

# START FUND IMPACT REPORT 2024



START FUND  
START NETWORK

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	02
TEN YEARS OF THE START FUND	03
CASE STUDY: THE FIRST START FUND ALERT	04
INCREASE IN ANTICIPATION ALERTS	05
CASE STUDY: ANTICIPATION OF WILDFIRES IN EL SALVADOR	05
FUNDING AND ACCESSIBILITY TO LOCAL AND NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS	07
CASE STUDY: PALESTINE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION	08
FINAL THOUGHTS	08

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the Start Fund has had a transformative impact on the humanitarian system, becoming one of the fastest humanitarian financing mechanisms in the world. Since the Start Fund was launched in 2014, the programme has ushered in a new era of responsive and inclusive humanitarian action, fostering systems change to empower local actors in emergency and anticipatory response efforts. Whilst humanitarian funding is often driven by media headlines and political interest, the Start Fund, focuses on three types of humanitarian needs: underfunded small to medium-scale crises; forecasts of impending crises; and spikes in chronic humanitarian crises. As a fund exclusively led and managed by civil society, the Start Fund has changed the ways in which aid has been allocated and disbursed, ensuring that humanitarian action is better accountable to those affected and at risk.



© Alert 560: Conflict displacement response, DRC Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo credit: MIDEFEHOPS ASBL

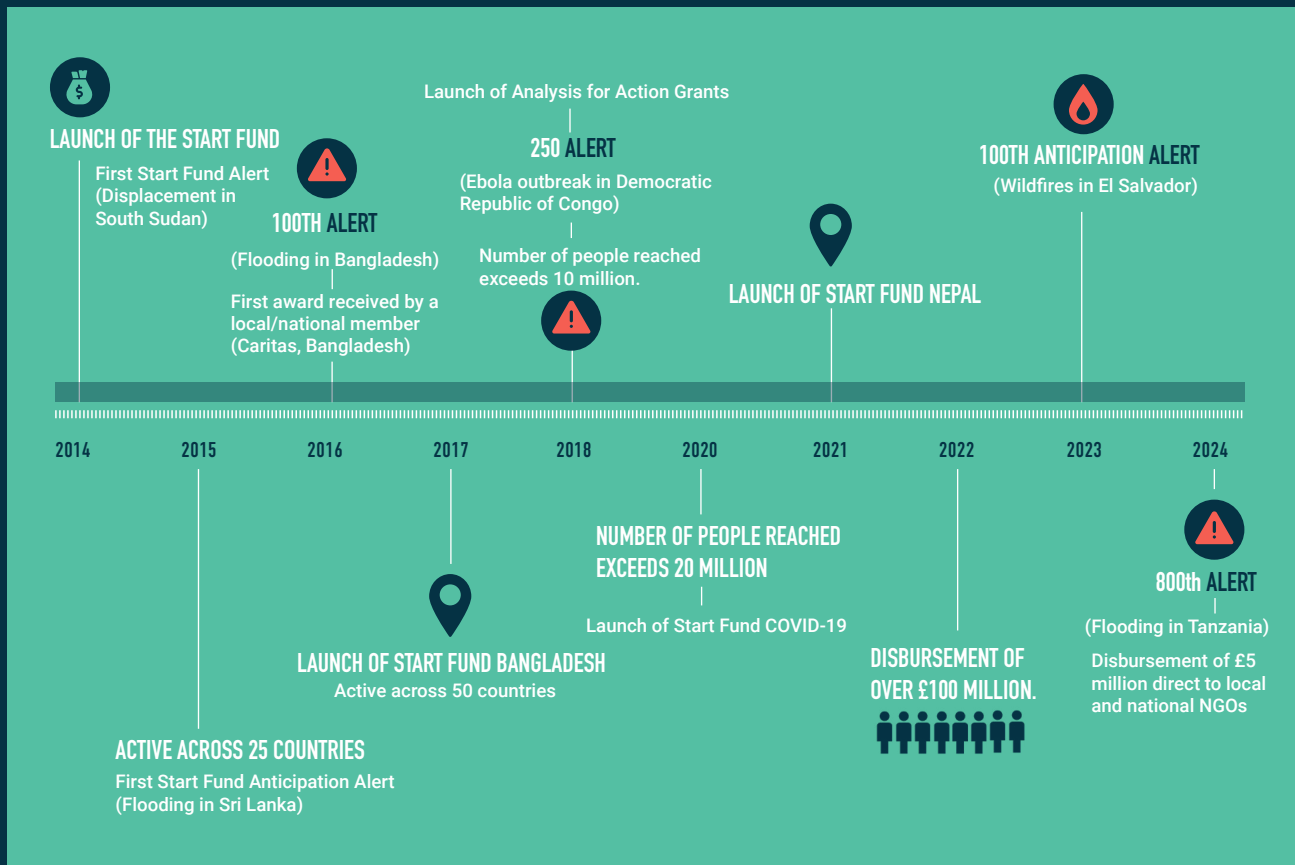
The Start Fund is currently supported by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the German Federal Foreign Office, Global Support and Development, the IKEA Foundation, the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Jersey Overseas Aid, the L'Oreal Climate Emergency Fund, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Postcode Lottery, and the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office.

# TEN YEARS OF THE START FUND

## START FUND STATISTICS AND DEMOGRAPHICS



Since its launch in 2014, the Start Fund has grown into a **£25 million annual fund, reaching over 26 million people across 76 countries to date**. Whilst the mechanism was previously accessed solely by international actors, in 2023 the majority of Start Fund projects were implemented in partnership with local and national NGOs. Consequently, over the past ten years, the Start Fund has become a more accessible and equitable funding mechanism, catering to a growing network of local and national members that has shifted the way humanitarian aid is delivered. As the nature of humanitarian crises have become increasingly driven by climate change, the Start Fund, with an average disbursement time of 68 hours, has ensured members are able to respond to crises timely and efficiently. Operating as a pooled fund, the Start Fund has also provided a more efficient means to finance humanitarian crises, ensuring that those affected by crises overlooked by the wider humanitarian system, receive the necessary aid and support.



# CASE STUDY: THE FIRST START FUND ALERT

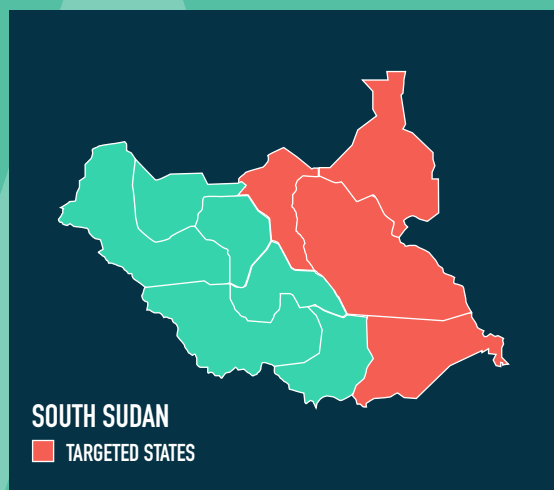
DISPLACEMENT IN SOUTH SUDAN



In December 2013, conflict broke out in South Sudan, initiating the start of the South Sudanese Civil War. Within the first five months, 700,000 people were internally displaced, 3.7 million people were experiencing acute food insecurity, and five million people were in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. Many internally displaced people (IDPs) had sought shelter in protective sites that were overcapacity and overcrowded, at high risk of disease and exposure to harsh climatic conditions. Mass trade disruption had left insufficient stock to address food shortages across the country and created further uncertainty regarding the start of the next agricultural season. With the rainy season expected to start in June, there was an urgent need to pre-position stock and distribute aid to IDPs in regions that were soon to become unreachable.

On the 1st April 2014, Christian Aid raised the first Start Fund alert that was activated within 24 hours. The activation allocated £425,000 to seven international NGOs aiming to provide a timely and early response to famine and to leverage greater recognition of the crisis that was severely underfunded. Collectively, Christian Aid, Relief International, Tearfund, Concern Worldwide, Plan International, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) and Action Against Hunger, coordinated a multi-sectoral response, addressing the emergency needs of IDPs in the Greater Upper Nile region and Eastern Equatoria state reaching over 47,800 people.

At the time of the alert, questions were raised on the effectiveness of pre-positioning activities, deemed non-conventional for an emergency response. From activation to project selection, decision making is entirely led by Start Network members that, given their in-country presence and contextual understanding, are better able to determine the effectiveness of a potential response. From the first alert, project selection represented a conscious effort from members to utilise the Start Fund to drive a more innovative approach to humanitarian aid, recognising the need to fill the otherwise inevitable gaps in the supply chain. Ten years on from the first activation, the Start Fund continues to support members to implement timely, coordinated, and innovative responses to humanitarian crises around the world.



**“START NETWORK HAS BEEN A GAME-CHANGER IN THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR, FOSTERING INNOVATION AND COLLABORATION TO ADDRESS OFTENTIMES NEGLECTED AND UNDERFUNDED CRISES.”**



Claas Beecken, CARE International

# INCREASE IN ANTICIPATION ALERTS

Despite 55% of crises happening with regular and predictable patterns of reoccurrence, less than 3% of current humanitarian funding is organised in advance<sup>1</sup>. Since 2016, the Start Fund has enabled members to raise alerts both in response to, and in anticipation of, humanitarian crises, proven to be a more cost-effective means to utilise funds and mitigate the impact of potential disasters. From 2016-2023, over 100 anticipatory alerts have been raised to the Start Fund across 27 countries in total.

Over the past few years, the Start Fund has increasingly encouraged members to raise alerts in anticipation of crisis, increasing from 12% in 2016 to 23% in 2023. This uptake has been attributed to a greater understanding and confidence of members to raise anticipatory alerts, in addition to a wider provision of support and guidance provided by the Start Fund. The Anticipatory Action Service Offer has provided members with guidance, resources, and capacity strengthening support, and Analysis for Action grants have better supported agencies to better plan an effective intervention. Over the next ten years, the Start Fund will continue to support members to raise alerts in anticipation of crises, saving a greater number of lives, preventing losses, and reducing costs.

## CASE STUDY: ANTICIPATION OF WILDFIRES IN EL SALVADOR



© SF 2023. Forest fire anticipation workshop in El Carmen, El Salvador

Climate change has become a key driver of humanitarian crises worldwide, with extreme weather events increasing in severity and frequency year on year. El Salvador is considered one of the most vulnerable countries in Latin America to climate-related disasters, at high risk to wildfires particularly during the months of March and April. The recurrence of wildfires during El Salvador's dry season prompted members to monitor wildfire conditions across the country, raising two anticipatory alerts in the past two years to support vulnerable communities prevent and manage their risk.

## ALERT 587

In March 2022, the government of El Salvador declared a red alert, the highest state of emergency, for wildfires. The alert was raised due to high winds and a 200% increase in the number of fires than the previous season. In response, Start Network members, led by local NGO, PRO-VIDA raised an anticipation alert to prepare and strengthen the response capacity of vulnerable communities. The alert awarded PRO-VIDA and four international NGOs (Oxfam, World Vision, Save the Children, and Catholic Relief Services), with £250,000 to mitigate the impact of wildfires, providing firefighting kits, first aid kits, and multipurpose cash delivery to at-risk households over 45 days. The agencies also conducted basic first aid training, fire control sessions, and a fire prevention campaign that collectively targeted over 15,000 people.



<sup>1</sup>Centre for Disaster Protection. (2023, November 16). The state of pre-arranged financing for disasters 2023. <https://www.disasterprotection.org/blogs/the-state-of-pre-arranged-financing-for-disasters-2023>

# ALERT 683

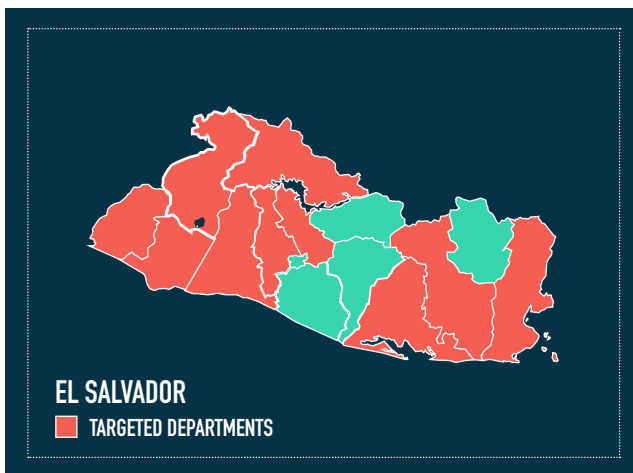


© Alert 683 El Salvador Wildfires Herramientas credit: WV

In February of the following year, forecasted high winds prompted the Government of El Salvador to issue another warning of forest fires. Additional concern was raised regarding the El Niño phenomenon predicted to increase temperatures and extreme heat. With the highest incidence of fire expected in the months of March and April, local NGO PROVIDA, raised another anticipatory alert, in consortium with four international NGOs, Catholic Relief Services, Oxfam, HelpAge International, and World Vision. The agencies were awarded £300,000 to implement disaster risk reduction activities, primarily in rural areas where there lacked equipment and training at the community level.

Given the success of activities in the previous year, similar training was provided and personal protective equipment distributed to communities across 18 municipalities, in addition to a fire prevention campaign. Learnings from the previous year also influenced the timeframe of the alert, with the implementation period extended to 60 days. With the majority of wildfires occurring sporadically and accidentally, it can often be difficult to predict their location. The anticipatory intervention, focusing on raising awareness of the risk and actively involving local communities in contingency planning, supported over 23,000 individuals to prevent and manage wildfires in their local community.

The anticipatory alerts raised by members in El Salvador demonstrates the ability of the Start Fund to fill a critical gap in the humanitarian sector. Raised in succession, the two activations reflect the increased confidence of members to raise alerts in anticipation of impending crises and how past learnings can inform future responses. As the network expands, the Start Fund will continue to provide members with innovative and accessible funding, better enabling communities to address potential risks whilst ensuring that crisis response is contextually relevant to local needs.



**“THE START FUND HAS EVOLVED TO PROVIDE CONTINUOUS SUPPORT TO MEMBERS, SHARING KEY LEARNINGS FROM DIFFERENT HUMANITARIAN CRISES, AS WELL AS MAKING NECESSARY CHANGES TO ENSURE THAT NATIONAL AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS ARE BETTER ABLE TO ACCESS RESOURCES”.**



Mihir Joshi, SEEDS India

# FUNDING AND ACCESSIBILITY TO LOCAL AND NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

At Start Network, we believe that a more balanced international humanitarian system, one that shifts power to those closest to the frontline, will generate more effective and appropriate support for communities affected by crises. Whilst localisation commitments have been similarly iterated by the sector, only 2.1% of direct and indirect funding reached local and national actors in 2022, the lowest percentage since 2017<sup>2</sup>. As of March 2024, local and national organisations represented 62% of Start Network membership. In efforts to become more locally led, Start Network has implemented various initiatives to increase the amount of funding directly reaching local and national organisations, particularly through improving access to the Start Fund.



To encourage a greater diversity of members, Start Network created a tiered due diligence framework to better enable local and national organisations to gain access to various levels of Start Network funding. Start Network also provides grants to organisations with lower resource capacity, aiming to strengthen their compliance infrastructure to access greater levels of funding. Based on feedback from local and national organisations, the Start Fund has also adapted operational processes to improve the ease in which such organisations can engage with the mechanism. Often lacking the capacity of larger organisations to rapidly mobilise resources, the Start Fund created the option to extend the project timeline to 60 days in any country where there were local and national organisations present. **In 2023, 54% of all Start Fund projects were implemented in partnership with local and national organisations, whilst direct funding to local and national organisations also increased from 1.3% in 2021 to 16%.** Start Network will continue to increase the involvement and representation of local actors within the humanitarian system and improve the accountability of the network to people affected by crisis.



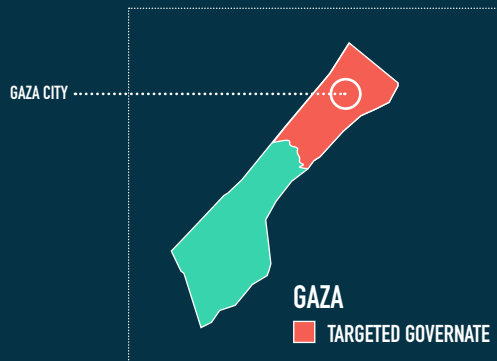
**"WE AT PARC BELIEVE THAT ONE OF THE CONTINUED ADDED VALUES OF THE START FUND IS THAT MORE RESOURCES ARE BEING ALLOCATED FOR ANTICIPATORY ACTION, INCLUDING TRAINING ON ANTICIPATORY APPROACHES."**

Ihab Hassem, PARC

<sup>2</sup>Development Initiatives. (2023, June 2023). A better humanitarian system: Locally led action. <https://devinit.org/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2023/a-better-humanitarian-system-locally-led-action/#:~:text=As%20a%20result%2C%20combined%20direct,on%2Dyear%20decrease%20from%202020>

# CASE STUDY:

## PALESTINE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION



Since becoming a member of Start Network in 2016, the national Palestinian organisation, Agricultural Development Association (PARC) has increasingly accessed funding from the Start Fund, responding to conflict and climate related crises such as flooding and extreme heat in Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt). Whilst operating in a sanctioned environment creates logistical and financial challenges, PARC has a deep-rooted understanding of community needs and the contextual knowledge to rapidly respond to humanitarian crises in the region.

### ALERT 724

In June 2023, following a forecast of extreme heat, PARC raised an anticipatory alert to mitigate the impact of high temperatures on the livelihoods of small-scale farmers and health of vulnerable groups in Gaza. Of primary concern were health related illnesses such as heat exhaustion and severe dehydration particularly for the elderly and disabled, as well as the impact of the heatwave on the agricultural sector and food security of the wider region. In response, PARC provided farmers with cash transfers and training to adapt their farming practices, and resources for vulnerable households to adapt their homes to extreme heat. Despite the small scale of the crisis, PARC's understanding of the local context enabled them to anticipate its potential impact and address the immediate threats, building the resilience of over 1,100 households to future climate extremes. The ability of national NGOs such as PARC to utilise existing networks highlights the leading role of local actors in the humanitarian system, better able to navigate complex operational environments and to ensure that aid effectively reaches those most in need.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The global Start Fund is a cornerstone of Start Network and pivotal to the evolution of its mission to inspire, influence, and change the current humanitarian system. Born out of frustration with the shortcomings of humanitarian financing, the Start Fund's ability to get fast funding to more than 130 million crisis-affected people in 76 countries irrespective of political interest or media attention has filled a critical gap in humanitarian financing. While the Start Fund has grown and evolved during the past ten years, its foundation remains the same: to harness the power and expertise of civil society in decision making and better utilise donor funds to reach an ever-increasing number of people affected by, or at risk of, crisis.

The experience and lessons of the past ten years have enabled the Start Fund, through Start Network members, to evolve into a more efficient funding mechanism, enabling locally led action, and better able to support a greater number of people in anticipation of crisis. While the next ten years will continue to challenge the sector's ability to keep pace with growing needs, the Start Fund will continue to adapt and grow to meet that challenge and address need wherever it is found.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE GLOBAL START FUND'S SUCCESS IN REACHING THIS IMPORTANT TEN-YEAR MILESTONE, IN REACHING MILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN NEED, AND IN DEMONSTRATING THROUGH PRACTICAL ACTION THAT A MORE EFFICIENT, EQUITABLE, AND ACCOUNTABLE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM IS POSSIBLE.**



Christina Bennet, Chief Executive Officer



# START NETWORK

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