons and good practices from the establishment of the first two country envelopes in Niger and Burkina Faso should serve as a reference for initiating other country envelopes.

6.2. Allocations were conducted efficiently, although in some cases contracting and disbursement times were sub-optimal, linked to the set-up of profiles for new partners in the establishment of a new Fund. It should be noted that these challenges were not unique to the Regionally-hosted pooled fund, as registering new partners and transferring funding to them for the first time can be challenging in any Fund, given the need to work through banking processes/approvals. Stakeholders appreciated the support provided to the allocation processes by ROWCA and the RHFU, with strong engagement, communication, and guidance. In some cases, partners faced challenges in using the GMS and requested longer windows for submitting proposals, however the ABs were committed to upholding agreed timelines. Contracting and disbursement was impacted by limited financial management capacities in the RHFU during its establishment, with delays in the recruitment of some positions. OCHA HQ also faced exceptional financial management workload (for example in relation to the unprecedented scale-up of the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund), while dealing with the complexities of establishing vendor profiles and banking details for new partners, which are typically encountered during the establishment of any new Fund.

Recommendations from participants:

- Continue and strengthen periodic training and awareness sessions for partners on allocation procedures, as well as the use of the GMS.
- Develop a French version of the GMS.
- Improve the timeline for contracting and disbursement, consolidating the financial management capacity of the RHFU and in OCHA HQ.

6.3. Allocation strategies encouraged multi-sectoral response to agreed priorities such as displacement, giving attention to cross-cutting issues. Stakeholders commended the approach applied in both Niger and Burkina Faso that dispensed with cluster or sector envelopes and optimized use of resources by reviewing and selecting proposals through multi-sectoral review committees, supported by diverse technical experts. Three quarters of all projects funded under the two country envelopes have been multisectoral. Stakeholders also appreciated efforts to give attention to priority cross-cutting issues such as community engagement, accountability to affected people (all projects included three mandatory indicators on AAP), protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (all projects included three mandatory indicators), gender (all projects were reviewed using the Gender and Age Marker), and cash-voucher assistance (11 per cent of all funding allocated). The co-location of thematic experts in the OCHA Country Office in Burkina Faso was particularly helpful. Good practices recognized included collaborating with PSEA, AAP, cash, and gender coordinators, for whom the country envelopes and allocations provided opportunities for raising awareness and providing training. Stakeholders recognized that sustained efforts like these are needed to ensure programme quality.

Recommendations from participants:

- Continue to promote multisectoral prioritization and thematic priorities to ensure best use of limited resources.
- Strengthen engagement with thematic experts on Gender, GBV, Protection, AAP, and CVA for technical support to enhance programming quality.
- Provide regular awareness sessions for key stakeholders - particularly partners including L/NAs - on cross cutting issues (Gender, GBV, Protection, AAP, and CVA) and other grant management topics (reporting, fraud-diversion and corruption, PSEA).

6.4. Allocations focused on prioritized activities in hard-to-reach border areas, demonstrating – where there had been doubts – the capability to implement. Stakeholders noted that the Fund has shown a strategic focus on border areas and related issues, supporting life-saving activities in locations with the highest need. By identifying best-placed partners and fostering strategic partnerships between international and national NGOs working with community-based organizations (CbO) to promote acceptance and community engagement, the Fund was able to expand programming in sensitive and insecure border areas. This aligns with the vision of the HCs to direct resources to the most challenging locations for crisis-affected people, increasing access to vulnerable populations and reducing delivery-related risks including safety and security challenges for international actors.

Recommendations from participants:

- Continue to build on strategic partnerships to facilitate the response in hard-to-reach areas with access challenges.

6.5. The Fund provides an opportunity to complement CERF resources and contribute to the triple nexus. Stakeholders noted the complementary relationship between the Fund and the deployment of CERF resources through joint prioritization. Allocations from the country envelopes in Niger and Burkina Faso increased the scale of frontline activities, while CERF funding was used in complementarity to procure emergency supplies and support common services. In terms of the nexus between humanitarian and development actions, stakeholders acknowledged projects supported by the Fund to provide critical emergency services, while empowering and capacitating local and national organizations for more sustainable programming in underserved locations. The participation of donor representatives in the ABs who can bring insights from their involvement in development funding and programming was identified as an opportunity to support synergies across the nexus while preserving the humanitarian character of the Fund.

Recommendations from participants:

- Further explore complementarity with other funding sources to promote the nexus, including other Sahel Funds.

6.6. The Fund has been instrumental in promoting localization. Stakeholders noted the strong involvement of local and national organizations (L/NAs) at both the strategic and operational levels, including representation on ABs and in the development of allocation strategies; engagement during the eligibility process; representation in project review committees and in the clusters' work throughout the allocation processes; expanded access to funding, both directly and indirectly through partnerships with international NGOs (INGOs) that support L/NAs' capacity. From the first allocation in Niger, 23 per cent was allocated to L/NAs directly and indirectly through strategic partnerships with INGOs. In Burkina Faso, 31 per cent of funding was provided to L/NAs directly and indirectly. Greater involvement of women-led and women's rights organizations can be encouraged. Stakeholders noted the high demand for capacity development support across L/NAs – not only in relation to the Fund but more generally – and the limits to what can be provided by the Fund within its humanitarian mandate and resources. Promoting the involvement of L/NAs can also benefit other funding mechanisms in the countries, with a ripple effect on skills, capacities and partnerships.

Recommendations from participants:

- Continue the trajectory with localization efforts, recognizing a positive start, but also that this will require a longer-term, sustained effort. Supporting capacity development of L/NAs and encouraging participation of women-led and women's rights organizations should remain priority. This includes adequate outreach and sensitization activities at the local, sub-national level.
- OCHA Country Offices should, in support of the Fund, identify ways to strengthen the capacity of L/NAs in order to expand the possible partnerships that the Fund can establish.

6.7. The eligibility process, central to risk management, was characterized by good partner outreach and flexibility. Stakeholders commended the eligibility process for its strong information sharing, support to partners, and flexibility – for example evidence of spot-checks conducted by other UN agencies was deemed sufficient in lieu of normal requirements to provide copies of audit reports. However, the process can still be perceived by some new partners, particularly L/NA, as complex and difficult to manage.

Recommendations from participants:

- Consider ways to further strengthen the support to L/NA through the eligibility process, while ensuring that minimum standards for risk management are met. This is a global challenge and includes (but is not limited to) continuing to accompany and guide new partners through the process, while drawing as much as possible on information from eligibility processes conducted by other UN entities.

6.8 Establishment of the Fund and the country envelopes has contributed to strengthening humanitarian coordination. Stakeholders acknowledged that the existence of the Fund has helped to strengthen humanitarian coordination in the respective countries. Its work has catalyzed more engagement of partners with sectoral coordination, and clusters have recognized that involvement in Fund processes enhances wider coordination efforts. This can include joint monitoring visits with OCHA to strengthen operational coordination and learning. Donor representatives, through

participation in the ABs, noted their improved understanding of needs and operational realities, which can inform funding decisions and coordination.

Recommendations from participants:

- Capitalize on the momentum and enthusiasm created around the Fund's establishment and first allocations to encourage commitment from humanitarian actors to participate and support coordination structures and mechanisms.
- Continue exploring ways to involve clusters in Fund processes, including joint monitoring visits, while recognizing that this recommendation is not specific to the Regionally-hosted pooled fund model.

6.9 While the first allocations conducted by the two country envelopes demonstrated complementarity, there is scope to enhance regional synergies. Stakeholders acknowledged the common approaches adopted in Niger and Burkina Faso, for example towards localization and program quality/cross-cutting issues and the deployment of funding to common border areas as described above. At the same time, they recognized the potential to strengthen synergies between country allocations, including by analyzing common needs and their drivers to inform allocation planning. At the point of conducting its first allocation, the Niger country envelope was the only one established, whereas the first allocation in Burkina Faso was able to build on and complement what had been done in Niger. Going forward, with more country envelopes established and more allocations taking place, there will be more opportunities to strengthen synergies between allocations, with greater sharing of analyses, information, and planning. This in turn will require recalibration of the RHFU staffing and capacities. With the two Reserve Allocations launched towards the end of 2022, the RHFUCA was able to deliver regional synergies and coordination at the strategic, operational and field levels.

Recommendations from participants:

- Capitalize on the positive experience with the new funding model by exploring options to foster greater synergies between country envelopes and allocations, while acknowledging the distinctive operational context in each country.
- Enhance communications, reporting and information sharing with stakeholders of each country envelope, by providing updates on allocations, the deployment of resources and status of project implementation.
- Expand RHFU staffing and capacities commensurate with the number of country envelopes activated and the number of allocations conducted.

7. [Perspectives and ways forward](#)

As this report on the lessons learned from the first year of RHFUCA is finalized, OCHA is taking steps to address some of the key recommendations and will continue to work on implementing others as the consolidation of the new mechanisms continues with the activation of additional country envelopes, such as in Mali.

7.1. Continue to use national and local forums to activate envelopes in additional countries

In addition to a well-structured humanitarian coordination system, an established and fully operational NGO forum, such as the SPONG in Burkina Faso, has proven to be a valuable entry point for supporting in-country processes related to the activation of a new country envelope and, more importantly, for facilitating engagement with local and national actors. The recent establishment of "SONAL" in Niger will undoubtedly serve the same purpose, and similar platforms in other countries will be leveraged.

7.2. Conduct regular awareness and training sessions and align RHFU capacities

The RHFU has developed a one-year plan to continue raising awareness and training partners on allocation procedures and the use of the GMS. In addition, OCHA HQ is exploring ways to develop a French version of the GMS. The RHFU is expanding its capacities by adding additional positions in 2023, commensurate with the increasing scope of the Fund, its country envelopes, financial turnover and management requirements while maintaining a cost-effective model of operation.

7.3. Continue to use a multi-sectoral/integrated approach as a way to deliver a better coordinated and holistic humanitarian response

A multi-sectoral/integrated approach to implement approved projects in priority locations has proven to be the most efficient way to address humanitarian needs of crisis-affected people with limited resources. It also promotes better coordination and collaboration between relevant clusters and partners. To this end, the RHFU will continue to support increased information sharing and collaboration between key stakeholders during the prioritization and allocation processes for multisector/integrated approaches.

7.4. Support and reinforce strategic partnerships between INGOs and L/NNGOs

Strategic partnerships between INGOs and L/NNGOs, as well as the involvement of CbOs, have proven to be an efficient way to operate and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid in hard-to-reach locations in border areas. This approach demonstrates the Fund's ability to implement projects in challenging contexts and marginalized locations. It promotes acceptance, improves access, and facilitates community engagement and accountability to affected populations. Therefore, the Fund will continue to invest in building strategic partnerships between INGOs and L/NNGOs, to strengthen the capacities of L/NNGOs when necessary.

7.5. Encourage more coordination between funding mechanisms

Given the limited resources available for addressing the rising humanitarian needs in the Central Sahel region, more coordination between different funding mechanisms is needed. OCHA has undertaken significant outreach to this effect, including with Sahel-focused resilience/development Funds. Beyond the good complementarity between RHF/WCA and CERF, OCHA will continue to seek complementarity with other funding streams and Funds to promote resilience and strengthen the nexus.

7.6. Pursue localization efforts

The localization of humanitarian aid has been shown to be essential in helping to provide assistance to marginalized and hard-to-reach areas in the Central Sahel. Localization also enhances access, acceptance, and community engagement and helps to ensure accountability to affected populations by increasing the involvement of those affected by the crisis. The Fund will continue to support localization efforts, building

solid partnerships between international NGOs and L/NNGOs and ensuring an appropriate balance of direct and indirect funding for L/NNGOs.

7.7. Explore ways to further strengthen support to L/NNGOs through the eligibility process

In line with ongoing efforts across the CBPFs globally, procedures and processes related to eligibility will be emphasized as part of the annual awareness and training plan to improve understanding of requirements. L/NNGOs will be offered additional support throughout the eligibility process. The Fund will also continue to explore ways to streamline the eligibility process without compromising its risk-based approach. This may include using the eligibility results from other UN entities and simplifying the eligibility process for international organizations already registered as eligible in one of the country envelopes.

7.8. Reinforce humanitarian coordination

The Fund will continue to prioritize participation in coordination structures and mechanisms, such as the clusters, as a requirement for being considered eligible for funding. This will ensure that funded projects align with the overall humanitarian response and contribute to strengthening coordination efforts.

7.9. Enhance regional synergies

RHFWCA has enabled synergies at the strategic, operational, and sub-national level across the region. Strategic coordination will continue to be strengthened through the regional framework prepared by ROWCA, operational coordination through allocations and discussions between the HCs and ABs in the different countries, and sub-national coordination through increased field presence.

Launching allocations simultaneously and in parallel presents an opportunity to enhance coordination at the operational level. At the time of the lessons learned exercise, allocations were launched at the same time in Niger and Burkina Faso, which constituted an excellent opportunity to foster greater synergies between country envelopes and allocations while acknowledging the specific operational context in each country.

7.10 Replicate the Fund in additional regions

The report offers OCHA leadership positive insights on the potential merits of replicating the regionally-hosted pooled fund model further in additional regions. Options to introduce other Regional Funds in other regions are under consideration, building on lessons to date while ensuring a design that is appropriate to the particular context.

8. [Annexes](#)

Annex 1: Concept note for the lessons learned exercise, September 2022

Introduction

Following extensive consultations, the Emergency Relief Coordinator decided to pilot the first-ever Regionally hosted Pooled Fund in West and Central Africa, building on OCHA's experience managing the CBPFs. The Regional Fund was launched in June 2021 with the aim to bring the benefits of pooled funding to West and Central Africa, a region composed of 24 countries with high population growth, affected by food insecurity, environmental challenges, and underdevelopment, and since 2020 by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The new funding mechanism offers an opportunity to add substantial value in a region with inter-connected challenges and broader regional and cross-border dynamics. It also serves as a valuable tool to enhance humanitarian access and response of frontline organizations working in remote communities, targeting the most vulnerable affected people, and prioritizing urgent needs, while promoting regional coordination and synergies. The RHF/WCA supports actors best placed to address prioritized needs, with especial focus on local and national partners.

Background and Context

Following inception of the Regional Humanitarian Fund, two country envelopes were activated in Niger (July 2021) and Burkina Faso (November 2021). Under the leadership of RC/HCs in those two contexts and with support from the OCHA Regional Office for West and Central Africa (ROWCA), the new funding mechanism was established and operationalized. An Operational Manual was developed for the Fund, the sensitization of key stakeholders was undertaken, partners were registered and assessed against a set of eligibility requirements and a first allocation was conducted in each country, Niger in September 2021, and Burkina Faso in March 2022.

OCHA has commissioned an exercise to collect lessons learned to date from the pilot and will draw on these to inform the ERC's decision making regarding the forward management of the Regional Humanitarian Fund, the future of the model, and its potential applicability to other contexts.

This document summarizes lesson learned exercise (objectives, key stakeholders/informants, methodology and timeline) and is intended to inform stakeholders how best to engage with the exercise.

Objectives of the exercise

Identify lessons from the roll-out of the RHF/WCA, taking stock of best practices and providing constructive feedback on how the management of the Fund can be optimized. This involves four key areas for exploration:

- **Operational Improvements:** review the roll-out of the RHF/WCA country envelopes in Niger and Burkina Faso and the management of the Fund, including the different processes (partner eligibility and allocation process).
- **Fund Performance:** assess the Fund's performance in the areas of inclusiveness, flexibility,

timeliness, efficiency, and risk management.⁶

- **Programmatic Value-Added:** consider the RHFwCA's added value to the humanitarian response in Niger and Burkina Faso, and how the allocation strategies addressed regional issues.
- **Stakeholders' Expectations:** consider whether this model met the expectations of humanitarian actors (UN, international and national NGOs), donors and affected people and how it has contributed and/or complemented the endeavors of host Governments and other sources of funding.

Key Stakeholders/Informants

- Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators (Niger and Burkina Faso)
- Donors in Niger and Burkina Faso, as well as at the regional/HQ level⁷
- Advisory Boards (Niger and Burkina Faso)
- Inter-Cluster Coordination Groups (Niger and Burkina Faso)
- Partners and sub-partners funded and/or registered by the RHFwCA (Niger and Burkina Faso)

Facilitation

The overall lead for the exercise will be OCHA ROWCA⁸, with support from OCHA PFMB⁹, OCHA Country Offices in Niger and Burkina Faso, and OCHA OAD¹⁰ as required.

Methodology

- **Structured interview** with RC/HCs in Niger and Burkina Faso.
- **Moderated discussion** with in-country and regionally based/HQ donors.
- **Moderated discussions** of Advisory Boards in Niger and Burkina Faso, separately.
- **Focus Group Discussion** of Inter-Cluster Coordination Groups (ICCGs) in Niger and Burkina Faso, separately.
- **General survey** with registered partners and sub-partners, using KoBo tool.
- **Desk review/analysis** based on existing GMS data and CBPF Data Hub.

Timeline

- Second half of August 2022: **Finalization and issuance of the concept note**
- First half of September 2022: **Planning**
- Second half of September 2022: **Consultations**
 - Launch of Survey (KoBo) to all partners and sub-partners: **September 16th** (for 10 days)

⁶ These are the five dimensions of performance for all CBPFs

⁷ This refers to donors at capital level that showed special interest in the RHFwCA: Switzerland (PFWG co-chair), Denmark, Germany, Canada, United Kingdom

⁸ Regional Office for West and Central Africa

⁹ Pooled Fund Management Branch

¹⁰ Operations and Advocacy Division

In Niamey, Niger

- Focus-group with ICCG members: **September 26th, 2.00-4.00pm**¹¹(OCHA Office in Niamey)
- Moderated discussion with AB members: **September 27th, 10.30 – 12.30pm** (OCHA Office in Niamey)

In Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

- Focus-group with ICCG members: **September 28th, 3.00-5.30pm** (OCHA Office in Ouagadougou)
- Moderated discussion with AB members: **September 30th, 10.00 – 12.00pm** (OCHA Office in Ouagadougou)
- First half of October: **Consultations with donors and HCs**
 - Focus-group with donors: **October 5th** (MS Teams)
 - Compilation and consolidation of key remarks from all stakeholders by **October 7th** (MS Teams)
 - Structured interviews with HCs: **Burkina Faso, October 14th**
 - Structured interview with HC: **Niger, date to be confirmed** (MS Teams)
- Second half of October: **Finalization of the Report**
 - Draft and finalization of the Report by **October 31st 2022**.

¹¹ All the times indicated referred to West Central Africa (UTC+1:00).

Annex 2: Four areas of exploration and guiding questions for discussions with key stakeholders

- **Fund management performance:** Was the Fund able to direct resources to the needs in a timely, efficient, and risk-aware manner?
- **Programming:** Has the Fund been an effective vehicle to advance localization and priority cross-cutting issues?
- **Overall effectiveness:** Has the Fund been an effective vehicle to support more actors and better meet humanitarian needs in new geographical areas?
- **Stakeholders' expectations:** Were the expectations of key stakeholders met?

Annex 3: Questionnaire used for partners and sub-partners on-line survey**OCHA – Regional Office/Bureau Regional****The Regional Humanitarian Fund in West and Central Africa (RHFwCA): Partners and sub-partners Survey**

Dear RHFwCA partners,

This is to invite you as Fund's partners and sub-partners to share your feedback on the Fund's performance, registration, allocation process, among other areas. The survey aims to identify lessons learned, take stock of best practices and provide constructive feedback to enhance the Fund's efficiency and effectiveness and optimize the management of the Fund.

The questionnaire is divided into four categories: partner profile, eligibility and allocation processes, Fund's added value as well as Fund performance. The survey includes 24 questions. Participants are expected to take around 15-20 minutes to complete it.

Many thanks for your willingness to participate. We appreciate it!

.....

Beginning of survey**A. Partner profile****A.1 Type of your organization**

- International NGO
- Local or national NGO
- Red Cross/Red Crescent

A.2 Is your organization an eligible partner of the Regional Humanitarian Fund in West and Central Africa?

- Yes
- No

A.2.1 If yes, in which country?

- Burkina Faso
- Niger
- Both

A.2.2 If no, did you apply?

- Yes
- No

A.3 Is your organization a direct or indirect recipient of funding from the Regional Humanitarian Fund in West and Central Africa?

- Direct

- Indirect
- Both

A.4 Please identify which phase(s) of the Fund you were involved or engaged in.

- Registration of your organization with the fund
- Due Diligence of your organization with the Fund
- Capacity assessment of your organization with the Fund
- Allocation strategy development including identification of prioritized activities and geographic locations
- Project development and submission to the Fund on GMS
- Participation in Strategic and Technical Review Committees to vet and recommend projects
- Reporting
- Project monitoring

B. Eligibility and allocation processes

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements

B.1 My organization was provided sufficient information on the Fund's registration process and received clear feedback on due diligence process.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

B.1.1 How can the registration and due diligence processes be improved? [Open question]

B.2 My organization was provided sufficient information and received clear feedback on capacity assessment results.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

B.2.1 How can the capacity assessment processes be improved? [Open question]

B.3 My organization is a member in one or more cluster(s) and it contributed to the prioritization exercise to shape the strategic focus of the Fund's allocation.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

B.4 The allocation process including proposal submission, project selection and project review was based on clear timelines and parameters.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

B.4.1 How can the Fund improve the allocation process?

- Clear geographic targeting
- Clear identified activities for cluster/thematic areas of intervention
- Allocation strategic focus is based on regional/cross border relevance
- Extended project submission period
- Faster review process
- Clear feedback to partners on projects submitted
- Other [if other, please specify]

B.6 The Fund is strategically focused based on needs in terms of thematic and geographic interventions (including in cross-border areas).

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

B.7 My organization received constructive feedback when its project proposal did not pass strategic and/or technical review and in result was not selected.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

C. Fund's added value

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements

C.1 The Fund facilitated humanitarian access and delivery of humanitarian assistance in hard-to-reach areas.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

C.2 The Fund supported the engagement and participation of local and national actors, contributing to a more localized humanitarian response.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

C.3 The Fund contributed to reinforcing the humanitarian coordination structure in the country among existing and new actors.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

D. Fund performance

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements

D.1 A Broad range of humanitarian actors and organizations (UN agencies and NGOs) participates in the Fund's processes and receives funding.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

D.2 The Fund plays a critical role in supporting saving lives and meeting the humanitarian needs on ground.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

- Not applicable

D.3 The Fund is able to adapt rapidly to changing priorities and allow humanitarian partners to identify appropriate solutions to address humanitarian needs in the most effective way.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

D.4 The Fund's contracting and disbursement process is timely.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

D.5 The Fund carries out regular monitoring and partner performance assessment through meetings, interviews, direct field visits, and/or beneficiary feedback.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

D.6 The Fund provides quality and timely induction and ongoing support / feedback (live and remote training, ad-hoc support down the line) for Project life cycle/technical aspects (proposal, reporting, amendments...).

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

D.7 Please identify the top three opportunities/ strengths that the Fund exhibit:

- It addresses/responds to needs based on participative and consultative processes
- It's one of the main funding sources for local and national actors
- It's fast/agile/flexible
- It supports the humanitarian coordination structure and mechanisms
- It's inclusive. Partners/NGOs engage in the Fund's processes

- It enhances partners capacity to support local communities
- It reinforces the capacity of humanitarian actors
- Other [if other, please specify]

D.8 Please identify challenges/areas for improvement for the Fund [open question]

E. Conclusion

E.1 Any further comments or feedback to the Fund [open question]

Thank you for your time for completing the survey. Your views and recommendations matter to us a lot and will help us in advancing the Fund. A message will appear on top when the input submitted successfully.

End of survey

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Annex 4: Map of projects funded under the respective first allocations in Niger and Burkina Faso

