

THE DRC HUB & GLOBAL START FUND PROTOCOL

PILOT REVIEW REPORT | March 2024

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

A protocol was developed following the discussion in the DRC Hub and members workshops in June 2022, and written in collaboration with DRC Hub leaders and member representatives.

The purpose of the protocol was to test out a series of adaptations to the global Start Fund alert cycle to enable more locally led decision making within the Start Fund, as the Start Network evolves into a network of networks. This report showcases the findings of the pilot.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Start Network's aim of devolving into a Network of networks stems from the strategy to shift power, resources, and decision-making to locally led networks and organisations. The vehicle for that change is through the establishment of national and regional hubs, whose membership comprises local and national NGOs (LNNGOs).

The Start Fund is the Start Network's flagship rapid-release, member-led, pooled humanitarian fund. However, it has been questioned whether the global Start Fund has the potential to be adapted to better connect it to the hubs; with the intention of achieving a greater level of more relevant, and local, engagement and decision making.

To promote the DRC Hub engagement in the Start Fund, a series of adaptations to its alert cycle were developed in collaboration with the hub members (referred to as "the protocol"). The protocol was designed to include the perspective and decision-making capacity of DRC Hub representatives concerning DRC alerts at each stage of the cycle. The protocol underwent a 7-month pilot, beginning in April 2023. This review has three key aims: to review the effectiveness, relevance, and feasibility of the piloted protocol, offering recommendations on how it could be improved. The study gathered perceptions and opinions, across a range of stakeholders. A set of principles, a "menu" of adaptation options and a set of prerequisites are offered as a result. These should serve as a starting point for other hub contexts to consider prior to the establishment of a protocol for a its interaction with the global Start Fund mechanism.

This review provided recommendations for each stage of the alert and project cycle for Start Fund alerts. Many of these are practical and tangible tweaks to the existing protocol, in hope of boosting engagement. However, the study also cast light on some of the more fundamental contradicting factors between the global Start Fund and the protocol, which led to the creation of overarching principles. A critical challenge encountered during the pilot was maintaining speed while also ensuring meaningful participation. The key principle identified is that the alert cycle must keep to 72 hours. Hub participation should be supported as much as possible but should not cause delays to the alert cycle.

The protocol has supported the advancement of the objective of locally led humanitarian action. However, further testing in the DRC Hub and other hub contexts is required. The long-term objective of the protocol should be to slowly increase hub representation in the Start Fund alert cycle, leading to local network representatives forming a majority in decision-making committees, for relevant alerts in their context.

The overall intention is to increase engagement and ownership of the protocol, and this requires active participation. Commitment must be reciprocated across all stakeholders, but particularly among the Start Fund programmes team and the DRC Hub. The next steps

are for the findings of this review to be discussed with the DRC Hub; this will provide an opportunity to renew engagement with the protocol among DRC Hub representatives. Luckily, there is a huge amount of willingness and motivation, accompanied by a sense of curious experimentation, all of which are necessary as the protocol moves towards its next phase.

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A note to Hubs.

GLOSSARY

The Start Fund – The Start Network’s flagship rapid-release, member-led, pooled humanitarian fund.

The Start Fund alert cycle – a strict sequence of processes that must be completed to allocate funding to a crisis and then to award the successfully selected project(s) usually taking place within 72 hours of the crisis alert being raised.

The Start Fund niche – a set of criteria that crises must be in order to be able to access the Start Fund: Small – medium in scale, under-the-radar, in anticipation of a crisis or a peak in a chronic crisis.

The Start Fund project cycle – Once a project is awarded, agencies have 45-60 days to implement and must submit reporting 30 days after the project end date.

The “protocol” – A set of adaptations made to the Start Fund alert and project cycles. Also referred to as: **Start Fund protocol in a hub context, & “hub protocol”**

LNGOs – Local and national non-governmental organisations.

INGOs – International non-government organisations.

Hub – The Start Networks way of devolving the global network. Hubs are currently in incubation and on their way to being independent organisations. How each hub is established and governed is decided by the local actors who form it.

Hub Focal Point – Hubs can hire a staff member(s) to drive all areas of hub development and work, which may include coordinating with Start Network and Start Fund. In the DRC, this role is entitled the **Hub Executive Secretary**. This job title may vary from hub to hub, hence, for the purposes of this report, the generic term “Hub Focal Point” is used for the individual who is the main point of contact between Start Fund and the hub. In some contexts, the Hub focal point might be a staff member of the hub secretariat or a hub member who acts on a voluntary basis.

Stakeholder group 1 - Representatives of the DRC Hub. Key stakeholders from organisations within the DRC Hub membership or secretariat, who have previously expressed interest in representing the hub in Start Fund processes.

Stakeholder group 2 - A. Alerting agencies. Staff representatives from agencies who have raised alerts in DRC or supported the process. **B. Implementing agencies.** Staff representatives who have been awarded projects within the DRC.

Stakeholder group 3 - Start Fund allocation committee members. Key decision-makers who have been trained on the Start Fund niche and allocation criteria, who

were actively involved in the pilot sample allocation decisions; and who could compare this to other previous allocation experiences.

Stakeholder group 4 - Global Start Fund Programme team members. The team facilitating the Start Fund processes, who can provide further information on the pilot's practical feasibility.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The Start Network is a network of over 80 humanitarian aid organisations, ranging from international household-name charities to smaller agencies operating in a single country. One thing that all Start Network member agencies have in common is that they are choosing to come together and act collectively to bring about the changes they wish to see within the world, and indeed, the humanitarian sector. Changes; deemed necessary not only among the Start Network membership, but by significant stakeholders across the sector, by large.

The Grand Bargain agreement, originally signed in 2016 between 11 of the biggest donors and UN agencies; now consisting of 67 signatories, defines the most critical thematic areas agreed upon that drastically need collective effort in order to reshape the aid sector.¹ Localisation, or locally led action, is a significant workstream under the Grand Bargain, which underlines the importance of direct funding to local actors, as well as how pooled funding can be utilised to shift the power, closer to local actors and to those affected by the crisis². Yet, generally, the international community has failed to deliver on the big commitments they promised; progress continues to be slow, and the humanitarian aid sector continues to be unfit for purpose.

The Start Network has woven localisation into the fabric of its *raison d'être*. “We are shifting power, resources and decision making to locally led networks and organisations.” (Start Network Vision)³. This essential part of the Network’s identity has been interpreted into many different areas of work; through various programmes (including the Start Fund itself,) research, and activities. Arguably the most visible way in which the Start Network is attempting to achieve locally led action is within the strategy to devolve into a “Network of networks,” via the establishment of hubs.

As the Start Network transitions towards a decentralised model, several hubs are at various stages of development and incubation. The concept is based on having a well distributed number of regional and national networks - a collaboration among

¹ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/node/40190>

² <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2021-11/Commitments%20and%20core%20commitments%20by%20workstream.pdf>

³ <https://startnetwork.org/about/mission-vision-and-values>

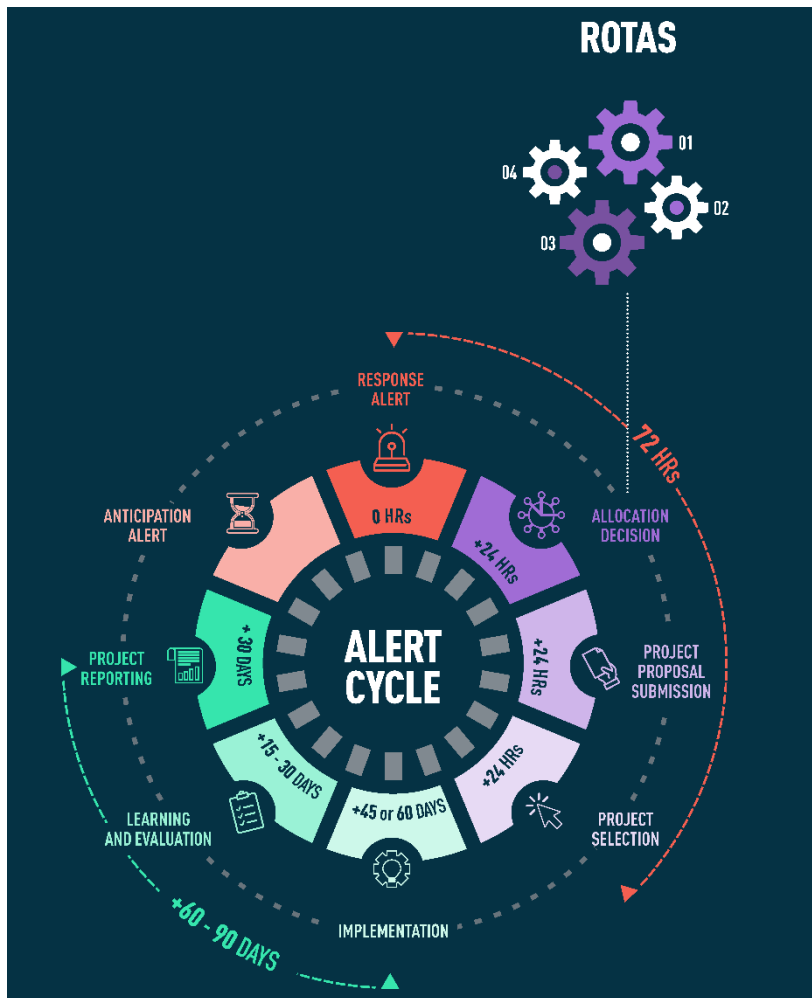
local, national, and international NGOs, as well as other change-makers such as academics. Each hub has the power and responsibility to co-design and -create their governance structure, funds, activities and focus areas. However, through the Start Network membership, hub members continue to have access to Start’s global financing facility and due diligence platform. ⁴

The global Start Fund, the Start Network’s flagship funding mechanism, is a member-led pooled humanitarian fund, focusing on underfunded small to medium scale crises, forecasts of impending crises and spikes in chronic humanitarian crises. With the development of the hubs at the front and centre of the Start Network strategy, it has been called into question **whether the global Start Fund has the potential to be adapted to better connect it to the hubs, with the intention of achieving a greater level of more relevant, and local, engagement and decision making.** The decision was made to trial this approach through a single country pilot. The findings of which would be used to support a larger scale roll-out to other hub countries.

THE START FUND ALERT CYCLE

For funding to be released, the global Start Fund’s model relies on the Start Network membership’s participation at two decision making points: Firstly, for funding to be allocated to a crisis, and then, awarded to successful project proposals. The power to make the decision on whether to activate the crisis alert and allocate funding occurs over a global roster of member representatives who have been trained on the Start Fund niche and criteria. Whereas the responsibility of the project selection decision is held at a much more local level, among humanitarian professionals working within the country in which the crisis occurred, who do not necessarily need to be part of the membership to take part in the selection.

⁴ <https://startnetwork.org/network/hubs>



WHY DRC?

The Start Network Hub in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was selected as the first hub to pilot a Start Fund “protocol” (a series of adaptations to the alert cycle) for several reasons:

Firstly, the frequency at which alerts are raised in DRC is an important factor. This is a country in which Start Network members are not only very active and engaged, but they are also familiar with accessing the Start Fund, and its processes. 78 alerts have been raised in the DRC since the Start Fund began in 2014. Since 2019, the number of alerts in DRC has been in double figures annually⁵.

Another factor which made the DRC Hub a favourable contestant to pilot a Start Fund protocol was its level of progression towards independence. The DRC Hub is the most advanced among the first cohort of hubs, estimated at fulfilling around 85% of its readiness indicators.⁶ The hub’s governance and network strength are two of

⁵ SOURCE: Global Start Fund alert data

⁶ SOURCE: NetDev Induction Aug 2023:

its highest performing indicators, both of which are critical for an effective protocol. This translates as having the necessary infrastructure and people in place to be able to interact with the Start Fund in a meaningful way. Importantly, there also must be the interest and energy to engage, from the hub’s board and secretariat, and across the local network.

Alerts raised from member’s concerning the DRC already had certain parameters such as pre-defined standing decision-making groups. These were put in place in response to recommendations made to enhance coordination in DRC by the Start Fund Strategic Committee, in 2021. Therefore, there was capacity among the Programmes team –those who administrate and facilitate Start Fund processes-- to add further specific steps regarding alerts in DRC, as those alerts already deviated from the “normal procedure”.

By fortifying the relationship between the global Start Fund and any given hub, the hub secretariat’s oversight of programming is also increased. This should encourage better complementarity of projects and instil a sense of shared ownership over relevant Start Fund projects within the membership. Accountability and assurance can also be enhanced by the hub’s awareness of active Start Fund alerts and projects within their context. So, there was also interest from the Start Fund for “hub protocols,” in the hope of additional layers of accountability and ownership among peers, increasing faith in high quality projects as an outcome.

THE PREMISE OF THE PILOT

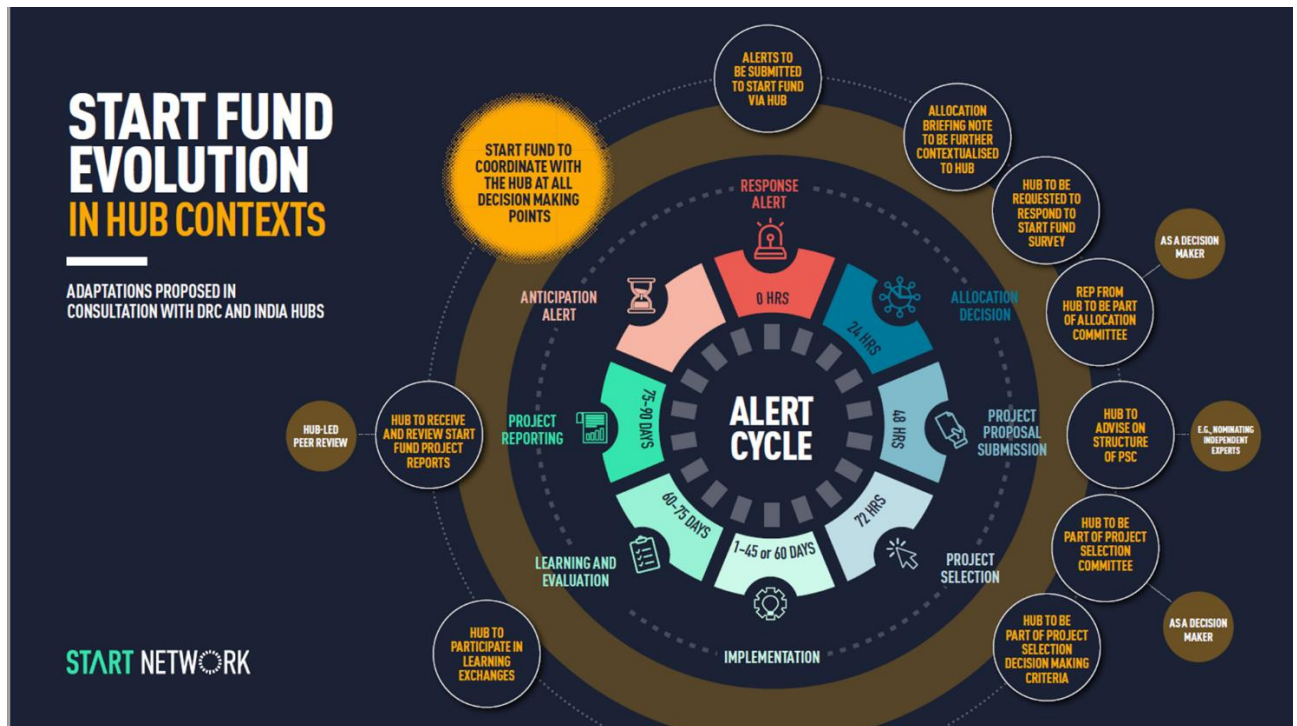
Hubs are central stakeholders with a perspective on how the global Start Fund could be utilised to support the hub in their area of operation. A series of adaptations (“the protocol”) were developed in collaboration with the hub members to promote the DRC hub engagement in the Start Fund, along the lines of their recommended adaptations to the alert cycle. The protocol was developed to include the perspective and decision-making capability of the DRC Hub, **at each stage** of the Start Fund alert cycle for alerts based in DRC, as a mechanism to improve the strategy for locally led humanitarian action via the global Start Fund. The final version of the protocol was agreed on January 2023 and the official roll out of the adaptations began in April 2023. For more information regarding the protocol, see [annex 1](#).

It was never the intention of this pilot to be a precursor to a national Start Fund, which is a separate area of work and has serious long-term implications.

Establishment of a hub protocol does not intrinsically mean creation of a national Start Fund. A Start Fund protocol in a hub context (sometimes referred to within this

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1xA_RN1oLGCYO0ndmHwO9-5wDPvqbkhes/edit#slide=id.p17

document as a “hub protocol”) defines how the hub and global Start Fund interact throughout the alert and project cycle.



An important part of the development of the protocol was to ensure a set of core considerations were upheld, meaning that specific protocol stages did not contradict any of the principles governing the global Start Fund’s model.

Core considerations behind the protocol:

1. The principles of the Start Fund as reflected in the Start Fund Handbook are upheld.
2. To ensure timeliness of alert decisions.
3. To ensure key stakeholders can participate meaningfully in the alert cycle process.
4. To ensure Start Fund alert cycle management continues to remain as streamlined as possible.

Seeing as this is the first occurrence of the hub specific protocol, a **pilot** was established to trial the protocol and allow for a testing period. The intended duration was six months. Three main areas of interest were being trialled:

Firstly, the pilot intended to examine the **effectiveness** of the protocol. Is the protocol, as it was elaborated and as it exists, a valuable mechanism for increasing meaningful participation of the relevant actors, to achieve the goal of increasing locally led action and decision-making via the global Start Fund?

Secondly, the pilot anticipated exploring the protocol’s **relevance**. This means considering **whether the protocol is received positively** across a range of stakeholders interacting with the global Start Fund, and whether this translates as **having the necessary buy-in from the relevant stakeholders** to deem the protocol successful and to understand whether it warrants the deviation from “normal alert cycle procedure”.

Finally, the pilot was also expected to test the **feasibility** of administering the protocol, including whether a protocol causes delays or contradicts other principles of the Start Fund.

The purpose of **this report** is a review of the pilot, with two main intentions. Firstly, the pilot offers an opportunity to identify areas of the protocol to alter, improve, or scrap. Secondly, the pilot offers an opportunity for the lessons to be carried forward; learning from this pilot review will also be used to shape the protocol for the Start Fund alert cycle across other hub countries. This will be achieved through the expected outputs of the pilot study, which are:

1. Recommendations for the DRC protocol
 - a. Framework and plan for executing recommendations and updates, defining regular review periods.
2. Prerequisites for any hub considering a Start Fund protocol.
3. The options available for a Start Fund protocol (the “Menu”).

METHODOLOGY

Different stakeholder groups who interacted with the protocol throughout the pilot phase were approached during the review. The stakeholder groups consist of

1. **Representatives of the DRC Hub.** Key stakeholders from organisations within the DRC Hub membership or secretariat, who have previously expressed interest in representing the hub in Start Fund processes.
2. **A. Alerting agencies.** Staff representatives from agencies who have raised alerts in DRC or supported the process.
B. Implementing agencies. Staff representatives who have been awarded projects within the DRC.
3. **Start Fund allocation committee members.** Key decision-makers who have been trained on the Start Fund niche and allocation criteria, who were actively involved in the pilot sample allocation decisions; and who could compare this to other previous allocation experiences.
4. **Global Start Fund Programme team members.** The team facilitating the Start Fund processes, who can provide further information on the pilot’s practical feasibility.

A set of learning questions and indicators were established at the inception of the pilot. ([See annex 2.](#)) The pilot review study consisted of two main approaches. Firstly, we made a quantitative analysis over the dataset from the pilot sample of alerts against the predetermined indicators.

Three surveys were then published, containing largely similar questions in each for each of the stakeholder groups, respectively, based on the learning questions. Only stakeholder group 4 did not receive a survey, as instead they participated in a series of group consultations.

The surveys consisted of a range of questions that provide a basis for a quantitative and qualitative analysis. To add greater depth to the qualitative analysis, focus group discussions were carried out with a small number of interested parties from each of the stakeholder groups. Again, the conversations were largely based on the learning questions and the overall intention of the FGDs was to gain a greater, more nuanced understanding of the perceptions regarding the protocol. The surveys and FGDs were carried out in French or English as preferred, to gain greatest insight and enable participants to respond freely.

LIMITATIONS

Due to the restriction of completing the study in a timely manner, the surveys were open for response for only a short duration. Limited access to study participants and the limited participation of respondents overall, presented a challenge in being able to draw themes and trends from the quantitative survey questions, due to a small sample size and conflicting responses. An important factor to highlight here is that participation was largely based on interest of the individuals, effectively creating a sample bias. In view of these being quite standard limitations of a short-term study, there is little that can be done to counteract them; however, they are important to note and bear in mind during the analysis.

PILOT REVIEW

QUANTITATIVE REVIEW

DATA SUMMARY PER ALERT CYCLE STAGE

For a summary of the pilot data, [see annex 3](#).

Alert cycle stage		Hub participation level %
Alert note feedback (from 'Hub Focal Point' ⁷ within three hours)		60%
Allocation survey	External response rate	60%
	'Hub Focal Point' response rate	100%
Hub participant in allocation		20%
Hub participant in PSC		75% - but serious delays to 1 of the 4 PSCs due to including hub participant
Hub participant in Learning Exchange		0% thusfar

SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE INDICATOR RESULTS

- # of alerts raised in the DRC – **5 in the pilot**
- % of alerts that received input from the hub – **60% (alert verification)**
- % of allocation meetings for DRC alerts that had the participation of a hub representative – **20%**
- # of alerts activated in the DRC – **4 out of 5 in pilot**
- % of project selection meetings for DRC alerts that had the participation of a hub representative – **75%**
- # of proposals with the involvement of a LNNGO – **for each activated alert there was at least one proposal submission from a LNNGO**
- % of narrative reports reviewed by hub representatives – **0%**
- % of Learning Exchanges with a hub representative in attendance – **0%**

⁷ *Hub Focal Point* – In DRC this role is entitled **Hub Executive Secretary** and is currently held by Roger Kayenga. It is a Start Network role hosted by the hub secretariat organisation, and this person is the main focal point, who liaises between Start Network and the hub membership. For the purposes of this report, we use the generic term “Hub Focal Point” for anyone who may be in a similar role, under the understanding that the job title may vary from hub to hub.

PRE-ALERT STAGE

WHAT HAPPENS

During this stage, member(s) share their interest in raising a Start Fund alert for a particular crisis that is considered to fit the Start Fund niche. Members are expected to coordinate using their country Skype group which typically involves:

- Sharing information on the crisis i.e., rapid needs assessment, access concerns
- Confirming coordination with the relevant humanitarian clusters
- Indicating whether their member organisation is interested in supporting the alert.

Hub-specific involvement: Hub Focal Point, in consultation with the relevant sub-hub (if applicable) is involved in the review of the alert note before formal activation.

PROTOCOL

#	STEPS	PURPOSE	TIME FRAME	ROLE OF HUB REPRESENTATIVE
1	Upon receiving the draft alert note from member(s), SF team to share the draft alert note with Hub Focal Point via email and skype	To ensure Hub Focal Point is aware of the draft alert.	As soon as the draft alert is received.	To receive the draft alert note
2a	<p>Hub Focal Point, in consultation with the relevant sub-hub, to review the draft alert note and provide feedback on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Is the hub aware of this crisis? ii. Is the hub aware if the alerting agencies and the supporting partners are present and able to implement any interventions in the target areas? iii. Is there any additional relevant information on the situation (that is not on the alert note), that the hub think should be shared with decision-makers? iv. Does the hub support raising this alert or has strong 	<p>To review and validate the crisis alert.</p> <p><i>Validate means to triangulate alert note information with local hub information. The hub does not have the power to veto the alert.</i></p>	<p>Feedback to be provided within the same working day the draft alert note is shared.</p>	<p>To review the draft alert note and provide feedback.</p> <p>To review and validate the content of the alert note.</p>

	reservations about it (and why)?			
2b	SF team to review the draft alert note and provide feedback on the content.	To ensure the alert note template has relevant information for allocation decision-makers.	Feedback to be provided within the same working day the draft alert note is submitted.	N/A
3	SF team to confirm with ACAPS whether there is sufficient information for a briefing note.	To ensure sufficient information for allocation decision-makers.		N/A
4	SF team to go back to alerting agencies with the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Draft alert note with comments from SF team ii. Questions/ concerns raised by the hub to be addressed iii. Feedback from ACAPS if more information is required to issue a briefing note. 	To enable alerting agencies opportunity to strengthen their alert note.	As soon as all three pieces of information are available – target to be within 48 hours of the draft alert note submission.	N/A
5	Once revised alert note is submitted, SF team to share the final alert note with the Hub Focal Point and ACAPS.	To disseminate the final version to key stakeholders.	As soon as the revised alert note is submitted	N/A
6	SF team to raise the alert once the following are available: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Revised alert note ii. ACAPS briefing note’s availability confirmation 	To raise the alert and notify the wider membership.	As soon as possible	N/A

Of the alerts included in the pilot, ACAPS and the Hub Focal Point were **both** able to verify the crisis within the allotted time in only **60% of cases**. In one case, the crisis was verified by the Hub Focal Point before the deadline however ACAPS could not confirm the crisis until **15 days later**, causing significant delays in raising the alert.⁸ This means that pre-alert processes could undermine the perceptions and information provided on behalf of the hub and “sub-hub” representatives⁹. One

⁸ Alert 748 DRC (Cholera Outbreak).

⁹ DRC Hub specific: Hub Focal Point, in consultation with the relevant sub-hub, is involved in the review of the Alert Note before formal activation.

survey respondent from **stakeholder group 2** reflected on this, stating, *“Start seems to rely much more on confirmation from ACAPS and OCHA.”*

The trust that is placed in locally led decision making should also extend to local crisis verification. Therefore, **one type of alert verification should be sufficient to raise the alert** (either from ACAPS or the Hub Focal Point - or equivalent role, with relevant expertise). That being said, ACAPS briefing notes have been consistently used as a means of verification. Allocation committees have year after year found these to be extremely helpful. Therefore, there is a non-negligible risk that alerts only verified by a hub are not activated. The hub will have to work to provide more detailed crisis verification feedback, including triangulated data.

Therefore, **the alert verification from the hub should fulfil a set of minimum requirements**, with support and guidance provided by the Start Fund to ensure quality alert verification. The standards can be reviewed on a hub-by-hub basis, dependent on each context.

To increase engagement, there are ways to facilitate this step to ensure a more effective, timely and direct information exchange, for example via Skype instead of email.

RECOMMENDATIONS: PRE-ALERT STAGE

1. Find most effective way of communicating with hub representatives to ensure dynamic interactions and timely response. (i.e., Reconsider communication platforms – Skype group?) [Lead: SF, Collaboration: Hub]
2. Ensure members copy the Hub Focal Point when submitting alerts to the Start Fund inbox. [Communicate: SF, Act: Members]
3. Revise the aims of pre-alert verification and ensure minimum standards (i.e. use of sources) [Lead: SF, Collaboration: Hub]

ALERT STAGE

WHAT HAPPENS

- The alert stage is when the alert note is circulated to all members. Members are expected to respond, within 24 hours, to the alert survey.
- Within the 24 hours of the alert being raised, members must complete the survey which has two functions: (i) it provides a strategic steer on whether the Fund should be activated and estimates an appropriate funding amount for the crisis (ii) it captures additional information on the crisis and each agency’s intention to respond.
- **DRC specific step:** A survey is shared with a list of neutral external participants (members of staff from humanitarian organisations and academic institutions who are not part of the global Start Network, or DRC Hub’s membership)

Hub-specific involvement: The Hub Focal Point, in consultation with the relevant sub-hub (if applicable) submits a member survey from a representing the perspective of the hub.

PROTOCOL

#	Steps	Purpose	Time Frame	Role of DRC Hub Representative
1	SF team to raise the alert by circulating the Alert Note and the member survey link.	To raise the alert and notify the wider membership.	As soon as the relevant information have been received	N/A
2	Hub Focal Point , in consultation with the relevant sub-hub , to complete the member survey, portraying the hub’s perspective.	To ensure the hub perspective on the alert is reflected.	Within 24 hours of alert being raised.	To respond to the member survey.

For the sample of alerts in the pilot, **the Hub Focal Point responded to 100% of the alert surveys on behalf of the hub**, however **the external respondents only replied in 60% of cases**.

Currently, two of the three surveys are sent manually (hub & external) making this a labour intensive and time sensitive stage for the Start Fund Programmes team to translate and compile information ahead of the allocation committee meeting. Despite this, the triangulation of the crisis information is critical for alerts in the DRC,

so the additional information provided is necessary. The pilot emphasised the benefit of having automated methods of administering processes; making them more user-friendly for Start Fund Programme Officers and respondents, alike. In a similar reflection to the pre-alert stage, it would be useful to agree upon a minimum standard of information shared within the hub survey responses. The sometimes-lacking participation from the external stakeholder group suggests the need to refresh commitments from individuals who could provide their neutral perspective. Contact details should be updated on a regular basis, in hope of retaining engagement during this stage.

The alert note is the most critical document for the Start Fund alert cycle: It is the only opportunity for alerting agencies to present the crisis. The alert note template, historically, has only been available in English. Allocation meetings are also carried out in English, as the common language for the global membership. There are a few things to consider here. Firstly, since the Start Network already offers many of its documents and resources in English, French as Spanish as standard, there is the possibility for alert note template(s) to also be available in the three above languages;¹⁰ as a huge amount of feedback from stakeholder groups 1 and 2 has focussed on the ability to submit the alert note in French.



ALL THE PRE-ALERT FUNCTIONS SHOULD HAVE A FRENCH VERSION. THIS WOULD REALLY FACILITATE US TO MONITOR AND FOLLOW ALL THE ALERTS FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE END. WHEN WE RAISE AN ALERT, IT TAKES AN EXTRAORDINARY AMOUNT OF WORK AND TIME TO SUBMIT IT IN ENGLISH: FILL IN THE FORM, THEN RESPOND TO THE QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK. ALL OF THESE ARE LITTLE BARRIERS THAT PREVENT US FROM PARTICIPATING TO OUR BEST STANDARD. FOR THE REST OF THE PROCESS, THERE ARE NO WORRIES BECAUSE WE CAN DO IT IN FRENCH.” – FGD participant from an alerting / awarded agency.

Secondly, as it is the alert note that carries the crisis information to the allocation committee, it is important that the committee have awareness and visibility over the how alerting agencies have interacted with the hub during the pre-alert and alert stages. This is because local coordination is a core consideration for decision-makers, and hubs are the vehicle that Start Network use to achieve this. This idea will be further explored in the Allocation stage section; however, the relevant recommendation for this stage, would be **to revise the alert note template to ensure sufficient space for alerting agencies to elaborate on coordination with the hub.**

¹⁰ This had previously been avoided due to the necessity of conducting all allocation committee meetings in English, as the common language of the individuals on the allocation committee rotas, as well as being able to confidently facilitate the feedback exchange in a timely manner between the programmes team and alerting agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS: ALERT STAGE

1. Review technological solutions to facilitate alert survey emails to ensure the most dynamic and timely response. (i.e., Reconsider communication platforms, DRC hub mailing list on Salesforce, automating external alert survey). [Lead: SF]
2. Refresh commitments and contact details of recipients of external allocation survey and plan for period updates going forward. [Lead: SF]
3. Revise the aims of the hub survey and ensure minimum standards (i.e. use of sources) [Lead: SF, Collaboration: Hub]
4. Communicate the rule to ensure Hub Focal Point is in copy when agencies submit the final alert note. [Lead: SF, Collaboration: Hub]
5. Revise alert note template to include space to elaborate on coordination with the hub (membership and secretariat) to give decision makers greater visibility. [Lead: SF]
6. Translate the alert note template and allow submission in French (and Spanish,) as well as English. [Lead: SF]

ALLOCATION STAGE

WHAT HAPPENS

- After 24 hours of the alert note being raised (i.e. alert note is circulated to all members), the allocation decisions are made by the Start Fund Committee¹¹ (using a rota of agencies that are on duty on a rolling two monthly basis). The decision to activate an alert is based on the available information about the crisis, the context, and the humanitarian needs; and whether it is appropriate for the Start Fund mechanism. The decision is informed by the alert note, the member survey and the third-party briefing note on the crisis.

Hub-specific involvement: A hub representative; a volunteer from a previously formed hub roster (not part of any of the alerting agencies) participates in the Allocation Committee.

PROTOCOL

#	Steps	Purpose	Time Frame	Role of DRC Hub Representative
1	One hub representative from the roster (not from any alerting agencies) to participate in the allocation committee meeting.	To ensure oversight from DRC Hub on all DRC alerts.	Within 24 hours of alert being raised.	<p>To review the alert note, ACAPS briefing note and member survey results.</p> <p>To contribute contextual insights on whether the alert meets the SF niche.</p> <p>To participate in activation decision-making.</p>

There was only one occurrence in the pilot sample in which a hub representative¹² participated at the allocation in the pilot sample, resulting in a 20% participation rate. In the latter three alerts the programmes team were forced to continue without hub representation as the alerts had already been postponed (some several times) in hope of securing the relevant participation. Consultations with the Start Fund team

¹¹ Allocation decisions for all DRC alerts are made by the Start Fund Committee rota and will not be delegated to Start Fund Team.

¹² i.e. Not the Hub Focal Point, but from a hub member organisation.

underlined how frustrating this stage was to administer, consisting of time spent chasing individuals to a largely unengaged reception.

On the other hand, from the survey respondents from the hub representative stakeholder group, **50% stated they did not feel included at all in this stage**, despite them being called upon to participate. Again, one of the major barriers to participation here is language. **“The language used is all in English, which limits our active participation, if only we could hold meetings in French.”** – *Hub Representative survey response.*

Stakeholder group 1 (representatives from the DRC Hub) clearly expressed the importance of the hub inclusion in **each** stage of the alert cycle.



HAVING A HUB REPRESENTATIVE PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON AT ALLOCATION MEETINGS IS A VERY IMPORTANT ELEMENT, AS IT IS ABOUT REPRESENTATION. HOWEVER, WE NEED TO FIND A WAY TO IMPROVE OUR SYSTEMS TO ORGANISE WHO COULD BE AVAILABLE, PERHAPS A WAY IN WHICH WE CAN ADAPT ALLOCATIONS FOR THE LANGUAGE – *Hub representative FGD.*

Even when faced with a question that was designed in a way to force respondents to state a preference for one stage of having more, or less, significance¹³, respondents took this as a study flaw and expressed frustration in not being able to mark all stages as important for hub representative involvement.

Here lies one of the fundamental issues in the feasibility of this stage of the protocol. Despite the will to participate, the operational language of the allocation meeting is English, presenting a barrier to Francophone representatives of the hub and generating feelings of being excluded. The Start Fund team have previously explored expanding the operational languages of meetings and have subsequently started offering as many functions as possible in French and Spanish, as well as English, including the latter decision of the alert cycle (project selection meetings). However, with the current capacity of the global Start Fund Programmes team, **it would not be possible to facilitate bilingual allocation meetings** so the allocation quorum could comprise (English speaking) representatives from the global rota as well as hub representatives (who may not be able to participate in English). This is because, if this possibility was offered to members in one country, the service would have to be offered to all Francophone or Spanish speaking countries, for the sake of equality. Due to the limited available resources for interpretation, with the additional challenge of short notice time ahead of meetings imposed by the alert cycle, administering this in a sustainable, systematic way is currently beyond the team’s

¹³ “Which stage of the alert cycle do you believe **is a) the most, / b) the least, important** to include the perspectives, opinions, points of view of the DRC Hub?”

capacity. Therefore, the only recommendation to increase meaningful participation at this point is **ensure that within the pool of representatives from the hub there are some English-speaking members**, and to refresh commitments and boost engagement of the individuals in the pool. This should be led by the DRC Hub, with the programmes team taking a supportive approach. This is a very problematic stage, as it causes a fundamental barrier to LNNGOs without English speaking capacity. **Therefore, consideration must be put into the medium and long term to remedy this.** For example, the Start Fund may wish to **reconsider the profile of the rota representatives**: requesting member organisations to prioritise staff with the ability to cover English, French, and Spanish, **or eventually establish of regional rotas, so allocations could take place in one language** (much like how local project selection meetings are offered currently), or **explore alternatives to be able to host bilingual meetings.**

Participants from stakeholder group 3 (allocation committee members) had the most visibility over DRC Hub participation at this stage and **62.5% of them regarded the allocation stage as the most important for hub participation.** However, there were some contrasting opinions questioning the added value of having a representative from the DRC Hub on the committee because the In-Country Participant¹⁴ is a regular part of allocation meetings, so contextual information still reaches the committee.

Stakeholder group 3 also reflected on the lack of visibility, and therefore their lack of understanding, of hub participation in latter stages of the alert and project cycle. A simple suggestion was made for the programmes team to highlight hub participation as and when it occurs, increasing transparency surrounding the protocol. Another parameter that can be put into place to boost visibility is simply ensuring that coordination with the hub is considered as a part of the decision-making framework for all alerts in hub contexts, prompting discussion about this during the alert analysis. This recommendation accompanies the recommendation (from the alert stage) to include space in the alert note for elaboration on coordination.

There is a mixed level of buy-in at this stage across the stakeholder groups, especially because there is a sizable workload associated with facilitating participation at this stage. Limited conclusions can be drawn given the low participation rate during the pilot. However, hub participation at the allocation meetings certainly meets the objective of **local participation in decision making**, if not quite yet “locally **led** decision making”. Moreover, there is the motivation to participate, although practical barriers currently prevent regular meaningful

¹⁴ The In-County Participant (ICP) is a staff member from an alerting agency, who briefly joins the allocation meeting to respond to any questions raised by the committee and provide any updates on the context, as decision makers come from a global pool and may not have full contextual knowledge. After this the ICP leaves the meeting and the committee continue with their analysis and decision.

representation. Because of this and in view of the delays caused to the alerts in the pilot sample, it is critical that the Start Fund’s alert cycle takes precedence. The Start Fund’s speed is a defining feature of the funding mechanism, that must be upheld.

RECOMMENDATIONS: ALLOCATION STAGE

1. **Principle: Alert cycle time frame should take precedence. Hub representative participation in the committee is the ideal standard. Alerts should not be delayed in case of non-participation on behalf of the hub.**
2. Find most effective way of communicating to hub representatives to ensure dynamic interactions and timely response. (i.e., Reconsider communication platforms – Skype group?) [Lead: SF, Collaboration: Hub]
3. Refresh commitments and contact details of hub representatives and plan for periodic updates going forward. [Lead: Hub, Collaboration: SF]
4. Communicate the existing, regular SF training opportunities to pool of hub representatives. [Lead: SF]
5. Highlight participation from the hub representatives when it occurs to other decision makers. [Lead: SF]
6. Revise the decision-making framework document to include special consideration of interaction and coordination with the hub. [Lead: SF]
7. Consider possibility of managing bilingual allocation meetings or regional rotas to offer FR/ES allocations **[Long-term]** [Lead: SF]

PROJECT SELECTION STAGE

WHAT HAPPENS

- If the Start Fund is activated, all members may apply to respond to the crisis with projects that are up to 45 days in length¹⁵. The proposal submission deadline is 24 hours after the activation decision has been made.
- The selection of projects is delegated, wherever possible, to member (and their partner) staff closest to the location of the crisis.
- The Project Selection Committee (PSC) is typically held at least 2 hours after the proposal deadline to ensure PSC participants have sufficient time to review the submitted proposals. The PSC is usually made up of 4 participants, and participants would need to be from organisations that are not submitting a proposal.

Hub-specific involvement: One hub representative from a volunteer roster participates in the Project Selection Committee.

PROTOCOL

#	Steps	Purpose	Time Frame	Role of DRC Hub Representative
1	SF Team to confirm alert activation by circulating the activation email with the proposal template.	To notify the wider membership.	Immediately after the allocation meeting	N/A
2	SF Team to request for quorum for the PSC – 4 neutral participants in total (including 1 from the DRC Hub roster) .	To ensure the Hub’s oversight in project selection decision.	Within 24 hours of alert being activated.	To confirm their attendance for the PSC.
3	SF Team reviews and anonymises submitted proposals and assigns them to the PSC participants for review.	To facilitate the PSC process, ensuring neutrality and impartiality as much as possible.	Within an hour after the proposal submission deadline.	N/A
4	One hub representative from the roster to review the proposal (s), any recommendations from the Allocation	To ensure the Hub’s oversight in project selection decision.	2-3 hours ahead of the PSC meeting	To review the proposals, the recommendation,

¹⁵ Up to 60 days as part of Start Fund’s test adaptations to accelerate locally led humanitarian actions.

	Committee and the selection criteria ahead of the PSC.			and the selection criteria.
4	Hub representative from the roster to participate in the allocation committee meeting.	To ensure oversight from DRC Hub on all DRC alerts.	Within 24 hours of alert being raised.	To contribute contextual insights on whether the alert meets the SF niche and to ensure decision making power within the hub.

All Start Fund project selection decisions are made by a committee consisting of humanitarian professionals who work in the crisis affected country (or region), therefore arguably always accomplishing the goal of having locally led decision making at this stage. However, the pilot study has cast a light on the differing perceptions of what locally led means to different stakeholders.



MANY MEMBERS OF THE HUB SEEM TO CONFUSE LOCALISATION WITH "FIRST THE LOCALS, THEN THE INTERNATIONALS". IT IS OFTEN NOTICEABLE THAT MORE PARTICIPANTS IN THE SELECTION COMMITTEE ARE NGOS, AND AMONG THE APPLICANTS THERE ARE NGOS AND INGOS. WE STILL NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF SUBJECTIVE SELECTIONS" – *Survey response from alerting/implementing respondent.*

In the pilot sample of alerts, **75% of project selection meetings had a hub representative present, but some significant delays to the alert cycle were caused** by ensuring their participation.

This is the stage in which **the tension between the speed of the global Start Fund mechanism and the desire for locally led decision-making is felt the most.** Postponing meetings to ensure participation was only one element of this. **"An obstacle is the urgent nature of these meetings and the challenge it poses in terms of people's availability. This is something we need to consider how to improve."** – *Hub representative FGD.* The task of being prepared for the selection meeting itself, at short notice, is also a barrier to meaningful participation. **"Applications for selection are sent in haste and often on the eve of selection, so there isn't enough time to read and understand the project."** – *Hub representative survey response.*

This calls into question the capacity of those individuals who are representing the DRC Hub, as remarked upon by a respondent from stakeholder group 3, **"The question of do the members of the Hub have the capacity to dedicate time to the Start Fund alert cycle process must be asked to Hub members."** – *Allocation committee member survey response.* An overarching principle is that the Start Fund

must be a rapid-release financing model. However, there are operational ways of increasing engagement which should be prioritised because of the pilot. A balance between meaningful participation on behalf of the hub and the speed of the Start Fund should be found.

High-quality decision-making is important in the Start Fund, so bringing a locally led element to that would be the gold standard. **Participation of the same hub representative at both the allocation and project selection meeting would enable that.** Within the pilot sample, this was not experienced. However, incidentally, it occurred in a subsequent alert.¹⁶ This continuity throughout the alert cycle was appreciated by the Programmes team, who reflected on the quality of the discussion. Furthermore, contributing in this way is beneficial for the hub representative, who is able to follow an entire alert cycle.

Conversely, we have witnessed the same individual participating in the decision-making in multiple alerts. There is a risk that if the responsibility falls on one person repetitively, then this does not constitute true hub representation. Another associated risk is if the representatives of the hub do not work for an agency who is able to access the global Start Fund, then expectations of accessing funding should be managed, as participation does not lead to this.

To gain the level of commitment required, it is recommended that five “DRC SF Champions” be trialled, from a small number of hub representatives to make the protocol a success. A set of commitments and targets for the champions should be established to guarantee the merit to their participation, such as attending both allocation and PSC for one alert. If identifying the DRC SF Champions is a collaboration led by the DRC Hub and if conducted in a proactive and encouraging manner, we could see hub participation rates could increase, and the long-term sustainability of the protocol may have a more positive outlook.

The “Two-Rota” System

“The Two-Rota system” is an existing process put in place for DRC alerts, consisting of two standing decision-making groups, who rotate monthly to participate at the PSC. As a part of the review process for the protocol pilot, the programmes team equally remarked upon the general challenges in securing quorum for the local project selection committee for DRC alerts. Therefore, these groups also need to refresh commitments.

¹⁶ SF Alert 775 DRC (Flooding) in January 2024

RECOMMENDATIONS: PROJECT SELECTION STAGE

1. **Principle: Alert cycle time frame should take precedence. Hub representative participation in the committee is the ideal standard. Alerts should not be delayed in case of non-participation on behalf of the hub.**
2. Find most effective way of communicating and engage with hub representatives to ensure dynamic interactions and timely response. (i.e., Reconsider communication platforms – Skype group?) [Lead: SF, Collaboration: Hub]
3. Revise the project proposal template to include special consideration of interaction and coordination with the hub. [Lead: SF]
4. **Participants of the 'Two-Rota PSC system' for DRC:** Commitments and contact details need an immediate refresh and plan for periodic updates going forward. [Lead: SF]
5. Refresh commitments and contact details of hub representatives and plan for period updates going forward. [Lead: Hub, Collaboration: SF]
6. Gold standard participation is to have the same individual represent the hub at both allocation and project selection meeting. [Lead: Hub, Support: SF]
 - a. From the pool of DRC Hub Representatives five people could be encouraged to be DRC SF Champions.
 - b. SF champions commit to attending both decisions, participation targets.

IMPLEMENTATION & REPORTING STAGES (POST ALERT CYCLE)

WHAT HAPPENS

- All agencies receiving Start Funds must submit a final report within 30 days of the project end date as indicated in the award letter.
- Apart from the reporting, Start Funds MEAL team holds a one hour virtual debrief called a “Learning Exchange” after each of its responses to reflect on the decisions that were made, what learning can be identified, and what recommendations should be taken forward to improve future responses and the services (tools and processes) that the Start Fund mechanism provides.

Hub-specific involvement: Peer review of Start Fund projects implemented in DRC i.e. review final report and participate in Learning Exchanges.

PROTOCOL

#	Steps	Purpose	Time Frame	Role of DRC Hub Representative
1	SF Team to confirm the reporting deadline and Learning Exchange date with DRC Hub.	To give DRC Hub notice on the timeframe.	After award letter(s) has been signed	N/A
2	Hub Focal Point to review the final narrative report(s) and participate in the Learning Exchange i. It is expected that the Hub Focal Point reviews all the reports within the same alert for consistency and ease of management. ii. The report and invitation can also be shared with the programme sub-commission and the sub-hub, but their engagement is not mandatory.	To ensure hub oversight of project implementation.	Within the project period	To review the report, attend the learning exchange, and share information with the programme sub-commission and the sub-hub.
3	SF Team to receive and share the final report(s) with the Hub Focal Point	To ensure accountability to the Start Fund and the hub’s oversight in project implementation.	Within 30 days of the project end date – as soon as the report has been submitted by implementing agency	

4	<p>Hub Focal Point to review the final report(s) and share any questions/ feedback with SF Team for consolidation.</p> <p>i. Only one round of question/ feedback is expected unless in exceptional cases.</p>	To ensure the hub's oversight on project implementation.	Within 2 weeks of the report(s) being shared ¹⁷	To review the final report(s) and provide any feedback/ questions for implementing agency.
5	<p>SF Team to consolidate all questions/ feedback and send them to implementing agencies for follow-up.</p> <p>i. SF Team will be responsible for ensuring any question/ feedback is addressed sufficiently.</p>	To ensure reporting is clear.	Within 2 weeks of the report(s) being submitted	N/A
6	<p>SF Team to share the final closed report with the hub representative for information.</p>	To ensure the hub's oversight on project implementation.	After the report(s) has been closed	To share any reflection with the rest of the DRC Hub during learning events.

This is the most underperforming protocol stage against the indicators, with there being **zero participation from the hub in learning exchanges or having viewed any project reports** within the pilot sample. The DRC Hub's disappointment with this is clearly noted. **"But once the projects are selected, the communication is limited, there is dissatisfaction that the hub does not feel truly involved in all stages of the process."** - *Hub representative FGD*. **The Start Fund Programmes team did not manage to invite the appropriate people to the relevant meetings or share the project documentation with the Hub Focal Point.** This has been a significant oversight and underperformance from the programmes team, particularly given how much persistence to adhering to the protocol there was in the alert stages. It should be reiterated throughout future testing and implementation that protocols are established for and led by hubs. Therefore, if a protocol is not being effectively implemented, **the overarching principle of reciprocal commitment** should be encouraged: Increasing the hub's faith in their own power and responsibility to provide feedback towards the Start Fund team.

This stage has raised some fundamentally problematic questions concerning who is accountable to whom.



¹⁷ In cases where SF Team did not receive any feedback/ questions within the two-week timeframe, SF Team would go ahead and get back to implementing agencies to avoid delays to the process.

IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES DO NOT BELIEVE THEY ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO THE HUB [...] AFTER HAVING VALIDATED THE ALERT, THE HUB REPRESENTATIVES ARE NOT INVOLVED AT ALL. THERE IS NO VISIBILITY ON START FUND PROJECTS, NOT EVEN THE FINAL REPORT. THE HUB IS SOMETIMES APPROACHED BY THE START NETWORK WITH QUESTIONS SUCH AS, “WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THAT PROJECT?” BUT HOW CAN WE KNOW IF WE HAVEN’T BEEN INVOLVED? THE HUB SHOULD HAVE AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS THAT ARE TAKING PLACE WITHIN ITS MEMBERSHIP, AT ALL LEVELS. START NETWORK SHOULD PRIORITISE THE MONITORING OF LIVE PROJECTS IN DRC” – *Hub representative FGD.*



IN THE PAST, IT WAS VERY BLURRY. NOBODY KNEW IF SOMEONE HAD A START FUND PROJECT, WHO WAS DOING WHAT IN WHICH AREA. NOW WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO UNDERSTAND WHETHER THERE ARE RELATED ACTIVITIES, WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PARTNERS. IT’S STILL WITHIN THE SAME FRAMEWORK OF REINFORCING THE ACCOUNTABILITY AMONG MEMBERS, ESPECIALLY NEWER MEMBERS.” – *Representative from alerting / awarded member agency of both global SF and DRC Hub -FGD.*

So, there is a desire for the hub to be able to monitor live projects. Therefore, it is recommended that **if the DRC Hub wishes to carry out this kind of peer-to-peer monitoring, then the sustainability of being able to do this needs to be considered by the hub secretariat**, especially in terms of budgetary requirements.

In terms of being able to generate increased visibility across the hub and a sense of shared ownership of the Start Fund in DRC, **the Start Fund team should reinforce their efforts to ensure that finalised narrative reports are shared with the Hub Focal Point**. However, one extremely important element to underline is that member agencies that are awarded a Start Fund project are directly accountable to the global Start Fund team, hosted by SCUK. While the global Start Fund is under the grant custodian agreement with Save the Children UK (SCUK), and while this protocol exists between the DRC Hub and the **global** Start Fund¹⁸ **it would not be appropriate for the hub or hub staff to be involved in revising open reports** (i.e. not yet signed off by the Start Fund team) or reviewing project financial reports, due to the sensitive nature of this information. **Clear roles, responsibilities and communication protocols should be established** to facilitate the hub’s involvement in this process, to ensure unambiguity between all stakeholders regarding the boundaries. A further consideration of this is to advertise the existing resources that are **publicly** available such as the existing Start Fund data on the website,¹⁹ and the Crisis Response Summaries (CRSs).²⁰

¹⁸ See “premise of the pilot” page 8.

¹⁹ <https://startnetwork.org/funds/global-start-fund/alerts>

²⁰ <https://startnetwork.org/learn-change/resources/crisis-response-summaries>

Regarding increasing the hub’s participation in learning exchanges, again, the onus is **on the Start Fund team to invite the relevant people**. However, there is also an opportunity for the sharing of ideas and learnings to take place in a much more localised and organic way at hub level. Therefore, the DRC Hub is invited to consider what national or local actions they could take to increase the hub membership’s visibility over Start Fund projects and share the lessons learned.

RECOMMENDATIONS: IMPLEMENTATION & REPORTING STAGE

1. Consider sustainability of hub peer monitoring of live projects. [Lead: Hub]
2. Reinforce efforts: Hub Focal Point should be sent the final project narrative reports.
3. Establishment of roles, responsibilities, and communication protocols to facilitate a clear understanding of hub’s involvement in receiving narrative reports. [Lead: SF]
4. Reinforce efforts: The Hub Focal Point and hub representative(s) who participated in alert cycle decision making should be invited to the relevant Learning Exchanges. [Lead: SF]
5. Advertise existing publicly available resources: Alert data & CRSs. [Lead: SF]
6. Consider what local and national actions can be taken to share learning from SF projects across hub membership. [Lead: Hub]

CONCLUSION

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS: UNRELATED TO A SF STAGE

1. The **DRC Hub Programmes Committee** should receive a regular (perhaps annual) briefing on the Start Fund.
2. Establishment of Training of Trainers (ToT) briefing programme for interested parties in DRC Hub, such as the DRC SF Champions
3. Integration of hub protocol into new Start Fund training programme syllabus.
4. Visit to DRC by SF, to carry out an in-person briefing, workshop or review with the DRC Hub. *

** There have been previous instances when the Start Fund team, hosted by SCUUK, have encountered issues in being able to travel to the DRC due to SCUUK security restrictions.*

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS (OUTPUTS OF PILOT)

PREREQUISITES FOR A HUB

1. Establishment of the Hub secretariat complete
2. Hosting agreement complete
3. Hub Focal Point * recruitment complete
 - a. Mention of Start Fund within hub focal point job description – time commitment to SF processes.
4. SF Induction for Hub Focal Point complete
5. Existing interaction in country with global Start Fund
6. Engagement of membership within the global SF rota (knowledge of SF and possibility of people to be hub representatives)
 - a. Establishment of commitment from hub representatives to engage with SF Potentially have 5 SF Champions in place.
7. Peer to peer hub learning when establishing a protocol.

MENU OF ADAPTATIONS

SF Alert Cycle Stages	Adaptations Offered
Pre-alert	Hub focal point verifies the crisis and reviews alert note. Hubs <u>not</u> able to veto.
Alert raising	Hub representative / hub focal point to submit survey on behalf of hub.
Allocation stage	Hub representative to participate in allocation meeting.
Project selection	Hub representative to participate in the PSC.
	No adaptation offered.
Implementation	<i>Ideas for further discussion with hubs - peer-to-peer monitoring, hub focal point monitoring</i>
Reporting	Final narrative report shared with hub focal point
	Hub representatives and hub focal point invited to Learning Exchanges and relevant learning events.
Learning	

This review found many areas of success in the first pilot of a protocol making adaptations to the global Start Fund mechanism for a hub context. However, the exploration of what seemed like minor failures in the implementation of the protocol revealed much deeper issues that will need to be redressed.

THINGS TO CELEBRATE

Firstly, the pilot has made headway in determining some important parameters before protocols are established in other hub contexts. The outputs of the study (the recommendations, the prerequisites, and the “menu,”) will serve as critical tools that can be used by the Start Fund team and hubs alike, before deciding upon a strategy to adapt the Start Fund.

Furthermore, the establishment of the global Start Fund and DRC Hub protocol, when carried out effectively, does take tangible steps towards locally led decision making, a critical factor of locally led humanitarian action. This can be heard in feedback coming from the hub.



THE PROTOCOL IS) A GOOD START FOR THE STRATEGY OF LOCALLY LED ACTION. IT CAME FROM OUR WISHES FIRST WHICH EVENTUALLY LED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THIS PROTOCOL. BUT WE NEED TO THINK OF THE PROTOCOL AS SOMETHING THAT IS NOT STATIC, BUT DYNAMIC, AND CAN BE IMPROVED THROUGH LEARNING. THE PROTOCOL SHOULD HAVE A REVIEW SECTION. BUT OVERALL, IT IS AS GOOD START TO ACHIEVE THE STRATEGY.” – *Hub representative FGD.*



I REMEMBER WHEN THE PROTOCOL WAS LAUNCHED VIA THE SKYPE GROUP THERE WAS A COMMENT “NOW THE LOCALISATION IS HAPPENING...” IT IS CRUCIAL FOR BRINGING DECISION MAKING CLOSER TO THE LOCAL LEVEL. BUT THERE NEEDS TO BE SPACE FOR CONTEXTUAL ADAPTATION OF THE PROTOCOL, WHICH ALSO NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERED RESPECTIVE TO EACH HUB COUNTRY.” – *Hub Focal Point FGD.*

It should be noted that **the long-term objective of the protocol should be to slowly increase hub representation in the alert cycle over time**, eventually leading to majority participation from representatives of the local network, the hub. The final output of the study, the set of recommendations for the global Start Fund and the DRC Hub, will hopefully enable the protocol to take the next step towards achieving this objective.

Finally, again referencing the quotes above, the study identified the huge benefit of willingness, across all stakeholders, not only for locally led action and decision-making; but equally for experimentation with the process of how that fits into the context of the Start Fund. There is an understanding that the protocol is the starting point and not the final product.

CHALLENGES

Firstly, there was the challenge of the varied buy-in and visibility of the protocol across the stakeholders and over the various stages. Recommendations have been made to rectify this, but essentially it is a problem of not promoting the protocol widely enough, or effectively closing some of the communication loops. If attention is paid to this and participation increases, the visibility of the protocol should also increase, therefore boosting the buy-in from the less engaged stakeholders. Furthermore, it is also important to manage the expectations of different stakeholders, especially concerning LNNGO members of the DRC Hub, as participating in the protocol does not equate to being eventually able to access the global Start Fund as a convening agency.

Secondly, there are contradictions between the desired engagement and participation of the hub (as can be understood from the survey and FGDs) and the actual record of participation (as can be understood from the pilot indicators). The study has uncovered certain barriers to participation and has made recommendations to mitigate some. However, offering an adapted allocation meeting in which participants can contribute bilingually is beyond the capacity of the Start Fund team at this moment.

Thirdly, attention must be drawn to the DRC Hub's desire to monitor projects during the implementation period and see the project reporting. Whilst there is agreement that the Start Fund team can take steps to increase the hub's visibility over the latter stages of projects in the DRC, the study explored the nuanced debate surrounding accountability regarding the grant custodian agreement. Recommendations were made to find a compromise for the protocol at this stage.

The most significant tension that the pilot uncovered is that of speed versus local participation. The Start Fund model adheres to a strict 72-hour alert cycle and this core principle must be respected. Some overarching recommendations and

principles have been made because of this study. The principles defined throughout this study are critical to the ensuring a successful hub protocol. The overall intention is to increase engagement and a sense of ownership; this requires active participation, particularly among the programmes team and the DRC Hub. Putting these recommendations into action increases the likelihood of success.

In conclusion, there is a need for the renewal of commitments and energy from all stakeholders to reassert the protocol and ensure its success. Certainly, there are processes and areas that can be streamlined. Furthermore, for the protocol to really be effective, the level of engagement from the hub needs to increase. Hopefully, the identification of a pool of DRC Start Fund Champions will be pivotal in driving forward greater adherence to the protocol. Luckily, there is a huge amount of willingness, and some motivation, accompanied by a sense of curious experimentation, all of which are necessary as the protocol moves towards its next phase.

OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

- Returning to the core considerations of the pilot, the Start Fund mechanism, processes, and niche won't change, but can be used flexibly and innovatively.
- Long term objective of the protocol should be to slowly increase hub representation in alert cycle over time.
- Successful inclusion in each step is the gold standard – but SF timeline takes precedence, if hub representatives do not volunteer to attend on behalf of the hub, they forfeit their inclusion for that stage in that instance (**i.e. Principle of “the alert cycle must go on”**).
- Protocols are established for and led by hubs. The Start Fund team will proactively support the DRC Hub to increase engagement with the SF (i.e. streamline internal processes, make communication more dynamic, provide briefings and support). However, The DRC Hub is responsible for ensuring a pool of appropriate and committed representatives, who are able to participate in a high-quality manner. (**i.e. Principle of reciprocated commitment**)
- Whilst the protocol exists between the DRC Hub and the global SF, it is preferable that (some) representatives in the pool can participate in English.
 - Recommended target: Identification and encouragement of five DRC SF Champions.

CONCLUSION SUMMARY TABLE

THINGS TO CELEBRATE	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The protocol aligns with the strategy for localisation. - All stakeholders have the will to support locally led decision making. - The Start Fund allows stakeholders the flexibility to trial new processes, and there is lots of will for experimenting and innovation. - All stakeholder groups are open minded about the process, they all see it as the protocol as the starting point and not the final product. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Speed of the Start Fund against participation of local hub representation. - Challenge of achieving timely participation from DRC Hub Representatives, despite the will to engage. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Barriers: alert cycle timeframe, language - Varied buy- in and limited visibility over whole process for different stakeholders. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Associated risk of expectations linked to participating. (e.g., access to funding). - Lack of clarity regarding monitoring and accountability mechanisms around Hub participation, and around the Hub’s engagement at Start Fund project implementation and reporting stages.

A NOTE FOR HUB CONTEXTS CONSIDERING A PROTOCOL WITH THE GLOBAL START FUND.

One final remark that should be made following this study, is that a menu of protocol options has been published as an output, accompanied by a set of prerequisites that need to be in place. ([See annex 4.](#))

The DRC Hub’s model of the protocol is the fullest level of integration of hub decision makers into the Start Fund alert cycle that could be offered to any hub and expects the most reciprocated commitment. Considering the amount of preparation, briefing, organising, and engaging regularly with the hub representative that goes into ensuring the success of a protocol, a significant time commitment is required from a member of staff within the hub secretariat, (**See annex 5, pg 31**) which should be comprised within the job role description.

What is equally important is that hubs consider the fact that establishing a protocol means that a groups of hub representatives will therefore have the responsibility of interacting with Start Fund decision-making. For this reason, it is critical that the members within the hub context already have familiarity with the Start Fund, for instance perhaps member staff already having engaged with the allocation rota. If the full menu is the selected option, it would be beneficial to identify and engage Start Fund Champions prior to launching the protocol.

Each hub has their own vision for localisation. Hubs could decide which options on the menu of protocol options to opt for (For instance, hub representatives partaking in just one of the decision-making points within the Start Fund alert cycle). Whilst regular engagement with a pool of decision-makers who represent the hub is still required, the identification of Start Fund Champions may not be necessary for this option. **Bearing this in mind, the greater the level of protocol customisation, the greater the demand on the Start Fund Programmes team.** As adapted Start Fund protocols are rolled out to other hub countries, considerations will have to be made on how to manage capacity needs.

Annex 1 - DRC Hub and Start Fund Protocol: <https://start-network.box.com/s/tjzx7ngnraud1a66lonvc472xl0amfw1>

Annex 2 – Learning questions: <https://start-network.box.com/s/nl6yiwipkx0sg74850om6v2zaae0r1e7>

Annex 3 - DRC pilot summary 2 pager: <https://start-network.box.com/s/xmv627mpe8fffe0qtpsin7yhfnea5olu>

Annex 4 – DRC pilot study outputs: <https://start-network.box.com/s/0ux6vp2qli26fuz4dnbh58r18urtgemk>

Annex 5 – Statement from DRC Hub Focal Point from 31st January 2024

Voici quelques éléments en rapport avec le processus de mise en place de la gouvernance Start Funds :

- Janvier : Proposition et partage de l'ébauche du projet par l'équipe de Start Fund
- Organisation plusieurs réunions avec les membres de Start Funds en RDC et le conseil d'administration du HUB sur la compréhension du contenu du protocole
- Février 2023 :
- Amendements du protocole et validation par les membres du Hub RDC
- Mars : début de la mise en œuvre du protocole test pour 6 mois
- Avril -Mai 2023 : Validation des alertes Start Funds (cholera et inondations)
- Juin 2023 : Evaluation mi-parcours du protocole
- Juillets - Décembre : Validation par le HUB de 3 alertes (inondation et conflit)
- Octobre 2023 : Evaluation participative du protocole d'accord
- Echanges avec l'équipe de Start funds

En conclusion : Ce projet test est une satisfaction pour le HUB RDC qui a été impliqué dans la prise de décision durant le processus de l'alerte jusqu'à l'activation, cependant quelques observations que nous avons évoqués dans la revue du protocole devraient être pris en compte dans la suite du processus.

Nous insistons sur le fait que dans l'accord de financement , le Start devrait mentionner que l'agence de mise en œuvre de projet est redevable non seulement au Start mais aussi au HUB RDC car cela permettra d'encourager l'engagement des membres au Hub et de renforcer la visibilité du HUB RDC au pays.

Aussi , les rapports de sélection et d'allocations devraient être partagé au HUB RDC pour une mise à jour.

Les autres observations ont été soumises durant la réunion de revue du mois d'Octobre 2023,

Enfin, je ne saurais pas être exhaustif en détaillant les différentes taches du processus et le temps passé sur le programme.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

Here are a few elements of the Start Funds governance process:

- January: Proposal and sharing of the project draft by the Start Fund team
- Organization of several meetings with Start Funds members in the DRC and the HUB Board of Directors on understanding the content of the protocol.
- February 2023: Protocol amendments and validation by DRC Hub members
- March: Start of 6-month test protocol implementation

- April -May 2023: Validation of Start Funds alerts (cholera and floods)
- June 2023: Mid-term evaluation of the protocol
- July-December: HUB validation of 3 alerts (flooding and conflict)
- October 2023: Participatory evaluation of the protocol
- Discussions with the Start funds team

In conclusion: This test project is a source of satisfaction for the HUB DRC, which was involved in decision-making throughout the process from alert to activation, although a few observations we raised in the review of the protocol should be taken into account in the rest of the process.

We insist that in the funding agreement, Start should mention that the project implementing agency is accountable not only to Start but also to the HUB DRC, as this will encourage members' commitment to the Hub and strengthen the HUB DRC's visibility in the country.

Also, selection and allocation reports should be shared with the HUB DRC for updating.

Other observations were submitted during the October 2023 review meeting,

Finally, I cannot be exhaustive in detailing the various tasks involved in the process and the time spent on the program.

ABOUT START NETWORK

Start Network is made up of more than 80 aid agencies across five continents, ranging from large international organisations to national NGOs. Together, our aim is to transform humanitarian action through innovation, fast funding, early action, and localisation.

We're tackling what we believe are the biggest systemic problems that the sector faces - problems including slow and reactive funding, centralised decision-making, and an aversion to change, means that people affected by crises around the world, do not receive the best help fast enough, and needless suffering results.