

START
NETWORK

STRATEGY

2024 | 2026

CHANGE MEANS ACTION

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CHANGE MEANS ACTION

THE AIM OF OUR 2021-2023 STRATEGY WAS TO SHIFT POWER, DECISION MAKING, RESOURCES AND VOICE TO LOCAL ORGANISATIONS AND LOCAL LEADERS BY BUILDING A DIVERSE 'NETWORK OF NETWORKS' FUELLED BY A 'FAMILY OF FUNDS' AND SUPPORTED BY A CULTURE OF INNOVATION AND LEARNING.

Looking back over the past three years, it is clear we made considerable progress:

- ▶ We increased the Network's reach by expanding membership to close to 100 local, national and international organisations working across six continents. Our membership is now 70% local.
- ▶ We shifted Network power to local and national organisations by supporting 10 locally led hubs – coalitions of local, national and international civil society organisations working together to improve humanitarian action.
- ▶ We shifted Network resources directly to local and national organisations for small-to-medium sized and neglected crises. Across its 10 years of operation, the Global Start Fund disbursed £127 million in rapid response funding, assisting more than 25 million people in 78 countries. More than £4 million has gone to local organisations directly. In 2023, 21% of those funds were allocated in anticipation of crises.
- ▶ We moved from assisting people in need to protecting people at risk by making Network resources available ahead of crises through Start Ready, a leading-edge anticipatory financing facility and risk pool of £5 million.
- ▶ We improved Network practice and behaviour to be flexible, risk willing, inclusive, anti-colonial and driven by community priorities. We supported home-grown solutions to recurrent crises through our Community-Led Innovation Programme and provided platforms and opportunities to amplify community impact on a global scale. We brought equity and ethics to our programmes and operations through a decolonisation framework, a new suite of partnership agreements and a tiered due diligence processes.
- ▶ We influenced the global 'localisation' and anticipatory action policy agendas through our practice, evidence and experience.

But that is not to say the journey of the last three years has been easy. Positioning ourselves as a catalyst for change in an entrenched and century-old system has come with tensions, trade-offs and fundamental questions about our ability to bring about transformational shifts. Going forward, we know that system change requires a clear vision, the time and space to innovate, iterate and improve, a laser focus on our core strengths and value offer, a committed alliance of staff, stakeholders and supporters, and sufficient resources.

Our new strategy 2024-2026 aims to put this learning into practice, positioning Start Network as a change agent that will help to remake the humanitarian aid system through practical action.

CHRISTINA BENNETT, CEO | SUZANNE LYNE, CFOO | SANJ SRIKANTHAN, CHAIR



© Crespo Mubbalaya AWYAD.
Alert 628, A woman uses her jerry can she received to collect water for home use in Mbale district, Uganda



© Save the Children.
Alert 529, Anticipation
of flooding, Sudan

WE BELIEVE THE HUMANITARIAN AID SYSTEM NEEDS A RETHINK

The destructive effects of an ever-changing climate, escalating violent conflicts, mass displacement and the resulting declines in people’s health, nutrition, productive capacity and wellbeing require an aid system that is faster, more agile and more attuned and accountable to the needs and aspirations of the populations it is meant to support.

YET THE CURRENT SYSTEM:

- ▶ centralises and concentrates power and resources in a handful of dominant and self-interested organisations making key decisions far from the locus of crisis.
- ▶ prioritises accountability to donors and governments over people in crisis.
- ▶ is too reactive and its funding is too slow to reach those impacted by conflict and disaster.
- ▶ is overly risk averse, pushing risk onto smaller organisations without commensurate funds or support to manage that risk effectively.
- ▶ lacks demonstrated models and evidence for viable alternatives to current ways of working.



“WHAT WE HAVE NOW ARE COMMITMENTS TO CHANGE - PLENTY OF THEM, GOOD ONES EVEN.”

What we have now are commitments to change - plenty of them, good ones even. Yet reports around tangible progress and positive outcomes are decidedly unimpressive. This three-year strategy offers Start Network

the opportunity to build on its decade of exploration, experience, evidence and action to demonstrate the change the sector needs and catalyse the change communities deserve.

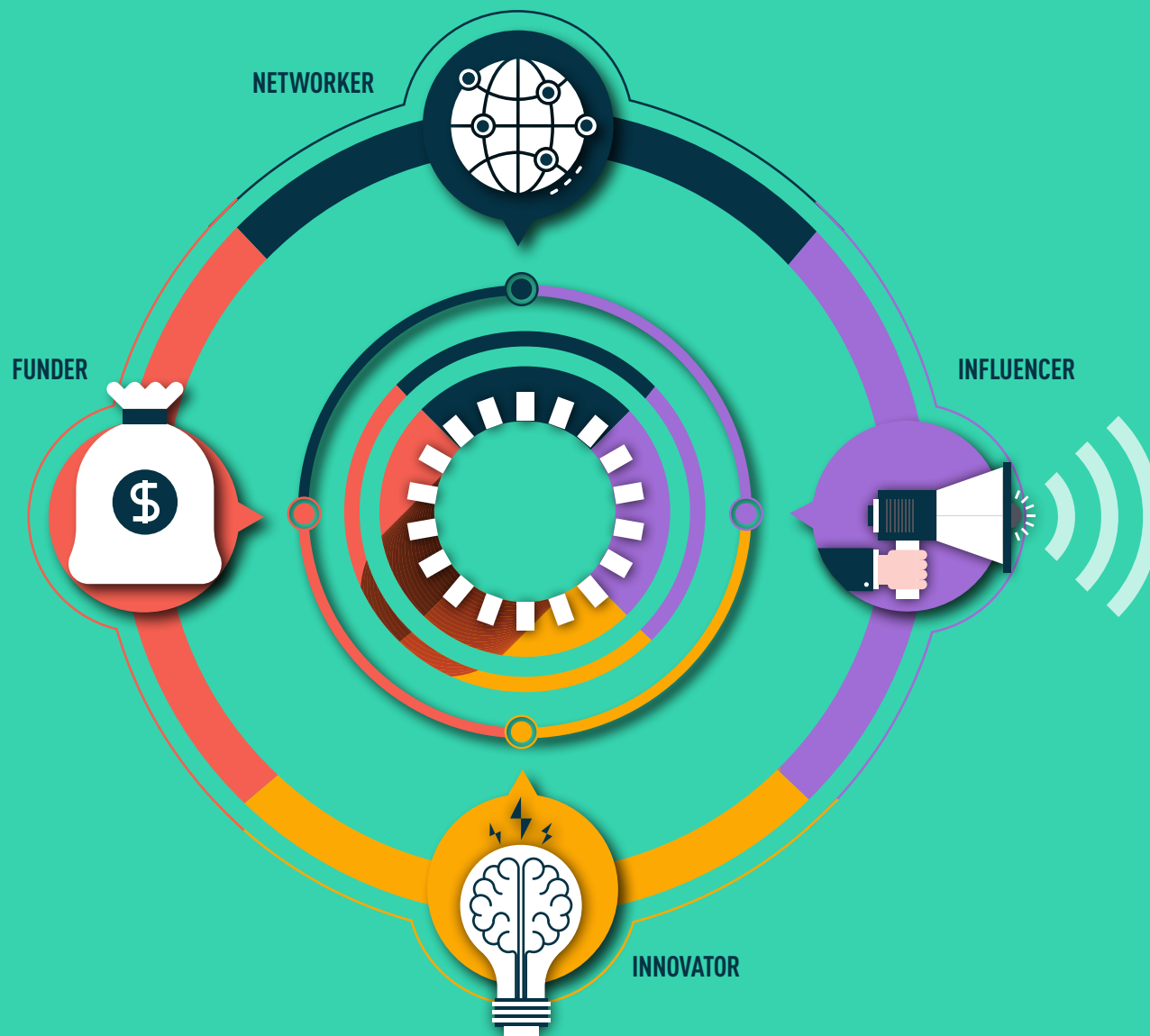
OUR VALUE AND LEGITIMACY AS A CHANGE AGENT COME FROM A PORTFOLIO OF CORE STRENGTHS. OUR UNIQUE OFFER IS OUR ABILITY TO BLEND THESE STRENGTHS TO DRIVE SYSTEM-LEVEL CHANGE AND SUPPORT OUR NETWORK IN MEETING THE NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS OF POPULATIONS AT-RISK AND AFFECTED BY CRISES.

WE ARE A NETWORKER

WE ARE A FUNDER

WE ARE AN INNOVATOR

WE ARE AN INFLUENCER





© CADENA. Alert 563, Response to migration in April 2022, Mexico

THE WAY WE DEFINE OUR VALUE HAS BEEN INFLUENCED BY A DECADE OF PRACTICE.



WE ARE A NETWORKER

We support collaboration, partnership, peer exchange and learning across a growing network of humanitarian civil society organisations working on behalf of at risk and crisis affected communities and connected through regional and country-based hubs. This network of networks serves as the backbone and infrastructure through which we deliver our programmes and change initiatives and remains central to our strategy.

It is complemented by a growing network of donors, strategic partners and supporters who help to drive our mission and movement for change. It serves as our core and primary channel for systems change and is the vehicle for devolving power, resources, accountability and voice.



WE ARE A LEADING-EDGE FUNDER

We enable our members to access rapid, early and risk-informed funding based on collective decision making and local leadership. We provide an alternative to other funding mechanisms in the sector, with a unique niche focused on small-to-medium sized and underfunded crises and a progressive model that relies on collaboration with members deciding and actively managing our funds in concert.

We are proactive in distributing funding at the right time and earlier than traditional humanitarian response, helping to create a system where people at risk are protected and supported earlier.



WE ARE AN INNOVATOR

We provide a space for our members to change the way the humanitarian system approaches, resources and implements humanitarian action, by exploring, developing and testing new ideas. We support this innovation by helping our members work through the operational details of complex ideas, testing and refining new models along the way.




WE ARE AN INFLUENCER

We recognise that system change cannot be achieved by Start Network working alone. We engage with technology providers, academics, governments, media organisations and think tanks to amplify our messages, share learning and accelerate change. We also draw out the insights and learning from our own work and share them with others to help take our work beyond those already convinced of the case for change.

04 OUR FOUNDATIONS FOR CHANGE



VISION



A locally-led and proactive humanitarian system that is accountable to people affected by and at risk of crisis, that saves more lives, promotes dignity and protects people from loss and harm.

MISSION



To develop, test & spread new ways of collaborating, operating & resourcing locally-led, proactive humanitarian action.

PURPOSE




To be a catalyst for system-level change that improves the efficiency, effectiveness and ethics of humanitarian action.

STRATEGY

We will align and leverage our value offer as networker, funder, innovator and influencer in all our work to develop practical alternatives to critical aspects of the current system.

VALUES



- We put people first
- We are brave
- We operate collectively
- We are inclusive
- We are open
- We are ethical

PARTNERS & STAKEHOLDERS



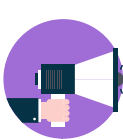



- Members
- Donors & philanthropy
- Communities
- Policy makers
- Advocates
- Private organisations
- Academics
- Scientists
- Media organisations

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE IS FOUNDED ON IDENTIFYING, TESTING AND IMPLEMENTING PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS THAT CAN BE REPLICATED AND SCALED BY OUR MEMBERS IN LINE WITH OUR CHANGE AMBITIONS.

We will therefore align and leverage our value offer as a networker, funder, innovator and influencer to develop and demonstrate practical alternatives to the aspects of the system we aim to change. By bringing our strengths together we can maximise our potential to change our practice and behaviour as an organisation, to influence the behaviour and actions of our members and to leverage the power of our network transform the humanitarian aid system.



SUMMARY	IMPACT WHAT EACH STRENGTH ENABLES US TO ACHIEVE	OBJECTIVES WHERE WE WILL PRIORITISE AND DIRECT OUR RESOURCES	DIRECTION OF TRAVEL WHERE WOULD WE LIKE TO BE BY END OF 2026?
<p>NETWORKER</p> 	<p>Our locally-led network is the platform that enables us to aggregate and share ideas, services and practice and to collaborate for change. It is the vehicle for devolving power, resources, accountability and voice</p>	<p>We will build and diversify our network of networks through our members and locally led hubs and support hubs, through our growing membership, on their journey to independence.</p>	<p>We can evidence and demonstrate how the locally led hubs and network model is sustainable and enabling change in the humanitarian system.</p>
<p>FUNDER</p> 	<p>Our funds and finance mechanisms enable faster and anticipatory funding, backed by community priorities, as a more efficient, impactful and ethical approach to humanitarian action.</p>	<p>We will scale our family of funds by increasing funding levels, diversifying our financial products and expanding our coverage of countries and risks across our network. In doing so, we will increase access to funding by local organisations.</p>	<p>We can demonstrate that our funds and finance mechanisms enable more proactive, timely and locally led action. And in doing so, promote more efficient, effective and ethical humanitarian outcomes.</p>
<p>INNOVATOR</p> 	<p>Our ability to experiment, test and disseminate new ideas and processes enables us to demonstrate, evidence and export viable alternatives to existing humanitarian practice across our network, organisation and system.</p>	<p>We will advance humanitarian practice by designing, testing and exporting new approaches, tools and services. In doing so, we will create a culture of innovation across the organisation and network.</p>	<p>We can demonstrate that we are effecting organisational, network and system level change through the development and adoption of a pipeline of new ideas and practice actions based on our core strengths.</p>
<p>INFLUENCER</p> 	<p>Our focus on experimentation, practical action, and evidence and learning enables us to build coalitions from within and outside our membership to influence our own actions and behaviours, those of our members and the wider humanitarian system.</p>	<p>We will influence organisation, membership and sector policy and practice through evidence, analysis and advocacy across our main change areas.</p>	<p>We are established as a thought leader that uses evidence and learning to catalyse positive change in the humanitarian sector.</p>
<p>ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT</p> 	<p>The Start Network organisation evolves to offer services that support and strengthen our members and hubs to develop and collaborate on common challenges as they seek to change the system.</p>	<p>We will invest across key organisational areas that will allow us to cater to a growing membership and provide a robust and effective service offer to our members, hubs, donors and other stakeholders.</p>	<p>We can demonstrate how playing a more enabling, support role to our hubs and members strengthens a locally led system and offers an alternative ways of operating and behaving.</p>


07 OUR APPROACH TO GROWTH 2024-2026

OUR APPROACH TO GROWTH ALIGNS WITH OUR 'ENDGAME' OF REPLICABILITY. WE WILL GROW AND SCALE TO DEMONSTRATE THE VIABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF OUR ALTERNATIVE MODELS AND TO ACHIEVE ENOUGH CRITICAL MASS TO DRIVE SYSTEM CHANGE.

Our strategy for the next three years is about **replicability**: defining and sharing a replicable operating and impact model that can be adopted by our members. As such, our approach to growth is about managed scale to demonstrate that our vision is efficient, effective and sustainable.

WE WILL IMPLEMENT IT AS FOLLOWS:

- ▶ The level and pace of our growth will start with our members and hubs, which form the backbone, infrastructure and channel through which we drive our work.
- ▶ We will increase our disbursement capacity in Start Funds, Start Ready and other hubs-based innovation and incubation initiatives to align with network growth, support the evolution of the hubs and fuel our members' coverage of humanitarian risks and needs.
- ▶ We will continue to invest in the exploration and testing of new approaches and in our ability to export and amplify that change through evidence and influence. In this way we will continue to inspire our members and maintain our leading edge.
- ▶ We will shore up our internal organisational capacity in line with this growth, first by digital transformation through which we will streamline and automate relevant processes, and by investing in moderate increases in our core capacity. We will begin exploring the devolution of some core global services to the Network.
- ▶ This period of measured growth must be aligned with our ability to raise funds and secure strategic partnerships through a diverse and loyal base of donors and supporters.



© Start Network. Alert 624, Distribution of peace messaging, NFI distribution, Psychosocial support, Food distribution, Kenya

HOW WE WORK IN PRACTICE TO ACHIEVE OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES IS CRITICAL. TOGETHER WITH OUR CORE VALUES, WE BRING THE FOLLOWING MINDSET, PRINCIPLES AND ETHOS TO OUR WORK.



LOCALLY LED

Our operations aim to reduce barriers for local organisations to respond to crises through supporting them to develop their vision of change, access resources and take on leading roles in governance structures across the Network.



DE-COLONISED

Our operations balance excellence with ethical standards, counteracting donor-driven decision-making with diverse and equitable decision-making. In doing so, Start Network can begin to unravel racism and colonialism within its programmes and structures.

LIGHT & AGILE

Our solutions are accessible, streamlined and non-bureaucratic. We develop processes and procedures that are enabling and not constrictive.

FAST & PROACTIVE

Our innovative financing mechanisms deliver funds quickly and in a proactive manner – ahead, or in the immediate aftermath of, a significant event that ensures communities at-risk of crisis are protected and the impacts are reduced.

DISPERSED & DISTRIBUTED

Our service offer is designed to decentralise decision-making and power where possible and will only be aggregated where it can enable efficiency. Aggregated solutions may also be dispersed and provided by other entities in the Network, including by developing centres of excellence for unique capabilities.

INNOVATIVE & ADAPTIVE

Our solutions are designed to evolve, allowing for the emergence of new initiatives from across the Network or removal of redundant ones, based on regular feedback and continuous exploration/testing of new opportunities.

RISK WILLING

Our approach to risk aims to lean into risk where possible and manage risk where necessary. And we will demonstrate how assurance and accountability can be more balanced to ensure that funding increasingly reaches local actors directly.

INCLUSIVE & ETHICALLY DRIVEN

Our operations are designed with a clear set of ethical standards and are accountable to local members and hubs that ensure they are met across the Network through ways of working, approaches and in delivery.

WE ARE INTERESTED IN TRACKING OUR ABILITY TO CATALYSE CHANGE.

We track both quantitative and qualitative data to learn about whether, how and by how much we are catalysing change at different levels:

HOW ARE WE PERFORMING AS AN ORGANISATION?

We track the effectiveness of our actions and initiatives to ensure we are operating efficiently, effectively and in line with our values and operating principles, continuously improving based on our learning and understanding of what works.

HOW ARE WE CONTRIBUTING TO CHANGE?

We track our influence and impact on the mindsets, behaviours and actions of our wider membership in the service of a more effective equitable, impactful and ethical humanitarian system.

HOW IS THE SYSTEM CHANGING?

We track how the wider system is changing, based on the five keys of systems change (see diagram), all mutually reinforcing areas of change that will help us understand how it is operating, spot the potential for change .



CRITIQUE OF HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

- ▶ Concentrates power & resources in a handful of dominant and self-interested organisations making key decisions far from the locus of crisis
- ▶ Prioritises accountability to donors & governments over people in crisis
- ▶ Is too reactive and funding too slow to reach those impacted by conflict & disaster
- ▶ Is overly risk averse with risk pushed to smaller organisations without commensurate funds or support to manage that risk effectively
- ▶ Lacks demonstrated models and evidence for viable alternatives to current ways of working

VISION

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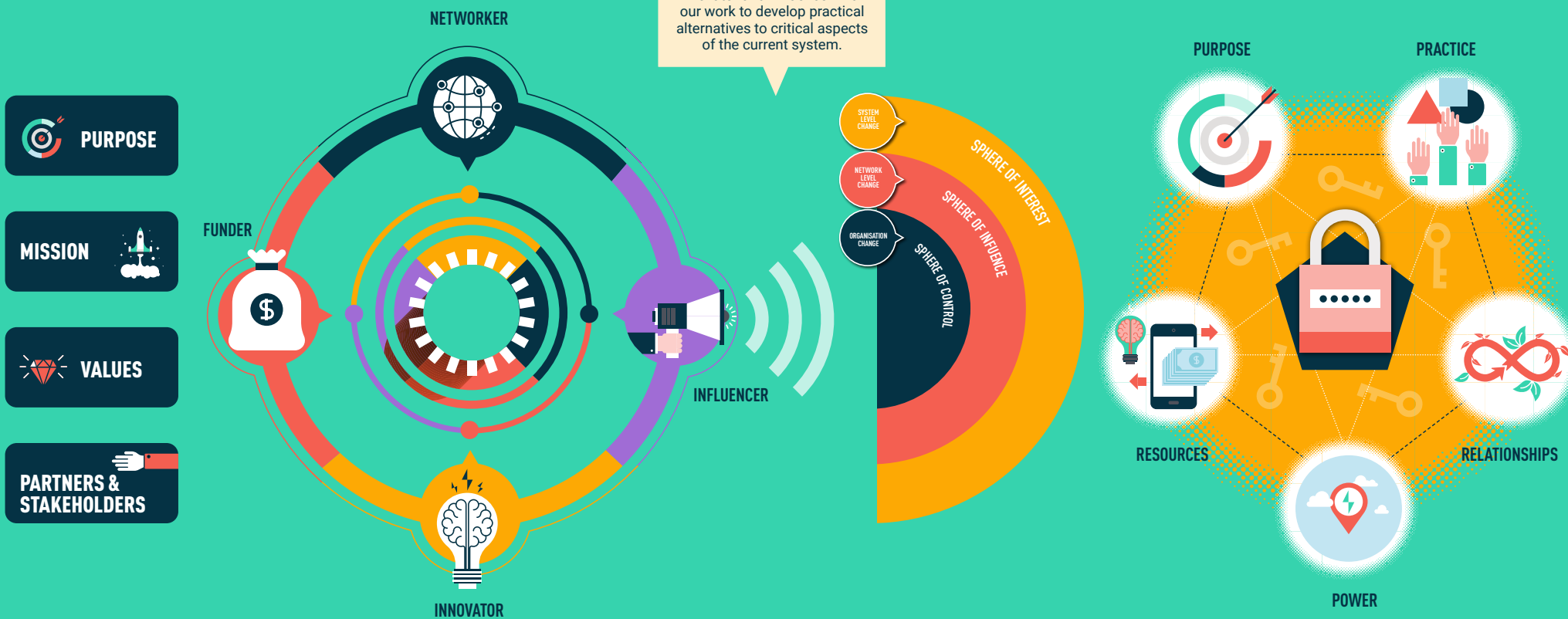


STRATEGY

We will align and leverage our value offer as networker, funder, innovator and influencer in all our work to develop practical alternatives to critical aspects of the current system.

EMERGENT, CHANGING SYSTEM

- ▶ Power & resources are concentrated in local Hubs and L/NGOs making key decisions right at the locus of crisis
- ▶ Accountability is predominantly to those communities and people directly affected by crises and disaster
- ▶ Funding is fast & anticipatory, quickly reaching those impacted by conflict & disaster
- ▶ The system as a whole takes a balanced approach to risk, sharing the risk burden equitably and with commensurate support to manage risk effectively
- ▶ Across the system we see experimentation & burgeoning evidence of viable alternatives to current ways of working



A NEW ERA OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION

START NETWORK

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