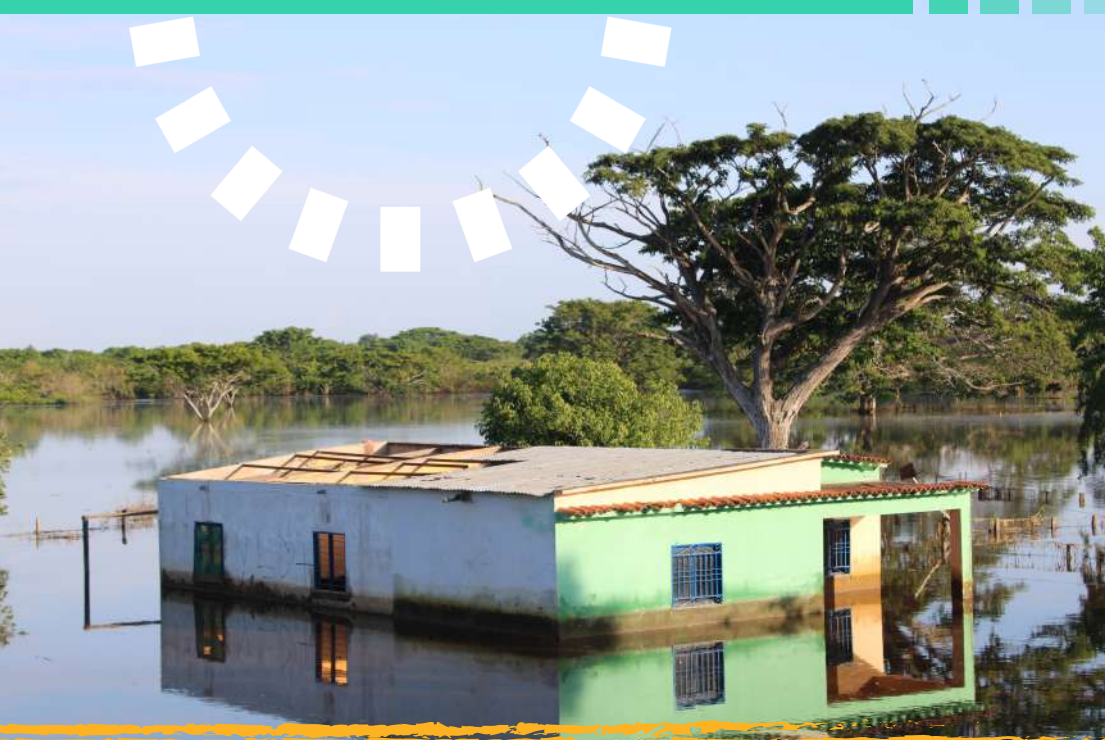


# THE START FUND

## PREPARING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ON SMALL-MEDIUM SCALE CRISES



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START  
NETWORK

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This report is dedicated to Professor Saleemul Huq OBE, climate scientist, activist and trusted advisor to least developed countries. His contributions were invaluable to this research.

# ACRONYMS

ASAL: Arid and Semi-Arid Land	IPMS: SF's Information Project Management System
CARF: Start Network Crisis Anticipation And Risk Financing Team	JI: Joint Initiative of Sustainable Humanitarian Assistance
CBO: Community Based Organisation	KII: Key Informant Interview
CBPF: United Nations Country-Based Pooled Funds	LnD: Loss and Damage
CERF: United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund	LDF: Loss and Damage Fund
CIDA: Canada International Development Agency	LGBTQI+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual
CC: Climate Change	LNGO: Local Non Governmental Organisation
CCA: Climate Change Adaptation	NEAT+: Nexus Environmental Assessment Tool
CDPM: Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme	NNGO: National Non Governmental Organisation
DERF: IFRC's Disaster Emergency Response Fund	NOAA: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
DRF: Disaster Risk Financing	ODA: Overseas Development Assistance
DRR: Disaster Risk Reduction	PWDO: People With Disability Organisation
ECHO: European Civil protection and Humanitarian aid Operations	REA: Benfield Rapid Environmental Assessment tool
ED: Environmental Degradation	SF: Start Fund
EM-DAT: EMergency events DATabase – The International Disaster Database	SGBV: Sexual and Gender Based Violence
FAO: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation	SN: Start Network
FGD: Focus Group Discussion	SFB: Start Fund Bangladesh
GAR: UNDRR Global Assessment report on DRR	SRC: Swedish Red Cross
GHG: Greenhouse gas	UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
GNDR: Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction	USAID: United States Agency for International Development
IFRC: International Federation of the Red Cross	WFP: World Food Programme
ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross	WLER: Women-Led Emergency Response
INGO: International Non Governmental Organisation	WMO: World Meteorological Office
IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change	WRO: Women's Rights Organisation

# DEFINITIONS<sup>1</sup>

<b>Adaptation:</b> adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects
<b>Anticipatory action:</b> is a set of actions to prevent or reduce potential disaster impacts before a shock or acute impacts
<b>ASAL areas:</b> locations with periodic drought, floods, disease, social instability due to conflict and historic marginalisation
<b>Climate change:</b> human caused changes in the earth's climate
<b>Compound hazards:</b> multiple hazards with concurrent impacts such as heavy rainfall, extreme wind and storm surge
<b>Ecosystem:</b> a unit of living organisms interacting with each other and their non-living environment
<b>Extensive risk:</b> risks associated with low-severity, high frequency, mainly localised events
<b>Hydrometeorological hazards:</b> the transfer of water and energy between the lower atmosphere and the land surface
<b>Hazard:</b> the potential of a natural or human-induced physical event to cause harm
<b>Intensive risk:</b> exposure of large concentrations of people and economic activities that are vulnerable to the impact of intense hazard events
<b>Localisation:</b> increasing the independence, decision making and leadership of local humanitarian actors
<b>Loss and damage:</b> negative climate change impacts occurring despite, or in the absence of, mitigation and adaptation
<b>Meteorological hazards:</b> extreme temperatures, heat / cold waves, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts, storms, etc
<b>Mitigation:</b> technology or practice to reduce GHG emissions
<b>Purposive sampling:</b> sampling of a particular group of people best placed to inform specific research.
<b>Quota sampling:</b> sampling from separate homogeneous groups to source specific information.
<b>Resilience:</b> The capacity to respond, reorganise, learn, adapt, or transform to cope with hazards
<b>Snowball sampling:</b> using referral to source key informants to inform specific research questions.
<b>Slow onset:</b> disasters emerging over time
<b>Systemic:</b> systems interacting with each other, such as climate, food, planning and economic systems

<sup>1</sup>Most definitions are abbreviated from IPCC definitions, here:

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has found that the impacts of all extreme weather events are exacerbated by climate change. Climate change is significantly impacting humanitarian crises, driving or exacerbating more frequent and more intense floods, droughts, storms, cyclones and heatwaves across the world. Climate change is directly and indirectly impacting human health, ecosystem functioning, water, energy, food security and livelihoods. Climate risks are growing rapidly as extreme weather-related hazards become more severe and spread across wider geographical areas. Increasingly, impacts cascade through natural and human systems, compounding each other and compounding with other crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ukraine war and related rapid food and energy price inflation. Climate change mitigation and adaptation will not be sufficient to temper the increase in crises.

Humanitarians need to recognise the scale of change, get informed and prepared for new risk patterns, particularly substantial increases in the number of small and medium scale emergencies. Rapid action is required to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian action. This includes accelerating the shift towards localisation that recognises distinct local capacities and puts at-risk people at the centre of their own recovery. International actors should form complementary partnerships that fairly share risks and increase the independence, access to resources, decision making and leadership of local actors. This should include supporting them to take anticipatory action that supports early recovery and reduces humanitarian impacts. The sector needs more effective working across connected preparedness, response and recovery interventions, currently often fragmented, that together can increase the resilience of communities to all hazard types.

Encouragingly there is growing awareness within the sector of the impact of the humanitarian sector's response impacts on the environment. This has typically been considered quite separately from work on climate change, but environmental degradation and climate change shouldn't and can't be separated. One person's mitigation is another person's resilience, as can be seen from the use of solar power to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Europe, to adapt to the reduction in firewood in the Sahel and to build resilience against disaster for health clinics in Lebanon. Greening humanitarian action should always be done in a way that also strengthens community resilience to climate change.



The Start Fund can support these priorities through raising the climate consciousness of Start Network members so they are well-positioned to support local communities' resilience to climate and other humanitarian impacts. The Start Fund can support local, national and international humanitarian actors in becoming more efficient and effective in their use of both local and external finance and resources.

The Start Fund has clear strengths that it should maintain. It is able to rapidly allocate funds and enable local members to respond to crises quickly, particularly to small and medium scale crises that are not supported by most other actors. It is demonstrating effective localisation in its member-led decision making and supporting Start Network in building effective national Start Funds. It is flexible and innovative, demonstrated in its work on anticipatory action. The Start Fund should protect these strengths and build on them to ensure it is fit for purpose in the face of rapidly accelerating climate change crises.

This report summarises research for the Start Fund on climate change impacts on small and medium scale crises. It also explores options the Start Fund could consider to build on its current strengths within this new context. Our report is written around six connected themes that emerged from the research: the Evolving risk landscape in a changing climate; Enhancing resilience through localisation; Anticipatory action to support early response and early recovery; green humanitarian action; and Raising climate consciousness. Our report seeks to emphasise the urgency and scale of the crisis we all face. Now is the time for urgent change for all humanitarians.





# 1.0 INTRODUCTION



# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

It can no longer be questioned - climate change is exacerbating the frequency and intensity of humanitarian crises wherever they occur. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has found that the impacts of extreme events<sup>2</sup> are attributable to climate change. Its report finds that compound hazards have become more frequent in all world regions with widespread consequences.<sup>3</sup> For example, increases in temperature, aridity, and drought have increased the frequency and intensity of fire and the interaction between fire and land use change,<sup>4</sup> particularly deforestation. Climate change is directly and indirectly impacting human health, ecosystem functioning, water, energy and food security, and livelihoods. Climate risks are growing rapidly as extreme weather-related hazards get more severe and spread across wider geographical areas. Increasingly, impacts cascade through natural and human systems, also compounding with other crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ukraine war, and food and energy price inflation. Climate change mitigation and adaptation will not be sufficient to temper the increases in crises. The IPCC finds that adaptation to many climate risks will likely become constrained and have reduced effectiveness should 1.5°C global warming be exceeded,<sup>2</sup> noting that global average temperature rise has already reached 1.2°C.

Within this swiftly evolving context the Start Fund, a rapid humanitarian pooled funding mechanism managed by Start Network's (SN) over eighty members, to promptly address under-the-radar emergencies, small and medium-scale crises, is filling a critical gap in the aid system. Start Fund commissioned this research to understand how climate change is affecting underfunded small to medium-scale crises and ensure that the way it categorises and analyses crises that members anticipate and respond to does not hide the potential root causes. The Start Fund would also like to explore its niche (see adjacent call-out box) in the context of a changing climate, whilst ensuring outputs and recommendations are useful to the wider humanitarian sector.

The Start Fund provides funding for Start Network Members to respond early and rapidly to:

- > underfunded small- to medium-scale crises
- > anticipation of impending crises
- > spikes in chronic humanitarian crises



Alert 581 Ecuador (Flooding) CADENA response.

Photo Credit: CADENA

<sup>2</sup>The IPCC is referring to hydrometeorological and meteorological events, [here](#):

<sup>3</sup>Sixth Assessment Report (AR6): Climate Change: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, IPCC, 2022, [here](#):

<sup>4</sup>Land use change is any way in which humans modify the natural landscape e.g. mining, deforestation, urbanisation, carbon brief, 2021, [here](#):



**THIS RESEARCH HAS BEEN UNDERTAKEN BY A TEAM OF THREE INDEPENDENT CLIMATE, ENVIRONMENT AND HUMANITARIAN CONSULTANTS, FROM JULY TO OCTOBER 2023, ADDRESSING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

1. What are the effects of climate change on humanitarian crises globally and on small to medium-scale crises in particular?
2. What is the relationship between climate change drivers and other crisis drivers?
3. Do Start Fund responses mirror or deviate from large-scale crisis response, and why?
4. Have Start funded responses directly or indirectly tackled crisis drivers?
5. What effect is climate change having on protracted, recurrent and seasonal crises?
6. What are the future trends of climate change related crises?
7. What role can locally-led action play in promoting "greener" humanitarian response?
8. What role can locally-led action play in building climate resilience?
9. Does the Start Fund have sufficient visibility of climate related crisis types?
10. How can the Start Fund improve its climate consciousness?



# APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The research commenced with a collaborative inception stage to agree on the scope, methodology, research and data collection methods, tools, stakeholders, and research questions. To ensure effective triangulation of evidence, qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used, drawing learning from primary and secondary sources using a range of methods:

*A review of a wide range of secondary literature* and analysis of some primary disasters' data<sup>5</sup>

*A desk review* of Start Fund response data from 2014 to 2023 on 729 alerts, 30 alert notes and several proposals, case studies, Start Fund published reports, Start Fund Nepal and Start Fund Bangladesh Response data from 2017 to 2022

*A member survey* sent to all members covering most research questions, with 38 responses

*Key Informant Interviews* (KIIs) with 31 people from 28 organisations, including local, national, and international NGOs, climate and environment experts across 15 countries, as well as staff from the Start Funds team within Start Network, Start Fund Bangladesh and Start Fund Nepal, three Start Network Hubs, and Start Ready

*Three Focus Group Discussions* (FGDs) with 27 members, partners and external specialists, were held separately with participants from Asia, Latin and South America and the Caribbean, and Africa.

# ETHICS AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All stakeholder interviews were confidential, designed to ensure good rapport to encourage free speaking, valuing stakeholders local knowledge and perspectives separately from the researchers' external or social science perspectives.

# EMERGING FINDINGS

Findings from this research are too numerous to include in a short report. They are summarised in synthesis documents that the Start Fund can draw on extensively to inform future member communications and further work of Start Network. Analysis of the research findings demonstrated overlaps and repetition between research questions. We therefore identified six related key themes, around which the rest of this document is formed.

Section 2.0 of this report explores the changing humanitarian landscape, due to the interaction of multiple climate impacts compounding each other and compounding other humanitarian crisis drivers. Section 3.0 discusses the need to ensure humanitarian responses are designed to build on and enhance community resilience, and discusses how this can be most effectively achieved through a greater focus on localisation. Section 4.0 explores the value of anticipatory action and its relationship to early action and early recovery. Section 5.0 explores locally-led greening of humanitarian action and its potential contribution to community resilience. Section 6.0 explores how the Start Fund can strengthen its own and Start Network members' climate consciousness. Section 7.0 explores complementarity between national and local finance and resources and external finance and resources. Section 8.0 concludes with discussion of how the recommendations from previous sections can be implemented to jointly contribute to the resilience of local communities and local members in a rapidly changing climate.

<sup>5</sup>The EM-DAT International Disaster Database, CRED, [here](#):

# 2.0 EVOLVING RISK LANDSCAPE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE



## 2.0 EVOLVING RISK LANDSCAPE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

The humanitarian sector is facing an unprecedented range of challenges. The recent global Covid-19 pandemic, the Ukraine war and related global food and energy price inflation, and the humanitarian situation in Gaza all come on top of increasingly protracted conflicts in fragile states, population growth, ecosystem decline, and increased conflict and displacement in all regions, which had already pushed humanitarian needs to a record high.<sup>6</sup> The financial and material resources to address these crises are not able to keep pace with the need. There is a growing funding gap for UN appeals, increasing from a 50% deficit of \$15 billion in 2016<sup>7</sup> to a 78%, \$43 billion, deficit in 2023.<sup>8</sup>

However, there is another much more substantial change that the humanitarian sector is neither equipped nor effectively structured to respond to.<sup>10</sup> Climate change is contributing to more frequent and more intense floods, cyclones, drought and heat waves which are extending to new geographical areas and compounding in their secondary impacts on food security, livelihoods, biodiversity, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), resource conflicts, community coping capacities and resilience.<sup>11</sup> The number of small and medium-scale under-the-radar disasters has increased five fold in the last ten years<sup>12</sup> and the scale of climate change disruption is projected to lead to a further massive increase.

Developing and emerging economy countries will need around \$2.4 trillion per year by 2030 to cope with climate breakdown,<sup>13</sup> with the *cost of loss and damage impacts<sup>14</sup> in low income countries estimated to be as much as ten times the size of current global humanitarian budget* by 2030, and fifty times this budget by 2050.<sup>15</sup> Loss and damage funding being requested by the climate community is in the order of \$280-500 Bn per year, in addition to the current global humanitarian budget of \$31.3 billion.<sup>16</sup> The impacts of climate change loss and damage will lead to increased demand for humanitarian assistance. These impacts will compound with ongoing rapid urbanisation, increasing populations, increasing conflict, energy and food inflation and environmental degradation to increase hazards, exposure and community vulnerabilities.

***Climate change is now the biggest driver of increase in humanitarian crises.***<sup>16</sup> Without significant changes the scale of increased need that the IPCC is projecting will overwhelm the already overstretched humanitarian system.<sup>17</sup>



**ALERT N-06 NEPAL (FLOODING & LANDSLIDE).**

Loss and damage normally refers to the destructive impacts of climate change that cannot be avoided by mitigation or adaptation. This reflects the fact that climate change is already having substantial negative effects on infrastructure and people's health and livelihoods around the world.

<sup>6</sup>Global Report on Internal Displacement, IDMC, 2023, [here](#);

<sup>7</sup>Too important to fail - addressing the humanitarian financing gap, HLPFH, 2016, [here](#);

<sup>8</sup>Global Humanitarian Overview, UNOCHA, 2023, [here](#);

<sup>9</sup>World Risk Report, CBM et al., 2022, [here](#);

<sup>10</sup>Rethinking Humanitarian Reform: What will it take to truly change the system?, Centre for Global Development, 2021, [here](#);

<sup>11</sup>Sixth Assessment Report (AR6): Climate Change: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, IPCC, 2022, [here](#);

<sup>12</sup>GAR Disaster Risk Reduction Report, UNDRR, 2022, [here](#);

<sup>13</sup>Finance for Climate Action, Grantham Research Institute, 2022, [here](#);

<sup>14</sup>What is loss and damage, Chatham House, 2022, [here](#);

<sup>15</sup>Unpacking finance for Loss and Damage, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, [here](#);

<sup>16</sup>Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, Development Initiatives, 2022, [here](#);

<sup>17</sup>Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, UNDRR, 2022 [here](#);



I don't think humanitarians have taken on board the full impact the climate crisis will have on the scale, frequency and complexity of disasters, or the political environment it might create. Taken together, the lack of ability to respond and lack of support would break the system. - Paul Knox Clark, ADAPT Climate and Humanitarian Crisis Initiative

Climate change impacts not only compound each other, they also exacerbate existing non-climate crisis drivers. Communities in vulnerable countries are not equipped to withstand this future of increased systemic compounding risk. Communities are limited in their capacity to cope or recover from such an increase in scale and frequency of disasters. Climate change adaptation also has its limits, beyond which disasters will prevail. The impacts of loss and damage are changing the scale of humanitarian need. ***Humanitarian actors at all levels need to work together to reform to become more efficient and more effective through greater coordination, collaboration and new ways of working.***

This includes much faster progress towards localisation, recognising and mobilising existing local capacities and providing external support to help augment them (discussed in section 3.0). Better collaboration is essential across the sector to integrate anticipatory action, disaster preparedness with response, recovery, DRR and adaptation (see section 4.0).

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is an international environmental treaty to combat dangerous human interference with the climate system, in part by stabilising greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. It was signed by 198 member states at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit who regularly meet to make agreements on measures to implement it, including responsibilities on greenhouse gas mitigation and funding for climate change adaptation and loss and damage.

Moreover, the whole sector needs to reduce its impacts on the environment, ensuring its actions are not exacerbating climate change impacts (discussed in section 5.0). Greater awareness and coherency are required across the system, removing duplication and competition between actors because the scale of climate change and its compounding impacts with other crisis drivers will otherwise overwhelm the humanitarian system (discussed in section 6.0). With such a substantial increase in the level of need the humanitarian sector needs to rapidly become more effective at using the resources we already have, regardless of what amount of additional funding may come from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) loss and damage funds (LDF). Existing resources include the global humanitarian budget but also include the resources and capacities that local communities and local and national governments already have (discussed in section 7.0).

Attribution of each crisis to climate change is not necessary because we now know that climate change exacerbates all meteorological and hydrometeorological disaster.

- Prof. Saleemul Huq, OBE, climate scientist.

Some commentators argue the need for climate change attribution in each crisis response in order to verify what proportion of funding should come from existing humanitarian funds versus additional loss and damage funds. Attribution is challenging, although scientists are getting much faster at it.<sup>18</sup> However, other commentators argue that attribution of any single crisis is an unnecessary distraction because we know that humanitarian crises already occur and we now know that climate change exacerbates all meteorological and hydrometeorological disasters, which in turn compound other crisis drivers such as food insecurity and conflict.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup>See the work of Prof. Miles Allen, Oxford University, [here](#); and Dr Friederike Otto Grantham Institution for climate change and the environment [here](#):

<sup>19</sup>Sixth Assessment Report (AR6): Climate Change: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, IPCC, 2022, [here](#):



Start Fund is the only mechanism we have that is addressing these kinds of small-scale disasters, we say these are obviously due to climate change. - Abdul Alim, ActionAid, Bangladesh

## 2.1 IMPACTS ON SMALL AND MEDIUM SCALE DISASTERS

Our research reviewed data from the EM-DAT international disaster database,<sup>20</sup> as did the majority of literature reviewed to inform this research. EM-DAT has a minimum threshold, recording disasters with at least ten fatalities, 100 affected people, a declaration of a state of emergency, or a call for international assistance. Anything below this threshold can therefore be considered as “off the radar” of the main international database. However, the Start Fund supports responses to small and medium scale disasters, whose definition varies between countries and actors. Disaster loss data for low severity, high frequency events is less robust than for large scale events and is typically not accounted for by the international community, although the losses are significant. This research reviewed data on small and medium scale disasters from the IFRC,<sup>21</sup> UNDRR<sup>22</sup> and the Desinventar database<sup>23</sup> which captures data on “*extensive risk*” through monitoring local media and capturing anecdotal evidence. These sources demonstrate that risks associated with low severity, high-frequency weather events (i.e. weather-related extensive risk) are expanding geographically, occurring with greater frequency and leading to increased loss and damage levels. In urban areas, the risk is driven by a substantial proportion of the population living in informal settlements in sites exposed to hazards. This includes low-lying areas or steep landslide prone slopes; river banks subject to erosion, flooding, coastal storms or tidal inundation. The UNDRR GAR (Global Assessment Report) 2011 found that localised disasters may account for only a small proportion of overall disaster mortality yet found that they are responsible for significant damage to housing, crops, livestock and local infrastructure, particularly affecting low-income households and communities. Moreover, the UNDRR GAR 2022 found that current figures are underestimates because “*data systems are still not sufficient to capture the large proportion of slow-onset hazards and subnational, localized or small-scale extensive disasters.*” The GAR 2015 found that “*a staggering 99.7% of all disaster events between 1990 and 2013 were smaller disasters involving fewer than 30 deaths or fewer than 5,000 houses destroyed.*” Whilst the GAR 2021 found that “*Thousands of these smaller-scale events are unreported every year because they do not generate high impacts at the national or international levels; however, they do bring a constant stream of local losses.*” **The Start Fund is clearly already responding to smaller climate change related disasters and is well positioned to scale up its response through the way Start Network is a global network structured to enable complementary supporting relationships between international, national and local humanitarian responders.**

Over the last 10 years cyclones have changed our lives. People are struggling. Cyclones damaged dams and sea water flooded agricultural land, reducing crop production. Our farmers are suffering. - Local focus group participant.

<sup>20</sup>EM-DAT International Disaster Database, CRED, 2023, [here](#):

<sup>21</sup>Come Heat or High Water: World Disasters Report, IFRC, 2020, [here](#):

<sup>22</sup>United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, UNDRR, 2023, [here](#):

<sup>23</sup>UNDRR Desinventar Sendai, 2023, [here](#):

## 2.2 CLIMATE IMPACTS ON PROTRACTED, RECURRENT AND SEASONAL CRISES

“Climate Change is a protracted humanitarian crisis hitting all countries.” - Prof. Saleemul Huq, OBE, climate scientist.

There has been a significant increase in *recurrent, seasonal and protracted crises*. Seasonal, recurring, nexus events and cascading events are all exacerbated by climate change and happening faster than the scientists predicted.<sup>24</sup> The world is fast approaching tipping points such as the Greenland ice sheet collapse, West Antarctic ice sheet collapse, tropical coral reef die off and the shutting down of the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation (AMOC), which includes the gulf stream.<sup>25</sup> Scientists are observing multiple climate phenomena overlapping including temperature increase, erratic rainfall, cyclone patterns, storms, floods and landslides. Tropical storms are more extreme and erratic. Recurrent seasonal climate related crises are increasingly happening in the midst of protracted conflict crises, making it challenging to respond to the climate related crises in these contexts.

Although climate related crises are often seen by humanitarians and others as separate to a conflict, research demonstrates that they are not. Instead climate change is typically found to be one of the drivers of the conflict and the conflict exacerbates the local impacts of climate change. However, humanitarian responders typically respond to one and ignore the other. In reality, the causes and consequences of disasters are complex and interconnected. It is very rare that any disaster has one single cause or risk driver. Climate change is now found to exacerbate all humanitarian crises, and so do other geopolitical and inequality issues, with some commentators arguing that this means all countries are now in recurrent or protracted crises.

The short timelines for Start Fund responses are not designed for, and therefore unsuitable for, effective response to protracted crises, although they do respond to spikes in chronic humanitarian crises. Humanitarian action over 45 or 60 days cannot change a protracted situation and it is possible any attempt to do so may instead cause unintentional harm. The Start Fund also finds itself responding to repeated similar alerts within the same countries. Analysis of the Start Fund's response data and some research informants' feedback suggests this is an indicator of the Start Fund responding to recurrent or seasonal crises without observing the protracted nature of the crisis for what it is. If the Start Fund had a stronger categorisation of its responses, it would be able to identify recurrent and seasonal crises and ensure Start Network members are able to be better prepared for them because they know they are coming.<sup>26</sup> Infact, the Start Fund is already doing this to an extent through its anticipatory responses, although this approach could be strengthened with longer climate forecast data.

“In Haiti we are in a protracted crisis compounded by recurrent and seasonal climate crises. The drought and floods are recurrent and seasonal. They are chronic.” - Angeline Annesteus, ActionAid, Haiti - SN Member

<sup>24</sup>Source: global climate expert interview

<sup>25</sup>Nature, 2023, [here](#):

<sup>26</sup>Start Fund Humanitarian Response data from 2014 to 2023

## 2.3 NEW CRISES, FUTURE START FUND ALERTS

The future of humanitarian response is mainly responding to crises driven by interconnected cascading risks, where climate change will both drive and exacerbate impacts across sectors and geographies. Climate impacts in terms of food insecurity; water insecurity; energy insecurity; extreme weather (floods, droughts, storms, heat/cold waves); sea level rise; and related health and productivity issues are all increasing. However, the disaster typologies (types or categories) will mostly remain the same as they currently are.<sup>27</sup> In this context, it would be beneficial for humanitarians to better understand the causes and consequences of disasters through an intersectional climate lens. We know that climate change is exacerbating all hydrometeorological and meteorological disasters, with some commentators saying climate now impacts every type of humanitarian disaster. Having said this, there are specific areas where we should expect to see significantly greater impacts. Reports from the IPCC, IFRC, UNDRR, International Rescue Committee and others are making a number of changes very clear. **Migration is increasing**, partly driven by climate change, partly driven by geopolitics. **More crops are failing** through erratic rainfall. Planting seasons have typically become shorter so traditional crops fail. Agricultural livelihoods are failing. **Floods are more frequent** and more extreme. Climate change is a big contributor to all of these, but there are other drivers including urbanisation, deforestation, hydropower schemes, poor housing locations and transboundary water disputes. **Asian monsoon timings have changed**. There is an increase in disease, particularly water borne. **Wildfires are increasing significantly**. Forest fires don't usually have a huge impact on population centres but they are increasingly impacting smaller populations. Cyclones are not new but they are changing in nature. They generate much more quickly as the sea surface temperature is warmer. Cyclones are occurring in places where they had not previously been present and their trajectories and intensity have changed from historical patterns.

"In Dhaka we estimate that every single day 2,000 people arrive in by foot, cycle, bus or rikshaw and disappear into the slums. Our research shows that a growing proportion are displaced by climate change."

- Prof. Saleemul Huq, OBE, climate scientist

### NEW

What is relatively new is that disasters have become more complex and interconnected. Climate, conflict, famine, protection vulnerabilities, displacement and migration each frequently intersect all disaster types. Another recent trend is that multiple disasters are occurring in parallel. Environmental disasters are happening in the midst of conflict; realised hazards are exacerbating other hazards. Our research included interviewing several renowned authors on climate change impacts who have documented the following as "new" trends in humanitarian disasters due to climate change:

A substantial increase in displacement is noted as the biggest crisis in all geographical regions.

<sup>27</sup>Sixth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability [here](#).

Heatwaves are the new crisis. According to the Climate Change Risk Assessment 2021, if global emissions do not come down drastically before 2030, then by 2040, a staggering 3.9 billion people are likely to experience major heatwaves each year, with urban areas suffering the greatest challenges of workability and survivability.<sup>28</sup> The Global Fund for Disaster Reduction and Recovery's Think Hazard! tool<sup>29</sup> finds for example that whilst the chance of a deadly heatwave in Somalia is 7% in an average year, this increases to over 50% in any given year. Heatwaves are the silent, unnoticed crisis, killing very large numbers of people, especially the elderly, young children, pregnant women and people with comorbidities. Tens of thousands of people can die in a single week in an urban environment.<sup>30</sup> Both governments and humanitarians are doing very little about this, partly because there is very little that can be easily done. Some governments are reducing urban concrete cover, painting roofs white to reflect heat and introducing more trees and green spaces into urban areas. In Sindh Karachi, the 2022 heat wave had a much lower death rate than the 2021 heatwave because of government actions.

In Ethiopia, over 24 million people face the harsh impacts of drought, with six consecutive failed rainy seasons. The challenges are compounded by conflict, instability, and disrupted humanitarian efforts, hindering response to climate change impacts.

**Mountain snow melt, glacial outburst and precipitation run-off are more common, causing new types of disasters from flash flooding. Landslides are becoming more frequent - partly due to a warmer wetter world, but partly due to poor road construction, deforestation and upstream changes. Drought and food insecurity in arid and semi-arid land (ASAL) is leading to previously drought resilient livelihoods no longer being able to cope. By 2040, almost 700 million people each year will likely be exposed to prolonged droughts of at least six months duration, with North Africa and the Middle East having the greatest proportion of their populations experiencing extreme water stress.**<sup>31</sup>

**Health impacts are changing, such as dengue and malaria having spread in latitude and altitude to communities who have no immunity. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and other forms of protection incidents are increasing with climate reportedly driving migration into bonded labour, child marriage and survival sex. Transboundary water conflict is increasing.**

In the Central Sahel, as in most humanitarian crises, women and girls are amongst the most vulnerable to climate change. A lack of access to water during drought seasons forces them to travel further to collect water and firewood, exposing them to greater risk of rape, sexual exploitation, and gender-based violence.

**Slow onset crises, discussed further below, are reported as the new emergency on a very wide scale, with slow loss of land, loss of fertile soil, and salinisation of groundwater, increased temperatures and reduced water resources. Over twice the global land area was affected by drought in 2019, compared with the historic baseline.**<sup>32</sup> For humanitarians these crises are very slow onset but they are massive disasters where large numbers of people will lose their homes, food source, livelihoods and security. In the Sahel in 2020, some 13.4 million people were reported as being in need of humanitarian assistance.

<sup>28</sup>Climate Change Risk Assessment, Chatham House/FCDO, 2021, [here](#).

<sup>29</sup>Think Hazard! - Extreme Heat, GFDRR 2023, [here](#).

<sup>30</sup>For example 61,000 people died in heat waves in Europe in 2022, [here](#).

<sup>31</sup>UNDRR DesInventar Sendai [here](#).

<sup>32</sup>UNDRR DesInventar Sendai [here](#).



Also new, is the occurrence of **existing crisis types in new locations**, including tornadoes being new to Nepal in 2019, hail storms and cyclones both new to West Africa. When considering new trends in crises, **new donor and legislative requirements** should also be noted. Whilst not discussed at length here, humanitarian responders should note that donors and governments in countries receiving humanitarian assistance have introduced new requirements and legislation including requirements to undertake environmental assessments; to monitor and report entire supply chain greenhouse gas emissions; national bans on single use plastics and polluter pays legislation. These requirements are expected to increase over time and there is a risk that they may overburden under resourced local responders.

**NOT NEW**



As researchers we are concerned to avoid false attribution. Whilst the evidence we have reviewed certainly confirms the above increases in coverage, frequency and severity of climate related crises, there are other factors driving the increased numbers of reported hydrometeorological and meteorological small and medium scale crises. The humanitarian sector's increased focus on localisation and Start Fund's, ICRC's and other networks' work with local responders have increased our attention on small to medium scale under-the-radar crises. This will have undoubtedly lead to an increase in reporting of these events that research informants advise that local communities previously considered to be normal, not realising they could be classified as disasters.

In parallel to the increased focus on localisation, there is an improvement in our scientific ability to monitor and record small and medium scale crises and an increase in local communities' access to social media and internet based communications. Such advances are timely because climate change is exacerbating the frequency, intensity and uncertainty of disasters to such an extent that this increased awareness is essential if we are going to be able to help local communities survive and become resilient to climate related disasters. Notwithstanding this, we have noted that the Start Fund's current categorisation of crises could be further enhanced to better understand whether there are new types of crises and to capture data on trends.<sup>33</sup>

## Responding to slow onset climate related disasters

Whilst humanitarian actors typically consider slow onset disasters to be those that occur over a period of weeks or months, such as drought, disease spread, or some forms of conflict, climate change actors define slow onset disasters over a much longer timescale of years, decades or centuries, including temperature rise, sea level rise, and changes in soil salinity. Slow-onset crises over such time frames may not, on first consideration, appear to require our immediate attention, and are typically not recognised by the humanitarian sector. However in relation to sea level rise, the IPCC<sup>34</sup> finds that *"The frequency of coastal flooding has nearly doubled since the 1960s."* whilst the World Meteorological Office (WMO) finds that 900 million people, or 1 in every 10 people, lives in a coastal zone at a low elevation. The long term estimate of sea level rise is around 12 metres if temperatures are held at 2°C, with one billion people now occupying land less than 10 metres above current high tide lines.<sup>35</sup>

Communities facing loss of land, groundwater salinity and extreme heat over the long term are facing the slow certainty that they cannot survive in their current locations and yet they have nowhere else to go. The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reports that global average sea level has risen 21 to 24 cm since 1880 and 10 cm since 1993.<sup>36</sup> Coastal communities are already feeling its impacts as this rise increases the frequency and severity of storms and rates of land loss. These impacts are already exceeding local communities', local farmers' and local governments' coping capacities. These people are already within the most protracted humanitarian crisis on earth.

<sup>33</sup>These research findings confirm and add to the Start Fund Value and Uniqueness findings, 2021 [here](#):

<sup>34</sup>Sixth Assessment Report (AR6): Climate Change: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, IPCC, 2022, [here](#):

<sup>35</sup>Climate Change Risk Assessment, Chatham House / FCDO, 2021 [here](#):

<sup>36</sup>Climate Change: Global sea level, NOAA, 2022, [here](#):

## 2.4 CHANGING HUMANITARIAN LANDSCAPE RECOMMENDATIONS

### THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR SHOULD:

- Come together at all levels to increase its combined effectiveness and efficiency through better coordination and collaboration, identifying and removing duplication and competition, acknowledging the scale of climate change as a driver of humanitarian crises and accelerating progress to localisation
- Inform itself on the complex and compounding interaction of climate drivers and other risk drivers such as famine, conflict, global inflation, SGBV and protection, treating all crises as complex, developing skills in systemic response
- Agree a process to better define, record and provide support at the right levels for small, medium and large crises
- Understand and agree thresholds and approaches to respond to slow onset climate crises.

### THE START FUND SHOULD:

- *Protect its niche of anticipatory action, rapid response, and locally led decision making; but increase its knowledge and action of climate change and associated extreme weather-related hazards<sup>37</sup>*
- *Amend its data categorisation and collect data on climate impacts and trends on protracted, recurrent seasonal and one-off small and medium scale crises*
- *Develop its response to slow onset crises through agreeing definitions, crisis alert thresholds and new response mechanisms, establishing processes for members to raise alerts on drought, salinity and increasing temperatures*
- *Conduct research to provide examples of the attribution of climate change to a range of typologies of small and medium scale crises*
- *Build on its existing track record and take a greater role in coordination, collaboration and influencing to break down silos between humanitarians and climate practitioners, and to align all humanitarian responses to support resilience, Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) and triple nexus objectives*
- *Link climate adaptation into a more integrated humanitarian / disaster risk management approach.*

<sup>37</sup>Start Fund Value and Uniqueness findings, 2021, [here](#):

# 3.0 ENHANCING RESILIENCE THROUGH LOCALISATION



## 3.0 ENHANCING RESILIENCE THROUGH LOCALISATION

Approximately 3.3 billion people live in countries with high human vulnerability to climate change. The IPCC concludes that “*complex human vulnerability patterns shaped by past [and present] developments, such as colonialism and its ongoing legacy, are exacerbated by compounding and cascading climate and other risks and are socially differentiated*”.<sup>38</sup> For example, low-income, young and female-headed households face greater livelihood risks from climate hazards. Increasing numbers of communities that may have previously been able to recover from single disaster events are seeing their coping capacity, their ability to recover, cumulatively diminished as they are impacted by additional disasters. As compounding climate and non-climate risk impacts increase, there is greater need to strengthen the resilience of communities to cope with increasing shocks and stresses whilst sustaining essential functions and services.

Resilience can be defined as “*The capacity to respond, reorganise, learn, adapt, or transform to cope with hazards*.”<sup>39</sup> The increased scale of humanitarian need, exceeding the resources of at-risk communities and the humanitarian sector, underscores the need for approaches to harness and strengthen community resilience through greater localisation and complementary partnerships. Localisation involves increasing the independence, decision making and leadership of local humanitarian (state and non-state) actors as well as increasing access to resources to enable them to take anticipatory action, respond and recover effectively. Whilst localisation is important for ethical and justice reasons, it can increase the effectiveness of external assistance and support communities around the world to become resilient to climate change and other risk drivers at the speed and scale that is required.

It's not just the climate change disasters that should worry us, it's the multiple impacts on people's ability to survive even when there are no disasters. Climate change will impact their health, nutritional and economic status, making many more people much less resilient. - Paul Knox Clark, Humanitarian and Climate Crisis Initiative

In general, local organisations understand the context, needs, local environment, cultural norms, social differentiation and effective responses and solutions better than external organisations. Local organisations have established relationships with communities and local government and have the trust and/or social capital that is essential to bring people together towards a shared purpose. A recent study has demonstrated that *local intermediaries could deliver programming that is up to a third more cost-efficient than international intermediaries, by reducing organisational overhead and salary costs*. Applied to the ODA funding flows allocated to UN/INGOs in 2018 (\$54bn), this would equate to a saving of US\$4.3bn annually.<sup>40</sup> This figure includes providing equitable salaries and overheads to local actors of \$680m per annum. When these core costs are excluded local organisations are impeded from meeting the needs of their communities. Moreover, the effectiveness of an anticipatory response-early recovery of affected communities depends on the level of preparedness and response capacities of local people. The preparedness, absorption/coping capabilities constitute critical components of community resilience, which is the foundation of a more resilient society in the context of a changing climate.

<sup>38</sup>Sixth Assessment Report (AR6): Climate Change: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, IPCC, 2022, [here](#):

<sup>39</sup>This definition is a combination of several others from IPCC, UNDRR and others

<sup>40</sup>PASSING THE BUCK The Economics of Localizing International Assistance, The Share Trust Inc., 2022, [here](#):



Moreover, localisation is not only about increasing direct access to external funding for emergency interventions. Importantly it is about handing over and empowering local leadership and decision making for locally-led response and recovery.<sup>41</sup> At-risk communities and local actors are well positioned to identify and mobilise existing resources and capabilities and use these to the full. However, when communities' own capacities and resources are no longer sufficient to respond and recover effectively, they need external support such as learning transfer, new or strengthened infrastructure, and the necessary funding to respond and recover from crises in a way that strengthens their resilience against future hazards, vulnerabilities and exposure.



ALERT 611 INDIA (FLOODING). CREDIT: NEADS, INDIA

Multiple research informants spoke of their experience of localisation as being lacking. Instead of handing over the power, decision making and funds, they shared examples that were mostly extractive, not true partnership, with key decision making rights retained by international actors and capacity building being imposed and focusing on donor funding compliance. The process was described by one local NGO as *“attempting to convert our organisation into a miniature copy of [the international organisation] whilst ignoring the additional skills and experience that we have”*. Whilst local organisations know the context, the needs, and the most suitable response, they need more resources, inclusion, voice, shared learning and support in engaging with local and national policy.

The Start Fund operates on the basis that funding and response decisions are made by Start Network members, which are increasingly local and national organisations working collectively through hubs. Its localisation approach already seeks to harness and strengthen the leadership and capacities of local state actors to manage and lead the design and delivery of emergency response activities to better address the needs of affected people. This can be considered an empowering “resilience strengthening” approach that increases the ability of at-risk communities to withstand future shocks and stresses. Localisation is an existing Start Fund strength with rapidly increasing numbers of its members being genuinely local, supported through use of an appropriate, tiered access due diligence framework.<sup>42</sup>

It is worth bearing in mind that effective localisation would not make international humanitarian actors redundant, which is perhaps an underlying fear that prevents faster progress towards localisation. Instead it would seek an equal complementary partnership; one of the biggest determinants on the effectiveness of humanitarian actions is its appropriateness to the local context.<sup>43</sup> This is a comparative strength of local actors, rather than the ability to comply with stringent donor requirements or international standards, which the international partner can instead take responsibility for. One research informant noted that *“working with international partners requires us to take all of the risk and them to take none of it.”* Effective localisation is less about compliance with donor reporting to prove where every last penny went, and more about complementarity of the relationship between the local and international organisations.<sup>44</sup> In this context it is likely that International partners are better positioned to manage the fiduciary risk, whilst local NGOs have relative strengths in terms of the planning and delivery of effective interventions based on a strong understanding of local context, capacities, culture and customs.

<sup>41</sup>Best practices in fulfilling the localisation agenda, CAF, 2021, [here](#).

<sup>42</sup>Start Fund Value and Uniqueness, 2021, [here](#).

<sup>43</sup>Best practices in fulfilling the localisation agenda, CAF, 2021, [here](#).

<sup>44</sup>Best practices in fulfilling the localisation agenda, CAF, 2021, [here](#).

Strengthening local resilience requires building local absorption<sup>45</sup> and adaptation capacities, providing better preparedness for anticipatory and early recovery that incorporates aspects of disaster risk reduction and adaptation to reduce vulnerability and exposure to future hazards. International humanitarian organisations can play a valuable role in building the capacity of local humanitarian actors in these areas. The principle of subsidiarity,<sup>46</sup> that decisions and actions are best when as local as possible, so that international organisations should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed at the local level, will bring decision making to local actors. The Start Fund has its own subsidiarity principle<sup>47</sup> and definition. Handing over decision making to local actors and strengthening their capacities enables the whole system to take a more anticipatory approach. Anticipatory action is known to ensure reduced disaster impacts, enable more effective responses and support early recovery. This is discussed further in Section 4.0.

Similar to Start Fund Bangladesh and Start Fund Nepal, the researchers are aware of developments within the UN system to pilot regional pooled / trust funds to support localisation. These funds would include both capacity building preparedness (including anticipatory action), as well as direct access to resources for local actors for the delivery of seasonal responses to climate related emergencies. Start Fund seeks to develop a more responsive system, recognising seasonality, ensuring greater accountability to affected people and enabling locally-led and managed humanitarian action. Effective localisation requires identifying, supporting and building on local knowledge, capacities and sources of resilience. The Start Fund has already made significant steps towards this way of working, seeking external support to augment local resources that local actors can access. This is demonstrated in Bangladesh and Nepal Start Funds where decision making is increasingly locally led. However, there are limits to resilience just as there are limits to adaptation, which is where localised pooled funds should provide critical assistance.

Start Fund Bangladesh (SFB), initiated in 2017, is one of the two national Start Funds, established as a locally led rapid emergency response pooled funding mechanism to promptly address small and medium-scale crises. It also focuses on enhancing coordination mechanisms; increasing representation of local and national agencies in decision-making fora; improving accountability to affected populations; and strengthening local and national agencies' access to funding. SFB has demonstrated that the onboarding of local organisations as members, and the direct flow of funds to them, improved response to local underreported emergencies, through a deeper understanding of community needs.

<sup>45</sup>Absorb, Adapt, Transform: Resilience capacities, Oxfam, 2017, [here](#):

<sup>46</sup>The principle of subsidiarity, Roughneen, D., 2018, [here](#):

<sup>47</sup>Page 12, Start Fund Handbook, Start Network, 2020, [here](#):

## SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

Effective strengthening of localisation takes account of how climate change, like other drivers of humanitarian crises, impacts women, children, older people, people with disabilities, indigenous communities, people who are LGBTQI+, and other vulnerable groups, differently.<sup>48</sup> In the process of response and recovery, this is too often ignored. The IPCC finds that “the intersection of gender with race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, indigenous identity, age, disability, income, migrant status and geographical location often compounds vulnerability to climate change impacts, exacerbates inequity and creates further injustice”. It further states that “There is evidence that present adaptation strategies do not sufficiently include poverty reduction and the underlying social determinants of human vulnerability such as gender, ethnicity and governance.”<sup>49</sup> The Start Fund should do further work on social differentiation including support to enhance members' existing assessment tools regarding gender, diversity and equity. Women usually give greater thought to planning for their family and are disproportionately responsible for unpaid care and domestic work and yet in many contexts patriarchy and social norms make them more vulnerable and/or marginalised than others. In some parts of the world women tend to have stronger social networks, although in others women are socially isolated, increasing their vulnerability. Start Network members could strengthen their understanding of local gender dynamics, diversity, and inclusion and deepen their understanding of how inclusive localisation can lead to resilience in a way that non-inclusive approaches cannot. Whilst women are often found to be the most vulnerable to disasters, this is not innate. In recognition of women's strength, knowledge, and leadership ability, ActionAid has pioneered work on Women-Led Emergency Response (WLER)<sup>50</sup>, which demonstrated in 2013 that when women are involved in humanitarian response, leading activities including need assessments, the logistics are more decentralised and agile, nutrition is more focused on children and shelter design is more accessible. The Start Fund could be intentional in including women's and people living with disability's rights organisations (WRO/PWDO).

<sup>48</sup>What is social differentiation? Its meaning and causes, Tyonote, 2021, [here](#).

<sup>49</sup>Sixth Assessment Report (AR6): Climate Change: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, IPCC, 2022, [here](#).

<sup>50</sup>Women Led Emergency Response, ActionAid, [here](#).

# RESILIENCE THROUGH LOCALISATION RECOMMENDATIONS

## THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR SHOULD:

Rapidly accelerate its *progress towards genuine localisation*, morphing international agencies' role to one of enabler and supporter of local agencies, handing over decision-making, leadership, and control of financial resources to local actors to enhance local response and recovery capacities and strengthen community resilience

*Donors should* devise mechanisms for local grassroots organisations to access grants including for inclusive development (WROs, PWDOs), supported by common standards and due diligence processes and greater use of national level country pooled funds

*Design localisation approaches to ensure inclusion of diverse vulnerable groups*, including partnership with women's rights and young people-led organisations and organisations led by people with disabilities, enabling them to have voice, giving recognition to their local knowledge and rights regarding their own communities, handing over decision making to them

*Encourage complementary partnering recognising the comparative advantage of different actors:* International actors are better placed to take responsibility for compliance with technical and humanitarian standards and donor reporting requirements. Recognise and support local actors' complementary set of knowledge and skills and local relationships as something of value that an international actor cannot bring

*Strengthen local capacities* in the areas local actors organisations request. In this research, local actors said that they want connecting with successful learning from agencies similar to them in other parts of the world and request support in building relationships with government, fundraising, and communications

*Share risk equitably* including for security, access, donor compliance and funding of overheads<sup>51</sup>

Help local responders *build effective relationships with their local and national governments* to engage in local and national policy debates and demonstrate their capacity to respond and build resilience.

*Advocate confidentially* on local partner's issues where using their own voice would put them at risk

*Provide sustainable funding* to initiatives that have demonstrated ability to provide funding to local actors, with locally led governance and management

<sup>51</sup>Guide on sharing risks with local actors, Oxfam, undated, [here](#):



## THE START FUND SHOULD:

- Continue to apply and *strengthen localisation approaches* to empower local responders, strengthen local recovery capacities and contribute to enhancing resilient communities
- *Speed up the process* for local members to join Start Network Hubs and national Start Funds
- Encourage its own *international members to advance localisation*, handing over genuine leadership, decision making and funds to local members
- Record and *share stories and evidence* of the greater effectiveness and efficiency of local response
- *Support the development of hubs and national Start Funds*, helping hubs to have their own resources and their own sustainable donor base
- *Strengthen its understanding of Social differentiation*, including local gender dynamics, diversity and inclusion, engaging WROs and PWDOs to deepen their understanding of how inclusive localisation can lead to greater resilience than non inclusive approaches
- Add a *gender and inclusion focus* into its guidance.

# 4.0 ANTICIPATORY ACTION, EARLY RESPONSE, EARLY RECOVERY



## 4.0 ANTICIPATORY ACTION, EARLY RESPONSE, EARLY RECOVERY

Anticipatory action is defined by the IFRC as “actions taken to reduce the impacts of a forecast hazard before it occurs, or before its most acute impacts are felt. The actions are carried out in anticipation of a hazard’s predicted impacts and based on a forecast of when, where and how the event will unfold.”<sup>52</sup>

Although the humanitarian sector has seen significant innovations in relation to anticipatory action and more effective early response, the transition through to early recovery and longer term rehabilitation is often not well defined and is characterised by fragmentation across the different stages of the disaster management cycle. Moreover, recovery interventions often do not incorporate DRR or adaptation measures that would enhance the resilience of communities to future shocks and stresses. The humanitarian sector lacks a genuine understanding of the importance of ecosystem services and nature-based solutions that are increasingly being promoted by the climate change adaptation community.<sup>53</sup> The effectiveness of localisation as an approach contributing to enhancing community resilience requires stronger coherence of action and integration across the different stages of the disaster cycle, notably the transition from anticipatory and early response through to early recovery that incorporate DRR and CCA considerations.

Traditionally, standard humanitarian action waits for a crisis event to occur, then develops a humanitarian response commencing with a needs assessment. However, early action can protect assets, livestock and people and so reduce the impact. Protecting assets helps people to reestablish their capacities and livelihoods. Moreover, the design of the early response measures can serve to protect and restore local capacities. Anticipatory action is known to ensure reduced disaster impacts, more effective responses, and supports early recovery.<sup>54</sup> The more anticipatory action protects local assets and capacities, the less impact these crises have on a community. For example, anticipatory actions of moving livestock to high land, supports communities in reestablishing livelihoods and restoring productive assets for self-sufficiency after the extreme hazard has passed through.

The scale of humanitarian challenge that we now face, substantially exacerbated by climate change, means that we can no longer work on humanitarian response in isolation. To do no harm we have to design each element to strengthen the others on the disaster cycle and go further to align our work with sustainable development goals; to be informed of and set the pathway for effective DRR and climate adaptation; and to explore and support triple nexus objectives wherever we are working on disasters.

Preparedness planning that informs anticipatory and early responses is required, which in turn supports an effective and early recovery. These combine to protect and enhance community capacities that are less likely to be overwhelmed by hazards and strengthen local resilience to future shocks and stresses. Examples include early evacuation of people and equipment, and early harvesting. Where adaptation planning is being undertaken the silos that separate it from DRR and longer term development planning must be broken.



ALERT 686 PERU (LANDSLIDE) RESPONSE. CREDIT: CADENA A.C

<sup>52</sup>The Anticipation hub, hosted by the German Red Cross with IFRC, [here](#):

<sup>53</sup>Why environmental and humanitarian action must be linked, OCHA, 2019, [here](#):

<sup>54</sup>Minimizing loss and damage through anticipatory action, 2022, [here](#):

Encouragingly, this research has found that Start Network local members' function in a less siloed way, in a more joined up way, than their larger international counterparts. The majority of local members cannot afford to employ separate DRR, climate, conflict and gender advisors due to budget constraints - by necessity, they are typically the same person. They don't have separate teams focusing on risk reduction to those focusing on response or recovery. They have one team who work with a community who by default consider all of their needs holistically.

A community whose resilience is strengthened through anticipatory action linked to early response is better able to recover and better able to absorb and adapt to future risks, including climate risks. The work of FAO, an agency at the leading edge of anticipatory action, can be consulted.<sup>55</sup> However, as with all areas of development and humanitarian action, there are social, cultural, and economic barriers to inclusion to overcome in anticipatory action. Anticipatory action is strengthened through localisation, bringing decision-making to the local level enables a more anticipatory humanitarian system which leads to reduced impacts and more effective work, which facilitates an early recovery. The less impact these crises have on the community, the more anticipatory action protects local assets and capacities.

Traditional humanitarian assistance remains essential in conflict and disasters, but anticipatory action allows us to act before disaster strikes and crises unfold before lives and livelihoods are lost. Anticipatory response informed by improvements in earth observations and weather forecasting capabilities can be effective for responding to a range of recurrent and seasonal crises, discussed in section 2.0, particularly for meteorological and hydrometeorological disasters. The FAO is also leading the way in anticipatory action in protracted crises.<sup>56</sup>

In 2022 a Start Fund Alert was raised in Madagascar in anticipation of Cyclone Emnati, two days before landfall. This was a departure from previous practice, where alerts for cyclones were typically raised 2-7 days after landfall. Using a cyclone forecast tool developed by FOREWARN and the Meteorology Office of Madagascar, funds were released before the cyclone made landfall. This new approach allowed local members to access Start Fund resources in advance of the impending crisis. This anticipatory response empowered them to proactively mitigate risks and reduce the impact on vulnerable communities before the disaster struck, facilitating decision-making. Through careful risk analysis, including weather forecast analysis and situation monitoring, they were able to plan response activities in advance.

Cyclone Emnati hit the Eastern and Southern coasts of Madagascar on February 22 and 23, 2022, only 17 days after Cyclone Batsirai struck the area. Damage to clinics, schools, and houses was reported, and roads were destroyed. At least 44,000 people were displaced in evacuation shelters across 12 regions.

Upon activation of the alert, Catholic Relief Services, Welthungerhilfe, and Medair were selected to respond to this crisis in three distinct affected regions. Their response reached a staggering 220,188 individuals, providing critical support, including water and sanitation services, non-food item distribution, and cash transfers. The anticipatory response enabled Start Network members to support community resilience ahead of the cyclone making landfall, providing communities with tailored support in the immediate aftermath, and enabling the community to recover faster.

***Anticipatory response is the Start Fund's new strength,*** demonstrating a different and innovative approach to most other humanitarian organisations, providing funding for members in advance of crises and funding disaster risk analysis to support anticipatory action. The Start Fund introduced anticipatory response after observing that its early responses were too late, despite being faster than most responders. It observed that information was available in advance, predicting the crises and observed that disaster responses were being raised by the same partners in the same location year on year. The Start Fund's innovative approach is further demonstrated in its membership collectively deciding whether to raise an alert and whether it is activated.

<sup>55</sup>Developing an Anticipatory Action System, FAO elearning academy, undated, [here](#):

<sup>56</sup>FAO-WFP Anticipatory Action Strategy, 2023, [here](#):



If they have enough time members can raise an alert note ahead of a crisis. Advisors in Start Network's Crisis Anticipation and Risk Financing (CARF) team and some Start Network members help with risk forecasting, data analysis and finances to raise alerts (through the FOREWARN community of practice). They build the tools to anticipate the crisis, they monitor risks and support all Members, including National Non-Governmental Organisation (NNGO) and Local Non Governmental Organisations (LNGO), to raise alerts and develop proposals to secure funds.

The Start Fund should further strengthen its anticipatory work by linking early response more consciously to early recovery and encouraging its members to link it to DRR, CCA and preparedness. Whilst direct work on DRR, and recovery are outside of the Start Fund's scope, it can ensure its responses are designed to support local members in achieving these objectives in their other existing work through adjusting its proposal form questions and reporting requirements.

## ANTICIPATORY ACTION, EARLY RESPONSE, EARLY RECOVERY RECOMMENDATIONS

### THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR SHOULD:

- **Scale up and embed anticipatory action in the humanitarian system**, linking it to early response and early recovery. They should support this with better data collection on climate change impacts on small and medium scale crises and better risk analysis to improve forecasting and early warning, agreeing contextualised thresholds and response triggers
- Move rapidly towards **making anticipatory action the default response** for recurrent, seasonal and all hydrometeorological and meteorological crises where impacts can be predicted some time ahead of crises
- **Align anticipatory action** with development plans and national adaptation plans to strengthen capacities to enable early action in areas of high disaster risk
- **Strengthen linkages and coherence across all stages of the disaster cycle** - anticipation, preparedness, response, recovery, DRR
- **Integrate climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction** whilst breaking down silos with disaster preparedness
- **Ensure anticipatory response is as local as possible**, recognising local organisations are well placed and have a comparative advantage in terms of understanding local vulnerabilities, needs, capabilities, response options and barriers to participation
- Give particular emphasis to the **inclusion of high-risk marginalised vulnerable groups** in anticipatory action - women; youth; the elderly; people with disabilities; people from ethnic, religious or sexual identity minority backgrounds
- **Strengthen coordination, learning and partnerships** to make anticipatory action, early response and early recovery substantially more effective and efficient.

## THE START FUND SHOULD:

- ***Build on its existing strengths in anticipatory response;*** increasing the number of anticipatory responses and ensuring they are the default response where impacts can be forecast, whilst continuing direct response where appropriate
- ***Support members to ensure anticipatory action supports preparedness, response and recovery.*** This will require greater expenditure on forecasting and more systematic processes and technology to predict loss and damage. The Start Fund should also explore Loss and Damage (LnD) insurance mechanisms
- Increase its work on providing ***early warning*** and locally-led anticipatory action and early response with at-risk communities
- ***Link anticipatory work to early recovery,*** encouraging members to link it to DRR, CCA, and preparedness
- ***Develop a response exit strategy:*** Facilitate a learning review as part of an ethical exit from a response intervention in order to capture lessons learned and experiential knowledge to enhance organisational and community level preparedness planning for future climate-related crises. Members participating in this research have requested that the Start Fund maps trends and “requires” members to use this information to plan better responses
- ***Continue or increase learning exchange*** with other country-based pooled funds and anticipatory responders including the UN's CERF and the IFRC's DERF and the FAO.

# 5.0 GREENING HUMANITARIAN ACTION



## 5.0 GREENING HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Concern regarding the impact of humanitarian activities on the environment became more widely articulated in the wake of the Darfur crisis response in the early 2000s. Construction of camps for displaced persons included unsustainable tree cutting and groundwater loss. The volume of trees cut to build “temporary” shelters was so great that it became clear that return home was not realistically feasible, with estimates of 12-16 million additional mature trees needed to rebuild displaced people’s permanent shelters.<sup>57</sup> Images were also shared across the sector of thousands of items of single-use plastic waste repeatedly picked up and cast about by mini whirl-winds, being caught in trees and some consumed by wildlife. A growing demand to assess and reduce humanitarian environmental impacts has steadily grown, with environmental assessments such as the Benfield Rapid Environmental Assessment (REA)<sup>58</sup> and the Nexus Environmental Assessment Tool (NEAT),<sup>59</sup> both now widely used across the sector.



*CULVERT COMMUNITY FREETOWN, DIRECT & INDIRECT HUMANITARIAN IMPACTS. CREDIT: DAVID BURT, START FUND*

More recent action on reducing humanitarian impacts on the environment has largely centred on reducing GHG emissions from buildings, energy use and travel, particularly international flights. However, a number of organisations including the ICRC and the Joint Initiative on Sustainable Humanitarian Assistance (JI), a network of large and small humanitarian organisations and donors, have sought to quantify humanitarian environmental impacts. Overall they have found this to be too substantial a task, partly due to lack of data and poor interoperability between data management systems. However, the JI’s combined research has determined that global logistics procurement and solid waste from procurement in particular is the humanitarian sector’s greatest detrimental impact on the environment.<sup>60</sup> It is estimated that by 2050, the world will generate 3.40 billion tons of waste annually, increasing drastically from the 2018 figure of 2.01 billion tons<sup>61</sup> and it is known that 40% of the world’s waste comes from packaging.<sup>62</sup> Aligning with this figure, The World Food Programme (WFP), within the JI, has analysed data from several humanitarian organisations to try to quantify packaging waste, finding that 32% of the total weight of primary and secondary packaging is plastic, and opportunities for recycling or repurposing this type of waste are scarce in humanitarian settings.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>57</sup>Darfur: Resilience in a Vulnerable Environment, Tearfund Learn, 2007, [here](#):

<sup>58</sup>Guidelines for Rapid Environmental Impact Assessment, EECentre, 2019, [here](#):

<sup>59</sup>Nexus Environmental Assessment Tool, Joint Environment Unit, 2023, [here](#):

<sup>60</sup>Joint Initiative on sustainable humanitarian assistance packaging waste management, EECentre, 2023, [here](#):

<sup>61</sup>What a waste 2.0, World Bank, 2018, [here](#):

<sup>62</sup>Three ways the humanitarian community is going green while saving lives, USAID figure, 2021, [here](#):

<sup>63</sup>Packaging Baseline Assessment Based on Humanitarian Emergency Responses in 2021, JI, 2022, [here](#):



## CHALLENGES WITH GREENING

There are a number of significant challenges facing the sector as it seeks to reduce its environmental impact. A key theme amongst them is **competing priorities**, illustrated by some informants with reference to the humanitarian imperative.<sup>64</sup>

In line with this imperative, humanitarians prioritise life-saving response and reducing human suffering over the environment. Security, access to affected populations, funding shortfalls, protection issues, staff retention and wellbeing, were also cited as competing priorities that are typically regarded as more urgent than consideration of the environment. Research informants also stressed that they carry out their duties in challenging circumstances and do not realise their activities are damaging the environment, for example humanitarian livestock distribution without consideration of the greenhouse gas emissions and environmental destruction caused by cattle, goats and sheep.

The JI network has found **lack of adequate local waste management infrastructure** and recycling facilities to be a significant barrier to environmentally sustainable waste packaging management, with packaging waste often burned or piled in the same way that other local waste is disposed of.<sup>65</sup> This challenge is further exacerbated by perceptions that recycled or more durable and sustainable materials and equipment are more expensive, which is not always the case. Similarly, humanitarian actors small and large report that they believe they cannot influence packaging materials or supply chain sustainability criteria. Research undertaken by the JI confirms the convenience and effectiveness of single use plastic and demonstrates the lack of viable alternatives. Interviewees also cited unclear regulations and variation in relevant legislation between countries and lack of donor funding provision for environmental sustainability as yet further barriers. Lack of information and data on the environmental impacts of different items and materials and information on sustainable alternatives was also noted by our research informants. Infeasible and unfamiliar environmental activities remotely designed response activities were noted as barriers, including use of nature-based solutions and developing circular economy or green livelihoods during a humanitarian response.

In contrast to the above, JI research, corroborated by our research informants, confirms that shared learning, case studies, organisational policies, national legislation and donor requirements all help to drive improved environmental practices. Several major donors are now asking for **environmental assessments** of responses, including ECHO, USAID, and CIDA. Increasing numbers of countries have banned some or all single use plastics or introduced some form of polluter pays laws. JI research, corroborated by Global Shelter Cluster and Swedish Red Cross environmental advisors demonstrates that greening of humanitarian response does not always increase costs. Examples include removal of unnecessary single use plastics and provision of reusable items such as washable menstrual cups and washable nappies both costing more per item, but costing significantly less per number procured.

<sup>64</sup>Action should be taken to prevent or alleviate human suffering arising out of disaster or conflict, and nothing should override this principle. Humanitarian Charter, SPHERE, Undated, [Here](#):

<sup>65</sup>Joint Initiative on Sustainable Humanitarian Assistance Packaging Waste Management findings, EECentre, 2023, [Here](#):

## SILOED APPROACHES REDUCE RESILIENCE

Having said all of the above, our research has demonstrated that the above described focus on corporate emissions reduction, sustainable supply chains and reducing packaging waste risk missing the most significant opportunities to reduce our detrimental impacts on the local environment - ***ensuring greening of humanitarian response is locally led and integrating work on climate change resilience and environmental degradation.*** Climate change impacts make the communities we are trying to assist more vulnerable, whilst humanitarian activities can reduce or exacerbate those vulnerabilities. Humanitarian response impacts on the environment and climate change have been treated as separate issues by most humanitarian relief and development actors. However, they are inextricably linked. Some organisations employ a "climate resilience advisor" working on climate resilience activities such as climate smart agriculture, climate change risk assessments, renewable energy or circular economy livelihoods. In parallel to this they often employ someone in a different part of the organisation such as the logistics or facilities team, who focuses on reducing the organisation's environmental footprint. This person is often doing carbon footprinting of head offices, trying to reduce flights, switch to renewable energy use. Sometimes one or sometimes the other is then training field staff on how to do environmental impact assessments. When these roles operate separately they miss opportunities for their work to support each others' objectives and to strengthen community resilience.

Torrential rain hit Kinshasa, the capital and largest city of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on December 13, 2022 causing major flooding in 16 municipalities. Widespread damage was caused to people, housing and infrastructure. 175 people died, 87 were injured and approximately 44,000 people were identified as in need of assistance. Over 7,000 houses were flooded, 800 of them destroyed and roads, bridges, utilities and agricultural fields were severely damaged.

As the quantity, intensity and duration of the rainfall surpassed historical records, many people were quick to blame the floods on climate change. Whilst the flooding can be correctly attributed at least in part to climate change, I observed large quantities of plastic waste blocking drains. Removal of this plastic waste could have let some flood water drain. I was left wondering to what extent humanitarian packaging waste may be contributing to floods in DRC.

- Poppy Anguandia, Start Fund hub member, DRC

## LOCALLY LED GREENING

Most of the reported efforts to reduce humanitarian impacts on the environment are focused on the actions of international actors.<sup>66</sup> However, Start Network is a global network with many national and local members. Evidence from SRC and the Global Shelter Cluster strongly suggests that locally led initiatives to reduce humanitarian impacts on the environment have more potential for success.<sup>67</sup> This is in line with understanding around localisation. Local humanitarian organisations, local governments and local communities know the context, have deep knowledge of their local environment, understand the causes of pollution and the likely impacts of humanitarian activities better than most external actors ever could. Local actors understand local capacities to deal with waste, their potential for recycling or waste-related livelihoods and existing patterns of waste reuse. Locally led greening is more likely to lead to solutions that do successfully reduce environmental impacts and that have the potential to also bring environmental benefits. Locally led greening can even strengthen disaster resilience.

Focus group participants shared examples of locally led green humanitarian response. This included community groups in Guatemala convening a space to discuss humanitarian response that had a lower impact on the environment. They decided to make bricks for shelter construction and fuel briquettes using coconut and rice husks. Both initiatives were successful as they were easily applied in the local context. They reduced environmental impacts from cement and fossil fuel use.

<sup>66</sup>See the work WREC Project, Global Logistics Cluster, as one example, [Here](#).

<sup>67</sup>Finding shared directly by the Swedish Red Cross

A solar panel may be a form of mitigation for someone in Europe, to reduce their emissions, but for a person in the Sahel this same solar panel can be a climate change adaptation and resilience - providing energy when there is no longer any petrol due to insecurity or inflated prices. To a person in Lebanon it is another person's source of resilience against disaster, providing electricity to the health clinic to continue saving lives when there is no other fuel.

- Bruno Jochum, Climate Action Accelerator

## LOCAL CHALLENGES

There are of course challenges with locally-led greening. The biggest challenge our research informants noted was the difficulty in knowing whether sourcing humanitarian supplies locally was better or worse than sourcing them internationally. Internationally sourced items pollute the environment with emissions from transport, yet they may be sourced from more sustainable materials and may be durable, longer lasting than equivalent local items. Locally sourced items may have low freight emissions and may be sourced from sustainable or unsustainable sources. They may also be imported from foreign markets such as China with just as high freight emissions and such items may be of high or low durability made using green energy or with polluting manufacturing methods. Local organisations do not have the capacity to answer these questions. We could instead support local actors to strengthen environmental sustainability within their own local markets. Examples include making advance agreements with local suppliers to purchase agreed quantities of specific items in return for the supplier sourcing items with less plastic. One informant shared the example of making an agreement with a local supplier to source bamboo toothbrushes packaged in waxed unbleached paper, advising that this not only reduced the environmental impact of the subsequent humanitarian response, but it also influenced a wider change in the local community.

Research informants also noted that they do not have the capacity or resources to undertake environmental assessments such as the NEAT+, which is now required by some donors. International partners could complete sections of these assessments remotely and develop simplified methods of capturing information that can only be captured locally.

## SHARE LEARNING

Several interviewees noted that international members of Start Network have existing environmental assessment tools, experience in undertaking environmental assessments and other humanitarian greening experience that should be shared with local members. Sharing tools and passing on training will support localisation, discussed in section 3.0 and contribute to the resilience of local actors. A number of informants noted national and regional networks that Start Network members can join to get support on greening humanitarian response including the shelter cluster, NGO Forum, disaster management platforms, climate working groups and specific environmental groups.

In 2004, the Nigerian government launched a housing initiative to create 8 million new homes. Addressing the hot Nigerian climate and growing concern about plastic pollution, the plan used recycled plastic bottles as a construction material. These houses were found to offer protection from bullets, which was particularly significant in an area known for violence.

## SUPPORTING RESILIENCE

Locally led greening of humanitarian response should not be done in isolation. Humanitarians responding to crises will not plant trees purely for the good of the environment. However, if those trees or any other green initiative will help the community recover or reduce the impact of future disasters then green response also supports community resilience. Trees can capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere whilst reducing risk of landslides or mangroves planted to provide protection from coastal storms and cyclones.<sup>68</sup>

There is a real opportunity to strengthen community resilience if we integrate the work of our climate resilience advisors with colleagues working on greening our humanitarian response, removing siloed working so their activities support each other. Community resilience can be further strengthened if our humanitarian response greening activities are locally led, supported by sharing learning and tools from international actors such as the Joint Initiative, the WREC project, WFP and international Start Network Members.

## SHOULD WE REFUSE, REDUCE, REUSE, REPURPOSE, OR RECYCLE? WE SHOULD DEFINITELY RESTORE

Many discussions on reducing human impacts on the environment centre on the 3, 4, 5 or more Rs Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, sometimes strengthened with *Refuse, Repurpose, Return, Remove and Renew*. These initiatives are important and they can make a real difference. The problem is that in doing them we can too easily think that we have done enough when these actions are frequently insufficient or even fail.

In humanitarian settings, we should **refuse items** that are not suitable, or out of date, or that will rapidly degrade, or cannot be locally repaired to ensure inappropriate items are not dumped on a local environment that hasn't got the capacity to process them.

### REDUCTION:

Reduction can also help, but it can only go so far. To reduce requires effort to redesign packaging to reduce transport weight or maximise pallet or container loading; or to provide bespoke kitchen sets, hygiene kits or meal portion sizes, designed to meet the specific needs of the individual, which increases time and cost to provide the assistance.

### RE-USE:

Re-use is also a challenging option for most humanitarian settings. When you import large quantities of equipment, food and non-food items, what can the equipment, items or their packaging or contents be re-used for? They're unlikely to be re-used to repackage and re-transport the items that came in them. Suggestions of using them for local repair or recycling livelihoods are not viable in many contexts.

There are some options to use source items that can be *repurposed* such as pallets that can be easily converted into chicken coops for pig-pens, or packaging that can be repurposed as floor mats or for roofing repairs, reducing waste that would otherwise cause harm.

<sup>68</sup>Call out box source: Solid waste as a potential construction material for cost-efficient housing, Engineering & Technology, Pati et al., 2014, [here](#).



## RECYCLING:

Recycling is a good option where local infrastructure exists. However it is not viable in many context and much humanitarian packaging is very challenging to recycle such as laminated food sachets. Local practices may be to burn, pile or bury waste due to a lack of viable alternatives. Even the richest countries in the world struggle to recycle their waste, with recent reports demonstrating that over 80% of waste collected for recycling is in reality burned or goes to landfill.<sup>69</sup>

## RESTORE:

**Restore.** Having assessed the work of many actors on reducing the environmental impact of waste produced by their activities, we suggest that part of our ethical exit from an IDP camp, refugee camp or any humanitarian response should be one of *restoration*. We should as a minimum leave the environment undamaged by our own humanitarian activities, and seek to improve the local environment wherever we can, as part of our response. Much work has been done on the circular economy<sup>70</sup> which seeks to ensure no materials are wasted and the restorative economy<sup>71</sup> that seeks to undo harm caused by human production and other activities, which the humanitarian sector could learn from. The biggest difference we can make to greening humanitarian response is to support a locally led assessment of our environmental impacts in conjunction with looking at climate change impacts and designing an integrated response to both, so that integrated activities strengthen local community resilience to climate and all disaster types.

<sup>69</sup>What really happens to your plastic recycling, Greenpeace, 2019, [here](#):

<sup>70</sup>What is the circular economy? Chatham house, 2021, [here](#):

<sup>71</sup>Restorative economy, Nwamaka Agbo, 2017, [here](#):

### THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR SHOULD:

- Take innovative and contextualised action to identify and reduce its impacts on the local environment from its humanitarian response activities
- Collaborate with other humanitarian responders in every response to jointly reduce environmental impacts from procurement and other humanitarian activities
- Work with its supply chain to take actions on reducing waste, specifically packaging waste
- Build its own and local capacity on environmental assessments of humanitarian responses
- Take an integrated approach to reducing the environmental impacts of humanitarian response and strengthening community resilience to climate change
- Prioritise locally led greening of humanitarian response designed to support local disaster resilience, avoiding prescribing solutions whose viability hasn't been corroborated locally, such as recycling, green livelihoods and circular economy activities
- Ensure green humanitarian response is locally led - local people understand what works in their context
- Design green humanitarian responses to support community resilience.

### THE START FUND SHOULD:

- Facilitate the sharing of greening tools and resources between international organisations and networks and local responders, adapting them to ensure they are proportionate for small local organisations
- Convene greening discussions, facilitating learning from good practice, consulting members regarding aligning with other donors' environmental sustainability requirements
- Prioritise locally led greening that strengthens local resilience to climate and other humanitarian impacts.

# 6.0 RAISING CLIMATE CONSCIOUSNESS



## 6.0 RAISING CLIMATE CONSCIOUSNESS

Humanitarian systems are not set up to respond to multiple interconnected cascading risks compounding with both climate and non-climate crisis drivers.<sup>72</sup> The sector is not currently configured to effectively and efficiently provide the necessary systemic responses. Humanitarian action is by nature not designed to respond to slow-onset crises such as sea level rise, temperature increases and soil salinisation which impact vulnerable communities over decades or centuries. For humanitarians these crises are very slow onset but they are massive disasters, happening now, where large numbers of people will lose their homes, food source, livelihoods and security. Most international humanitarian actors focus their attention on major crises that are prioritised by donors who may be influenced by the crises to which the media gives its attention. In such a setting, it is not surprising that our research suggests many humanitarians have a low awareness of the scale at which climate change is already impacting humanitarian crises. The whole sector needs to become aware that crisis drivers from climate change and environmental degradation far outstrip any others.

In order to respond proportionately to the scale of the crisis we are already within, the humanitarian community needs to strengthen its knowledge of climate change impacts, of climate change adaptation and of loss and damage. The humanitarian DRR community and the CCA community need to join together. The DRR community perhaps has more local community experience whilst the CCA community perhaps has a deeper knowledge of climate change impacts, ecosystems services and adaptations. Where appropriate, to be more effective, humanitarians should ensure our response mechanisms facilitate an early recovery that incorporates aspects of risk reduction and adaptation and strengthens local resilience. Not only are DRR and CCA currently separated, but preparedness, responses, and early recovery are usually each approached separately, with separate thinking, by different people in our organisations.

Bangladesh, a densely populated country, is ranked seventh in the global Climate Risk Index 2021; the third most impacted by climate-induced disasters. Between 2000 and 2019 it suffered 185 extreme weather events impacting human health, agriculture, livelihoods, the economy, and ecosystems, with economic losses of \$3.72 billion. In 1970 Bangladesh was hit by the devastating Bhola cyclone, one of the deadliest climate-induced disasters in recorded history. The ensuing storm surge caused widespread flooding and the deaths of an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 people, 80% of them women. In the ensuing years, whilst climate change impacts have increased, lives and infrastructure lost have reduced. This accomplishment is due to the combined efforts of government, NGOs, academic institutions, and civil society – a whole of country response.



**NEPAL LANDSLIDE.**  
CREDIT: CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

<sup>72</sup>The relationship between climate change, health, and the humanitarian response, The Lancet, 2022, [here](#):



## CLIMATE CATEGORISATION

This research explored whether the way the Start Fund categorises crisis types lacks nuance or inadvertently hides crisis root causes. Review of Start Fund data shows that the majority of Start Fund's responses already relate to climate or weather. However, the Start Fund could amend its categorisation to collect data on climate impacts and trends on protracted, recurrent seasonal and one-off small and medium scale crises. The Start Fund could use this data to get better baseline information and inform future trend analysis and focused research providing examples of the attribution of climate change to a range of typologies of small and medium scale crises.

Encouragingly, there are examples of humanitarian actors and even whole countries strengthening their own resilience against climate change and environmental degradation, with very little external support. For example, Costa Rica, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh are countries that have taken great strides in this direction. In Bangladesh, a small country with a large population that is exposed and highly vulnerable to climate change, the government and all sectors of society have come together to strengthen the country's climate resilience.

It is important to see climate change through an intersectional lens that recognises diverse and marginalised communities, considering gender, age, religion, ethnicity, education, livelihoods and more, to strengthen resilience and disaster preparedness. - Abdul Alim, ActionAid, Bangladesh

## RAISING CLIMATE CONSCIOUSNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

### THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR SHOULD:

- Ensure it is informed on climate change drivers of humanitarian crises and prepared for the scale and speed of change required
- Avoid treating climate change as a niche issue, recognising it as the core driver of humanitarian crises and prioritise increasing its knowledge of the scale of the problem, its impacts and appropriate responses
- Breakdown internal silos between climate and other disaster types
- Recognise slow onset crises as current humanitarian disasters. Work with governments and other actors to agree national thresholds which when triggered lead to pre-defined automatic response
- Proactively build climate consciousness amongst staff and partners. Without this it is no longer possible to design an effective humanitarian or strengthen community disaster resilience.

## THE START FUND SHOULD:

- Protect and further develop its niche of fast response, local decision making and local funding allocation whilst increasing its knowledge of and action on climate change and extreme weather-related hazards
- Amend its data categorisation to collect data on climate impacts and trends on protracted, recurrent seasonal and one-off small and medium scale crises
- Conduct research to provide examples of the attribution of climate change to a range of typologies of small and medium scale crises
- Support members in networking with other members to exchange learning and good practice on climate change and its compounding interaction with other humanitarian drivers
- Support members in networking with other members to exchange learning and good practice on climate change and its compounding interaction with other humanitarian drivers
- Encourage active knowledge transfer and local member capacity building on climate change impacts, and appropriate responses, including asking international actors to share their existing resources. This should include sharing learning from Start Fund Bangladesh
- Consult members on applying a climate change lens across all of their work. The Start Fund could include CC / ED in its grant award criteria. Several informants requested that the Start Fund ranks proposals and awards grants based on those that address climate and other drivers saying that this will help raise awareness and focus on climate change
- Use its research funding to look at climate change specifically in evaluations including mapping climate change impacts across countries over time, using this research to inform future responses.

# 7.0 FINANCE AND RESOURCES



## 7.0 FINANCE AND RESOURCES

*Climate change impacts are rapidly exacerbating and driving additional humanitarian crises, with most of these impacts manifest in small and medium-scale under-the-radar crises<sup>73</sup> that the vast majority of media, humanitarian donors, and international humanitarian responding agencies do not report or respond to. Responding to climate change loss and damage impacts is projected to require at least ten times the annual funding that flows through the current humanitarian system. Developing and emerging countries will need around \$2.4 trillion per year by 2030 to cope with climate breakdown<sup>74</sup> with funding being requested by the climate community for LnD in the order of \$280-500Bn per year against the current global humanitarian budget of \$31.3 billion.<sup>75</sup> Neither affected national governments, nor the international humanitarian community have the capacity to meet the scale of the need. Whilst climate campaigners are calling for additional funding, the scale of humanitarian need is also increasing from drivers not directly attributed to climate change, including conflict, environmental degradation, pandemics and energy and food inflation. The humanitarian system is already larger and more stretched than it ever has been. The constant squeezing of the humanitarian funding envelope is not keeping up with humanitarian need.<sup>76</sup> The sector has become characterised by competition between agencies and high compliance from donors. In a context where the risk landscape continues to grow faster than the ability to effectively manage the risk, future efficiency and effectiveness gains in humanitarian action, disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation, depend, to a large extent, on how well domestic and international actors, from local to global level, are able to work together across traditional boundaries, stages, sectors and administrative levels in a more coherent and mutually reinforcing way.*

Last year Chittagong, our second city, was underwater for several days as the water couldn't drain. Millions of people were affected. It hardly made the news in Bangladesh, let alone the global news. To the media now it's 'just another downpour'. Maybe they think "A few people died . . . so what?" And that really is a tragedy because it's going to get worse and worse and worse. And the global community won't respond unless it's on CNN. Prof. Saleemul Huq, OBE, climate scientist

*Humanitarian actors at all levels need to work together to become more efficient and more effective through greater coordination, collaboration and more intelligent use of its collective resources. If the humanitarian sector is going to effectively respond to climate induced or exacerbated humanitarian crises and their compounding impacts on other crisis drivers it will need to fully optimise all of its available resources. This includes greater efficiencies and effectiveness in the use of both local and external resources.*



**ALERT 607 VENEZUELA (FLOODING). CREDIT: DANIELA GÓMEZ / COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA OFFICER FOR SAVE THE CHILDREN VENEZUELA**

<sup>73</sup>Sixth assessment report (AR6): Climate change: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, IPCC, 2022, [here](#):

<sup>74</sup>Finance for Climate Action, London School of Economics, 2022, [here](#):

<sup>75</sup>2021 figure, Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, Development Initiatives, 2022, [here](#):

<sup>76</sup>The Start Fund: Value and uniqueness in a shifting humanitarian funding environment, 2021, [here](#):



Local resources include the agency and local knowledge of at-risk people - of context, capacities, markets, culture as well as crisis impacts and effective responses; they include natural resources, local buildings and infrastructure, social capital, and people's innate skills and traditional knowledge - none of which can be efficiently provided by international actors. Local people and local organisations are always the primary responders, and being local they have a better appreciation of local resources and of what additional external resources are required to support local solutions and build local disaster resilience. When these local capacities are exceeded, additional external support is required from district or national government or the international community. What local responders often lack is the funding, decision making authority, voice and access to external learning. This can be provided by or complemented by national and international actors.

Localisation became a mainstream reform issue during the 2016 World Humanitarian summit (WHS) in Istanbul where it was included as one of the main Grand Bargain commitments.<sup>77</sup> Localisation and its benefits are discussed in section 3.0. Part of the challenge in making more effective and efficient use of local and external resources lies in developing *a more effective way for local, national and international humanitarian actors to work together*. Localisation does not mean forcing local actors to become miniature replicas of international organisations. As a sector, at all levels, we need to work together to understand how to share risk, harness local capacities, resources and sources of climate and other disaster resilience.

In theory localisation that hands over power, leadership, decision making and funding to local organisations can better optimise the use of local capacities, which can then be augmented by external support when these capacities are exceeded. The challenge of using external resources lies in efficiently and effectively getting these resources down to the grassroots levels. The Start Fund, through its global network, national funds and regional hubs, is one of the few actors that has already demonstrated growing effectiveness and efficiencies in understanding, accessing and using local resources and effectively adding external resources where local resources are insufficient. The Start Fund's transferable knowledge can inform future loss and damage funding mechanisms. The Start Fund is de facto already in the climate space whether this is through strategic intent or not, and should therefore build its own understanding and capacity from this point. The Start Fund and Start Network's members are already well positioned in a number of countries that are most vulnerable to climate change, including Bangladesh, the Philippines and Pakistan.

UNFCCC parties are calling for *loss and damage funding* to be channelled in its entirety through a new UNFCCC Loss and Damage Fund (LDF) directly to vulnerable countries' governments, who would presumably disburse these funds through national and local actors, including local governments, humanitarian agencies and CBOs. Other commentators expect that donor countries will require at least a proportion of funds to be disbursed through the existing international humanitarian system through mechanisms similar to current Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), albeit under a climate finance mechanism. Whichever channel funds are ultimately disbursed through, effective humanitarian action that is localised, links to early response and early (adaptive) recovery, is required to operationalise the loss and damage facility. Local organisations, local government, LNGOs and CBOs are best positioned to disburse funds to support local communities, including adaptation and LnD. In support of this shift, international humanitarian organisations will remain necessary and useful - both to respond to large scale humanitarian crises that overwhelm local actors and national governments, and also to build the capacity of local responders, through knowledge sharing, training, handing over leadership, decision making and funding and building effective relationships with their local and national governments.

<sup>77</sup>Localisation, A "Landscape" Report, Tufts - Feinstein International Center, 2021 [here](#):

## FINANCE AND RESOURCES RECOMMENDATIONS

### THE GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN SECTOR, AT ALL LEVELS, SHOULD:

- *Work together to become more effective and efficient* through better coherence, coordination and collaboration

- Improve its progress towards *default locally led*, locally managed responses, recognising existing local capacities and resources

- Work with local actors and national governments to agree thresholds that identify when local capacities are exceeded that when passed automatically *release the flow of funds, capacity building and learning* exchange, ensuring transparency and accountability of transfers to local communities

- Augment community climate change adaptation and resilience with additional support that recognises, cherishes, strengthens and is *additional to local capacities and local resources*, ensuring agency for local people, supporting existing social networks and indigenous knowledge, building local capacities whilst recognising local limits

- *Fund local actors' overheads* including to meet donor compliance including for environmental assessments, GHG audits, and upskilling staff on climate and environment

- Explore how they can best support national governments and the climate change community in decentralising external loss and damage funding mechanisms and developing *mechanisms for disbursing funds* to the most hazard prone, vulnerable, risk exposed local communities.

## THE START FUND SHOULD:

- Build on its existing *progress towards localisation across its network*. Start Network should develop more hubs and national Start Funds, based on members' needs and requests, continuing to add more local members through its tiered due diligence system, and encouraging international members to build the capacities of and hand over power to local members. This is essential for positioning local members to support local and national governments in responding to the anticipated large number of additional small and medium under-the-radar crises due to climate change loss and damage
- Support making the skills and capacities of local members in disaster anticipation, preparedness, response and recovery, visible to local, national and international governments, including their capacity to disburse national loss and damage funds. Support building their voice and relationships.
- Support learning transfer between members, hubs and national Start Funds, particularly from international members who already have climate and environment assessments, tools and capacities
- Whilst protecting its rapid emergency response niche, position its existing funding to support or leverage climate resilience, adaptation, development and triple nexus objectives. In support of this the Start Fund could consider amending its funding system to prioritise giving funds to members who demonstrate using Start Fund funds towards these goals e.g. through leveraging other funding, and who provide contextual analyses, needs assessment and vulnerability capacity assessments supporting such intentions
- Start Network should explore options for establishing its own special funds for loss and damage and for climate research.

# 8.0 LOOKING FORWARD





## LOOKING FORWARD

This research has explored the rapid changes currently taking place in the humanitarian sector. The sector is facing unprecedented challenges from rapidly increasing climate change impacts which compound with environmental degradation, a global pandemic, involuntary displacement and conflict, including the Ukraine war, and related global food and energy price inflation. At the same time, as humanitarian needs reach unprecedented levels, the UN appeal funding gap continues to increase. Climate change is exacerbating existing humanitarian crises and driving new ones. We are witnessing more frequent and more intense floods, droughts, storms, cyclones and heatwaves, erratic rainfall patterns and disruption to human health, ecosystem function, water, energy, food security and livelihoods. *Climate risks are growing rapidly* as extreme weather-related hazards get more severe and spread across wider geographical areas. Increasingly, impacts are cascading through natural and human systems, compounding each other and compounding with other crises. Climate change mitigation and adaptation are not sufficient to temper the increases in crises.

Humanitarians need to increase their levels of awareness and preparedness for new patterns of climate change related risk. Greater efficiency and effectiveness are needed including *a faster shift towards localisation* that builds on local capacities and puts vulnerable people at the centre. *Anticipatory response and early recovery should be better linked* and scaled up to reduce humanitarian impacts and promote more effective working across connected but often fragmented preparedness, response and recovery interventions that together can increase the resilience of communities to future hazards.

The humanitarian sector should *integrate its work on climate change and environmental degradation*, combining them to both reduce the impacts of humanitarian response on the environment and to strengthen local resilience to climate change.

The Start Fund should proactively *raise the climate consciousness of its members* so they are well positioned to support the resilience of local communities to climate and other humanitarian impacts, including through promoting complementary partnerships between local and international humanitarian actors in their more equitable use of both local and external finance and resources. In doing this, the Start Fund should protect its existing strengths of fast response, member-led decision making, anticipatory response and leading the way in localisation. Most importantly, the Start Fund and the whole humanitarian community should focus on strengthening local resilience to both climate and other humanitarian impacts.

# ANNEXES



# ANNEX 1 – RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	DESK REVIEW		STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION		
		LITERATURE REVIEW	START DATA	SURVEY	KIIS	FGDS
1	What are the effects of climate change on humanitarian crises globally and on small to medium-scale crises in particular?	1RY	2RY	4RY	3RY	
2	What is the relationship between climate change drivers and other crisis drivers?		1RY		2RY	3RY
3	Do Start Fund responses mirror or deviate from large-scale crisis response, and why?			1RY	3RY	2RY
4	Have Start funded responses directly or indirectly tackled crisis drivers?		3RY	2RY	1RY	1RY
5	What effect is climate change having on protracted, recurrent and seasonal crises?	1RY		4RY	2RY	3RY
6	What are the future trends of climate change related crises?	1RY		3RY	2RY	
7	What role can locally-led action play in promoting "greener" humanitarian response?	1RY		3RY	2RY	4RY
8	What role can locally-led action play in building climate resilience?			3RY	1RY	2RY
9	Does the Start Fund have sufficient visibility of climate related crisis types?		1RY	4RY	2RY	3RY
10	How can the Start Fund improve its climate consciousness?	2RY		3RY	2RY	1RY

# ANNEX 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

The research team, composed of the Start Fund and consultants, collaborated on design research including development of the research methodology, instrumentation, and data collection.

## SAMPLING

### Research Participants

To make the research well-organised and successful, appropriate sampling procedures have been maintained. Purposive sampling was used which is probable in nature, targeting a particular group of people. Quota sampling was used to select specific types of research informants including key Start Fund staff, a geographical spread of international, national and local Start Network members and external climate specialists. Snowball sampling was also applied whereby the researcher starts by identifying relevant individual(s), then asking them to locate other relevant informants.

### Methods And Tools

The research was conducted following qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources using a semi-structured questionnaire. Overall, a total of 31 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with humanitarian and climate experts from 28 organisations, including local, national, and international NGOs, climate and environment experts across 15 countries, as well as staff from Global SF, SF Bangladesh and SF Nepal, three Start Hubs, and Start Ready. KII stakeholders were selected from different country-based organisations including international climate experts, environment experts, Loss and Damage experts, and members of Start Network in different countries including representatives of local and international organisations.

Along with these, three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted, through which the research team captured the perspectives of 27 members, partners and external specialists. FGDs were held separately, geographically, with participants from Asia, Latin and South America and the Caribbean, and Africa. FGD themes were greening humanitarian response; addressing root causes; climate change impacts on protracted/recurrent/seasonal crises; building climate consciousness and crisis categorization, with more than one theme in some of the FGDs.

The team has also conducted a survey with Start Network members from different countries with 33 organisations responding. The majority (58%) of respondents have a geographical focus on the Southern Asia region including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The number of respondents from other regions was very low, with only 6 (18%) from Africa, and 2 (6%) from South America, leading the research team to place greater emphasis on research findings from non-survey sources.

This research was also informed by a close review of secondary literature and some primary data across climate impacts, disaster trends, displacement, vulnerability, risk, rapid and slow onset climate impacts, secondary impacts, conflict and displacement, climate change adaptation (CCA), disaster risk reduction (DRR), loss and damage (LnD), climate financing, resilience and localisation.

A desk review of Start Fund provided data and relevant Start Network publications was undertaken. It examined Start Fund's response data spanning from 2014 to 2023, encompassing Alert 1 through Alert 729. This analysis included analysis of 30 Alerts (notes and several proposals) ranging from 341 to 698, as well as in-depth review of case studies, Start Fund Bangladesh Response data from 2017 to 2022, and recently published reports.



The researchers emphasised rapport-building with the respondent by assuring them of confidentiality and accountability in how we used information they shared with us. After receiving respondent's verbal consent regarding recording, some of the interviews were digitally recorded. The Researchers used the emic perspective, which seeks the insider's or natives' perspective of reality, and the etic perspective - the researcher's external or outsider's social science perspective of reality as lenses to understanding and inform this research. This was instrumental in understanding and accurately describing their context and practice.

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## ANNEX 3: INFORMATION ANALYSED TO INFORM THE DESK ANALYSIS

- > Start Fund data on alerts 1 to 726
- > National Start Fund Bangladesh data from 2017 to 2022
- > Documents from 30 Alerts, including alert notes, proposals, and reports

CRISIS CATAGORY	CRISIS TYPE	CRISIS CAUSE	REVIEWED 30 ALERTS FOR IN-DEPTH UNDERSTANDING (NOTES, PROPOSAL, REPORTS ETC.)
NATURAL	HYDROLOGICAL	FLOOD	368, 376, 420, 424, 445, 489, 514, 534, 550
	METWOROLOGICAL	CYCLONE	417, 495
		STORM	559
		HURRICANE	653
	CLIMATOLOGICAL	DROUGHT	689
		EXTREME TEMPERATURE	673
	GEOPHYSICAL	EARTHQUAKE	663
BIOLOGICAL	DISEASE OUTBREAK	341, 345, 698	
HUMAN-MADE	INDUSTRIAL/TECHNOLOGICAL	FIRE	443
	SOCIOLOGICAL	CONFLICT	444, 503, 509, 538, 569, 591.
		MIXED MIGRATION	657
UNCATEGORISED	OTHER	OTHER	621 (FOOD INSECURITY)

## PUBLICLY AVAILABLE START FUND DOCUMENTS REVIEWED:

- 10-year report describing 10 years of Start Network
- Start Network Strategy 2021-2023
- Start Network Strategy 2020-2022
- Start Fund: Value and Uniqueness
- Start Fund Learning from a slow-onset (longer version)
- Start Fund Evaluation 2021 – 22
- Start Fund Impact Brochure 2022
- Start Fund involvement in under-the-radar crises.
- Start Fund Pilot Anticipation Of Cyclones Forewarn - Madagascar

# START NETWORK

Start Network is made up of more than 40 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.

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