

START NETWORK

STRATEGY 2021 TO 2023



WHAT IS START NETWORK?

Start Network is a global membership of more than 50 aid organisations working across six continents tackling what it sees as the biggest systemic problems the sector faces. These problems mean that the current global humanitarian system is not accountable to people affected by crises.

PROBLEMS WE'RE ADDRESSING

- DECISION-MAKING IS **CENTRALISED**, AND PRIORITIES ARE **DISCONNECTED** FROM AT-RISK AND AFFECTED COMMUNITIES.
- IT IS **REACTIVE, FRAGMENTED** AND **INEFFICIENT**.
- THE SECTOR'S INCENTIVES AND WAYS OF WORKING ARE **OUTDATED, INFLEXIBLE** AND **RESISTANT TO CHANGE**.

MISSION, VISION AND THEORY OF CHANGE

Start Network's vision is for a locally led humanitarian system that is accountable to people affected by and at risk of crises. We aim to achieve this vision by making system-level shifts in the way humanitarian support is approached and delivered, by:

OUR SOLUTIONS

- **SHIFTING POWER** AND **DECENTRALISING** DECISION-MAKING TO LOCALLY LED NETWORKS AND ORGANISATIONS.
- CREATING A GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN FINANCING SYSTEM THAT IS INCREASINGLY FOCUSED ON **REDUCING RISK, ANTICIPATING** AND **ACTING AHEAD** OF PREDICTABLE CRISES.
- **SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES** TO DEVELOP **INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS** TO HUMANITARIAN PROBLEMS.

Change rests on the ability of our members to use their collective power to amplify diverse voices for change, influence behaviours and catalyse a locally led humanitarian system at scale. And it assumes that traditional aid actors, whether international NGOs or donors, feel compelled to join the network and support its work –both because they share our conviction about the need for transformational change and because they are committed to shifting their own mindsets, behaviours and ways of working to see that change through.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2020



5 HUBS

set up and incubated, these hubs are building their own finance and innovation programmes



55 MEMBERS

including 18 local members



9 MILLION

people reached in 51 countries



36 MILLION

in humanitarian funding released to our members



26%

disbursed to local and national organisations and 11% directly

START NETWORK

THEORY OF CHANGE

Our theory of change is based on evidence that a locally-led system is best placed to minimise suffering, loss of life and livelihoods. It promotes sustainable and dignified responses in crisis contexts. And it accepts that such change requires focused financial investment in locally-led organisations and structures to enact and sustain systemic change.

PROBLEMS

The global humanitarian system is not accountable to people affected by and at risk of crisis, and fails to adequately support them, because it is:

Centralised and power imbalanced

Reactionary and slow

Inflexible and resistant to change

STRATEGY

Catalysing a locally led **network of networks** for equity in power, decision making, access to resources and voice

Expanding a **family of funds** and financial services for timely, proactive and risk informed crisis action

Promoting a **culture of innovation and learning** for continuous evolution, experimentation and iteration

NETWORK OUTCOMES

Locally-led decisions and actions drive solutions to crises

Risk informed, flexible financing models respond to neglected and predictable emergencies

Shared ideas and peer learning drive **contextual, sustainable approaches** to humanitarian action

SYSTEMIC CHANGES

A humanitarian system that is increasingly **locally led**

A global financing system that is **risk-informed**, needs-based and increasingly focused on reducing risk, anticipating and acting ahead of predictable crises.

A global humanitarian system that is informed, flexible and **context-specific** in its mindset, approaches and behaviours.

VISION

A **locally led** humanitarian system, **accountable to people affected by and at-risk of crises**

IMPACT

A more effective humanitarian system in which people receive better quality support, **maintain their dignity and are protected from suffering and harm**

OUR VALUES

We work to uphold the following principles, and expect the same from our staff, hubs and members:

- **WE PUT PEOPLE FIRST:** communities come first in our decision-making and programming.
- **WE ARE BRAVE:** we have great ambition and are willing to explore new things and take risks to achieve it.
- **WE OPERATE COLLECTIVELY:** we leverage the value of working as a network, sharing risk and resources and learning together.
- **WE ARE INCLUSIVE:** we see the value in diverse perspectives and work to remove the barriers that prevent voices being heard.
- **WE ARE OPEN:** we work transparently and with integrity, building mutual trust in all levels of our work, from governance to programming.
- **WE ARE ETHICAL:** we operate on key principles of anti-racism, non-discrimination and anti-colonialism. This is a work in progress.

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT?

Start Network is well placed to drive system change within the humanitarian sector because of the following:

- We represent a diverse membership.
- We have a strong established reputation for disruption, innovation and change.
- We are decentralising.
- We have experience in leading financial innovation at scale.
- Our innovations start with communities.

OUTCOMES & OBJECTIVES



PRO-VIDA, Alert 422 in El Salvador (Gender-based violence)

START NETWORK OUTCOME AREAS AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



OUTCOME 1 A NETWORK OF NETWORKS

1. Incubate and support a critical mass of country and regional hubs, shifting the network composition to a diverse group of majority local actors.
2. Shift Start Network decision-making and governance to locally led networks, with a view to ensuring accountability to communities.
3. Support local actors to exercise power within the network and humanitarian system and drive their vision for reform.



OUTCOME 2 A FAMILY OF FUNDS

1. Support inclusive locally led structures, to own, develop and implement financing strategies and systems.
2. Develop a global financial infrastructure that connects a range of response funds and financing mechanisms to promote learning and early action.
3. Secure flexible multi-year funds which are accessible to hubs and members.



OUTCOME 3 A CULTURE OF INNOVATION AND LEARNING

1. Develop a platform-based evidence, learning and monitoring framework that drives decision-making based on the theory of change.
2. Invest resources in hubs and members to enable collective problem solving toward durable, locally led solutions to locally prioritised problems.
3. Develop organisational expertise and behaviour that is responsive to data and feedback and is iterative with a bias toward reflective, action-based learning.



OUTCOME 4 ORGANISATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

1. Ensure Start Network's team, decision-making structures and ways of working promote equity, diversity and inclusion based on anti-racist, anti-colonialist and non-discrimination principles and ethics.
2. Develop an operating business model (locations, functions, skills, systems) for Start Network to transition to a platform-based service provider.
3. Digitally transform the organisation to create an efficient, agile and transparent service provider model.

A NETWORK OF NETWORKS

Start Network will become a diverse “network of networks” that ensures equity in power and decision-making, access to resources, and voice and visibility for its local members. We will achieve this through locally led, self-governing, national and regional hubs, bringing on their own members.

The humanitarian system’s power, influence and resources are concentrated in the global north. This imbalance of power has caused local and national organisations to be excluded and disempowered, even though they are deeply rooted in the communities that they support and are responsible for the vast majority of humanitarian responses.

Tackling this problem requires moving towards a system that is accountable to affected and at-risk communities through the leadership of local organisations and through a change in mindset by traditional power holders that allows them to cede power and control. It requires a radical shift towards an approach that pools and shares risk between larger and smaller actors and reflects the value that different organisations bring.

This network of networks can demonstrate a powerful and positive alternative to the current system and model a different approach that can ultimately drive wider reform.

In 2021–2023, Start Network will:

- **incubate** and **support** a network of locally led self-governing national and regional hubs with a diverse and majority-local membership.
- **decentralise** and **distribute** governance and decision-making to hubs, with the aim of **ensuring accountability** to communities and transitioning the Start Network team to a secretariat and service provider role.
- **support local actors** in exercising power within the humanitarian ecosystem and driving their vision for reform, working with others to address structural, political and operational challenges.

A FAMILY OF FUNDS

Our network of networks will be underpinned by a family of funds and financial services in order to pool investment and risk and help more communities at reduced cost. This family of funds, the Start Financing Facility(SFF), will allow member to access fast funds in small and medium-sized crises. It will also put in place pre-arranged funds and financing that can facilitate more timely, proactive or risk-informed crisis action. It will do so while ensuring these funds are increasingly accessible to the local and national organisations.

There is increasing evidence that shifting the focus from response to protecting people ahead of shocks, through pre-agreed plans and finance, is a [faster, more dignified and more cost-effective approach to disasters and crises](#). There is a need for coherence, connectivity and scale to support the efforts of frontline humanitarian responders, local and national organisations to be better financially prepared in advance of crises.

The Start Financing Facility is designed as a single instrument that will marry the proven success of the Start Fund with our growing portfolio of risk-based financing products. This will enable faster, more efficient and more effective global humanitarian action on crises that are difficult to predict, while enabling us to ["layer" financing instruments for more predictable crises in a way that makes our money work harder and stretch further](#).

In 2021–2023, Start Network will:

- **support inclusive local and national organisations and structures** to own, develop and implement their own financing strategies and systems.
- **grow and improve** the global Start Fund, and **support** the growth of national funds to respond to small to medium scale crises that humanitarian donors often overlook.
- activate the Start Financing Facility as a way of connecting a range of funds and financing mechanisms that are accessible to local actors and accountable to the membership on behalf of the communities that they serve.
- influence donors, and secure flexible, multi-year funds that are accessible to all of our members.

A CULTURE OF INNOVATION AND LEARNING

Start Network will promote a culture of continuous evolution, experimentation, peer learning and iteration. We will do this by aggregating knowledge, expertise and lived experience to build a robust body of evidence in support of innovative, contextual and sustainable humanitarian action.

People affected by crisis must be an integral part of the generation and use of evidence. This means rooting the design, development and use of evidence, learning and innovation in context and community. Start Network will support and promote an adaptive, locally led culture of learning and innovation across its membership. Start Network will draw on this knowledge to promote the uptake of contextual evidence-based and innovative decision-making and programming.

We will invest in the practice, tools and technology for collecting and interpreting evidence and feedback across the network, which we will use in regular and timely decision-making. We will also create opportunities for problem solving and innovating by investing in hubs that can develop durable, locally led solutions to problems that are defined locally. We will also support collaborative problem solving across the network. And we will develop an organisation mindset and expertise that is reflective, iterative and responsive to data, feedback and learning. We will also identify and address the barriers that make change difficult at organisational and sectoral levels.

We will support the Start Network team and membership to generate, communicate and use robust, relevant and useful data and evidence. And we will provide support on problem solving, design, strategy and systems change processes.

In 2021–2023, Start Network will:

- **develop a platform-based evidence, learning and monitoring framework**, based on our theory of change, that drives organisational decision-making.
- **invest resources** in hubs and members so they can collectively develop durable, locally led solutions to locally prioritised problems.
- **develop an agile organisation mindset and expertise** that is responsive to data and feedback and is iterative, with a bias to reflective action-based learning.

ORGANISATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

A programme of organisational transformation will drive our transition to becoming a globally dispersed team, shift our operating model from programme delivery to service provider to our hubs and build our digital architecture, infrastructure and capabilities in support of the network.

As an organisation established and headquartered in the United Kingdom, key decisions are made by leaders and managers in London and there is limited representation from the global south. Many of our ways of working are inherited from a system with roots in colonialism, where programming decisions and expertise are delivered from the global north to the global south. We also operate using traditionally western structures, systems and processes. These tend to be bureaucratic, risk averse and based on western values.

Our organisational transformation to an outcome-led service provider model will enable us to address these challenges and focus our success on impact and change. We will focus on servicing and supporting our hubs, which will design and operate all humanitarian activities and programmes in their countries or regions.

Although we will continue to operate our global funds from London during the next three years, we will adapt our own workforce to this service model by transitioning from a London-based organisation to a dispersed team. We will actively recruit a more diverse team, targeting underrepresented groups in the global north and increasing the number of roles based in the global south. Our current organisational model, while evolving, is centralised, supply driven and analogue. Many of our processes are manual and cannot easily be scaled.

Our current digital infrastructure does not enable us to operate at scale globally. We will develop a digital infrastructure through integrated technology platforms, technology-enabled processes and by promoting a digital culture. We hope this will build efficiency, agility and transparency into our current systems and enhance our ability to operate the network at scale.

In 2021–2023, Start Network will:

- **create a culture of inclusion** by ensuring that the Start Network team composition, decision-making structures and ways of working **promote equity, diversity and inclusion** based on principles of anti-racism, anti-colonialism and non-discrimination.
- **understand and invest** in developing new operating models (locations, functions, skills, systems) for hubs and in the platform for Start Network to transition to a platform-based service provider.
- **digitally transform the organisation** (embedding digital technology, creating digitally-enabled processes and building a digital culture) to create an efficient, agile and transparent service provider model.

ENABLERS

During the next three years, Start Network will continue to invest in strengthening the enabling functions that support its programmes and work. Like our outcome areas, these enablers are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.



ENABLERS

MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Start Network's trusted, diverse and engaged membership of local, national and international NGOs continues to be our key asset and the basis upon which we will achieve our vision of a locally led humanitarian system.

In 2021-2023, Start Network will:

- **grow local membership** through hubs, which will set their own vision for membership diversity, and develop tools and resources to integrate new members.
- **create scalable platforms** that will allow hubs and members to engage in our initiatives, processes and systems.
- **improve our tiered due diligence system**, co-designing an alternative model to bring on more members at lower cost and to streamline compliance and explore alternative due diligence models that meet the critical purpose of shared accountability and risk in a more inclusive and transformative way.
- **decentralise governance to hubs**, as we transition to a global, fully distributed self-organising and self-actualising network of networks.
- **build member engagement in programmes**, working proactively to promote understanding of and participation in our services and programmes.
- **ensure that members are engaged in the technical and operational aspects of all Start Network initiatives**, with a focus on the Start Financing Facility.

MOBILISING RESOURCES

We offer a unique portfolio of programmes which is very attractive to donors who want to fund initiatives that are at the forefront of humanitarian action. We have built strong relationships with our current donor base and have developed a rapport with champions within those institutions who advocate on our behalf internally as well as with other donors.

In 2021-2023, Start Network will:

- **look for continued financial support** by securing flexible multi-year funds for our hubs and members, maximising potential contributions from our current donor base while investing in the capacity to prospect and engage new donors.
- **invest substantially in our network of networks** by securing flexible funds to incubate our growing network of hubs, supporting their early start-up costs, their participation in our global programmes and their programmatic ambitions.
- **decentralise our fundraising team** so it can support hubs, as they transition to independence, to catalyse and broker their own fundraising efforts.
- **grow our pooled funds and financial services offer**, mobilising funds to grow our global Start Fund and national funds and securing three years of investment to launch the SFF.
- **secure unrestricted core funding to support innovation**, experimentation and scale and to ensure that Start Network itself benefits from a solid and flexible core funding base from which it can experiment with new areas of business while maintaining a healthy level of reserves.

COMMUNICATIONS AND ADVOCACY

The role of Start Network's communications and advocacy function is to increase awareness of Start Network and its initiatives and build the positioning and legitimacy of the network, while also building relationships with key stakeholders and influencing the wider sector to implement change in their own operations.

While much of our advocacy to date has been located in and focused on the global north, we intend to shift the team leading communications and advocacy to the global south and to decolonise our content and the language we use.

In 2021-2023, Start Network will:

- **raise the visibility and voices of hubs**, local and national NGOs and communities, and support them to influence change, while advocating for a shift from centralised to locally led humanitarian action.
- **advocate for a shift from a reactive to proactive approach**, while raising awareness of the SFF and other funding mechanisms to engage new investors and users.
- **raise awareness of our learning and impact** to encourage stakeholders to learn from our initiatives and implement changes across their own organisations.
- **shift more of the communications team to the Global South** and produce more materials and guidelines to enable hubs to lead their own communications.

OPERATIONS AND FINANCE

Start Network's operations and finance functions will shift from supporting the start-up activities of a newly independent organisation to shaping and delivering the future state of what will become a service provider and secretariat. We will be a key ally to the hubs, working alongside them on the operational aspects that will deliver their ambition, while ensuring that Start Network is compliant and a going concern.

In 2021-2023, Start Network will:

- **provide the hubs**, where requested, **with support services**, while strengthening their own operational capabilities.
- **introduce a strategic finance capacity** into our structure to support the delivery of multiple finance and fundraising models (such as Start Network being able to receive funding directly, operating the Start Financing Facility mechanism, negotiating grant custodian agreements or working with the hubs and members to support their financial management systems).
- **continue to automate and digitalise our processes**, data analysis and information exchange, investing in project, grant and financial management systems to increase efficiency, promote transparency and allow colleagues to make more timely strategy-sensitive decisions.
- **support the newly established Risk and Compliance Committee** by reviewing how we pool and share risk across the network more equitably; introducing more relational based contracts and appropriate risk appetite statements and tolerances.



JOIN US

The scale and complexity of today's crises cannot be dealt with by individual organisations and institutions acting on their own. We must do more to support people and communities affected by crises to cope with the risks and vulnerabilities they are increasingly exposed to as their own first responders and primary agents of their own change and future. To do this, we need effective humanitarian action, with new forms of collaboration, new areas of expertise, methods, business models, incentive structures, cultures and accountability mechanisms. Start Network is dedicated to driving that change.

If you believe there is a better way of doing things, and would like to help make this happen, join us on this journey as a member, supporter or partner. Find us at startnetwork.org

MEMBERS

ACTED, Action Against Hunger, ActionAid, Age International, ALIMA, AFEDDEM, Arab Resistance for Democracy and Development, ASECSA, AFPDE, BRAC International, Bright Star Development Society Balochistan, CADENA, CAFOD, Care International, Caritas Bangladesh, Caritas Goma, Caritas India, Caritas Sri Lanka, Catholic Relief Services, Christian Aid, Community World Service -Asia, Concern Worldwide, Cordaid, Doctors of the World, Dorcas Aid, GOAL, HANDS, HelpAge, Help Foundation, Humanity & Inclusion, Initiative for Development and Empowerment Axis, International Medical Corps, Islamic Relief, Medair, Mercy Corps, MIDEFEHOPS ASBL, Mines Advisory Group, Muslim Aid, NEADS, Oxfam, PARC, People in Need, Plan International, PRO-VIDA, Qatar Charity, Relief International, Save the Children UK, Solidarites International, SEEDS, Tearfund, Trocaire, War Child, Welthungerhilfe, World Jewish Relief, World Vision, Yuganter.

DONORS



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Company registration number 09286835 and charity registration number 1159483
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