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# BEYOND BARRIERS

**BANGLADESH CASE STUDY:**  
START FUND

## Lead Authors

Mahfuza Mala

## Contributors

Mark Johnson, Ariana Marnicio, Melody Wei, Oona Mitchell, Elisabeth Ashley Haugen

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The Start Fund, a flagship rapid pooled funding mechanism of the Start Network, has been at the forefront of promoting localization by actively involving local actors in addressing small and medium-scale crises. This case study highlights how the Start Fund Bangladesh is creating an example of localization in the humanitarian sector.

Start Fund Bangladesh (SFB) is one of two national Start Funds, initiated in 2017 and modeled on the successful rapid emergency pooled funding mechanism that is driven by locals in responding to the country's many underfunded small to medium-sized 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. 26 of its 45 members are local and national organizations. SFB has demonstrated that the onboarding of local organizations as members, and the direct flow of funds to them, improved response to local underreported emergencies through a deeper understanding of community needs.

Since its inception, SFB has reached more than 953K people through rapid response to 44 small to medium-sized crises, allocating £9.58 million to member agencies (as of March 2024). This demonstrated the commitment of SFB to locally driven humanitarian action, saving lives, and reducing suffering from emergency and climatic shocks.

**THE TIMEFRAME OF THE START FUND IS FASTER THAN OTHER MECHANISMS, AND IT THEREFORE REQUIRES START NETWORK MEMBER PERSONNEL TO BE KNOWLEDGEABLE AND READY TO CONTRIBUTE.**



## START FUND GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

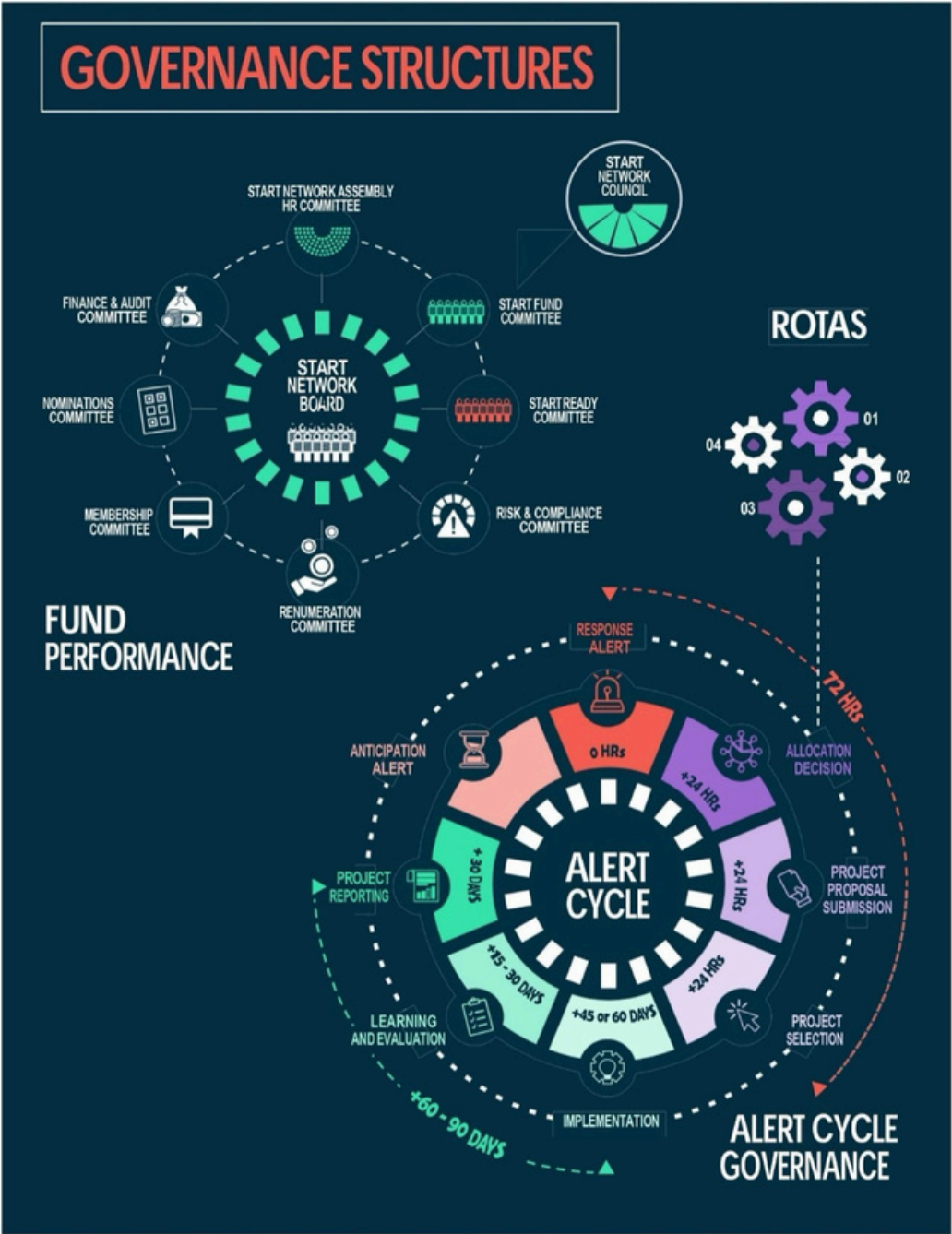
The Start Fund's approach is driven by its member NGOs, fostering decision-making rooted in principles of collective stewardship, accountability, transparency, impartiality, continuous improvement, and subsidiarity. Representatives from both INGO and local and national NGOs have equal participation in the governance committee. Seven local organizations and six INGOs are part of the executive committee.

This unique decision-making process is not only participatory, but also strategic and depoliticized, displaying how financing can foster collaboration over competition, leading to more impactful humanitarian efforts.

The governance structure of the Start Fund serves two primary purposes: (i) overseeing performance and (ii) ensuring rigor and impartiality in all crisis alert and project selection decisions. This model has demonstrated its replicability and influence within the broader humanitarian system. The governance structure is made up of four distinct bodies as set out in the table below:

<b>Start Network Assembly</b>	Represents the network membership and steering the network's strategic direction
<b>Start Network Board of Trustees</b>	Delegates the governance of the Start Fund to the Start Fund Committee and Start Network Council
<b>Start Fund Committee</b>	Sub-committee of the Start Network Board of Trustees is responsible for the strategic management and operations of the Start Fund within the parameters set by the Board and Start Network Council.
<b>Start Network Council</b>	Comprises the donors to Start Network, as well as representatives from the Start Fund Strategic Committee, the Board and the Start Fund Team.  Has oversight of risk management and performance of the Start Fund

The Start Fund team supports the performance of the Start Fund and facilitates the governance procedures and alert process on behalf of Start Network and its membership. The Start Fund team is employed by the host organization (currently Save the Children) to fulfil its role as Grant Custodian to the Start Network. The Start Fund uses host organization’s finance systems to receive, hold and disburse Start Fund awards and grants to Start Network members.



## RAISING THE ALERT

Recognizing the urgency of the situation, any Start Network member can identify a crisis that is felt to be suitable for the Start Fund. A Start Fund crisis alert can be raised by any single member, or by several members acting together. Start Network members can alert the Start Fund on behalf of partners. The Start Fund can be alerted to:

- Underfunded small to medium scale crises
- Anticipation of impending crises
- Spikes in chronic humanitarian crises

The raising of a crisis alert initiates the Start Fund alert cycle, whereby the alert information is shared, an allocation decision taken on whether the Start Fund should be activated, and funding disbursed and, if activated, members are invited to submit projects which then go through a selection process with funding awards being made. The cycle takes place within a 72-hour timeframe, although anticipation alerts can necessitate a different decision-making timeframe.

All Start Network members must participate in allocation decisions in line with the Start Fund Committee Rota system. Allocation decision-making meetings will follow the process set out in the Start Fund Committee Terms of Reference.

After the crisis alert has been issued and conveyed to Start Network members, every member is invited to participate in an online survey regarding the alert.

**SFB established a robust system that reaches disaster affected people faster. In 2022, the time from raising an alert to reaching the affected communities is now 11 days, compared to 20 days before the Start Fund mechanism was created.**

It is imperative for all Start Network members to engage with the survey, regardless of their physical presence in the affected country or their level of insight into the crisis. This juncture in the Start Fund alert process stands as the singular moment when all members play a role in shaping strategic allocation decisions. Hence, it is crucial to gather and document all perspectives comprehensively. For the crisis alert to progress to the allocation stage, the member survey must indicate that at least one Start Network member (or member's partner) is able to respond to the crisis.

In the member survey, Start Network members should nominate their own personnel in the country or region of the crisis for the project selection meeting should the Start Fund be activated. Nominees should be experienced members or partner personnel. Start Network members (and any partners) that submit project proposals cannot participate in project selection.

## **ALLOCATION DECISION**

In response to an alert signaling a crisis, the Start Fund Bangladesh swiftly evaluates whether the nature of the crisis aligns with its objectives and, if so, promptly decides on the appropriate amount of funding to allocate within a 24-hour window.

Allocation decisions within the Start Fund Bangladesh are carefully guided by a comprehensive review process which includes assessing crisis alert notes, analyzing member survey insights, and referencing third-party briefing notes. These briefing notes offer an additional layer of verification, enhancing the rigor of decision-making through information triangulation.

Typically, the Start Fund Committee, comprising rotating members serving for eight-week intervals, is responsible for allocation decisions. All members actively engage in this process, ensuring diverse perspectives are considered. However, there are occasions when allocation decisions may be entrusted to the Start Fund team. This occurs, for example, when survey responses strongly indicate activation preferences or when funding requests in the crisis alert note are relatively modest.

Each allocation decision is meticulously evaluated, considering the specific circumstances of the crisis, the contextual factors at play, and the identified needs. Rather than adhering to rigid criteria, decisions rely on the collective wisdom and consensus-building skills of member decision-makers. Throughout this process, the paramount consideration is prioritizing the Start Fund's overarching goals over individual member priorities, ensuring an effective and equitable response to crises.

The Start Fund Bangladesh team (secretariate) offers invaluable support to decision-makers by providing essential guidance on crucial considerations for anticipating and responding to crises. Acknowledging the inherent uncertainty that decision-makers often encounter, especially during the preliminary stages of a crisis or when dealing with anticipation alerts, the Start Fund team has crafted a detailed guidance note to assist in navigating through such uncertain terrain. This resource equips decision-makers with the tools and insights necessary to make informed and effective decisions in the face of uncertainty, ultimately enhancing the efficiency and efficacy of crisis response efforts.

Decisions regarding the activation of the Start Fund, as well as the allocation of funds if activated, are communicated by the Start Fund team through email notifications to Start Network members, donors, and supporters. Additionally, notifications are shared in the primary Start Fund Skype group to ensure widespread awareness.

### **The Start Fund Bangladesh remains inactive under the following conditions:**

- **Member representatives, as part of the allocation decision-making process, determine based on available analysis and situation reports that local government or other Indigenous actors possess the capacity to adequately address the situation without additional support or funding.**
- **The crisis unfolds in country or territory not listed as an official development assistance (ODA) recipient by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC). However this requirement may be waived by the Start Fund's donors under exceptional circumstances, such as when the country or territory lacks the capability to respond to the humanitarian crises.**
- **As a guideline, no more than £1 million will be allocated to any single crisis alert within the Start Fund.**



# PROJECT PROPOSAL

Once the crisis alert is activated by the members, members from the affected areas are requested to submit project proposals must using the standard Start Fund proposal forms to Start Fund team within 24 hours of the allocation decision or by the deadline set out in the allocation email. Project proposals should concentrate activities on providing life-sustaining services and support to affected populations. Project proposals should be based on needs and involve affected populations in decision-making and project implementation processes. This includes putting appropriate complaint and feedback mechanisms in place that populations can access confidentially.

Start Network's Due Diligence Framework informs the amount of funding that individual members can access.

- The maximum amount that can be awarded from the Start Fund to members assessed on Tier 3 of the Due Diligence Framework is £300,000 (or the maximum amount allocated if less than £300,000). If the proposal is for a consortium project, this amount can be applied to each member; for non-members in a consortium project, they would be sharing the maximum amount of the awarded (convening) member (or the maximum amount allocated if less than £300,000).
- The maximum amount that can be awarded from the Start Fund to members assessed on Tier 2 of the Due Diligence Framework is £100,000 (or the maximum amount allocated if less than £100,000).
- Members assessed on Tier 1 of the Due Diligence Framework are not currently eligible to be awarded from the Start Fund.

Start Fund puts emphasis on the fair share of the Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR) in the project. The maximum amount that can be requested in a proposal for Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR) is 10% of the total implementation and operations costs. If the total implementation and operations costs at the time of project reporting are lower than those originally budgeted at the time of project selection, the ICR amount should be a maximum of 10% of the actual cost.

## PROJECT SELECTION

Once the crisis alert is activated by the members, the selection of projects is delegated, wherever possible, to member (and their partner) personnel closest to the location of the crisis. Within 24 hours of the fund activation decision, a project selection committee is formed comprised of between four and seven participants in the affected country or region to review and approve project proposals. However, Start Network members (and any partners) who submit project proposals to the Start Fund for a crisis cannot participate in the project selection. If there are not enough members present in the country of the crisis alert, member representatives from the region can participate in the meeting. Those with contextual insight will be given preference at the discretion of the Start Fund team.

Participants of the project selection meeting are required to review submitted project proposals prior to the meeting and adhere to the Start Fund principles. All decisions should prioritize the needs of populations at risk of and/or affected by humanitarian crises over the priorities of individual member organizations. Decision-makers must provide independent humanitarian expertise and contextual insight without representing their organization.

During the meeting, a chairperson is selected to facilitate discussions, supported by a Start Fund team representative. Another participant takes minutes to document the selection process and justification for decisions. The minutes and an audio recording of the meeting are shared with the Start Network membership to ensure transparency.

- Once member projects have been selected for funding by a Project Selection Committee, award letters are issued to the relevant member organization/s. Award letters must be signed and returned by the member within three days.
- Start Network's Grant Custodian will initiate the transfer of the awarded funds within 24 hours of receiving the fund transfer request from the Start Fund team, following project selection and the receipt of the signed Start Fund award letter from the awarded member.
- Awarded projects must be initiated – with activities reaching the population at risk of and/or affected by a humanitarian crisis – within seven days of the award start date. Projects must then be completed within 45 days. (unless the award letter stipulates another timeframe).

- Project reports are to be submitted by the member 30 days after the award end date.
- If a Learning Exchange is scheduled, this should take place a further seven days after submission of the project report.

## **PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**

The Start Fund Bangladesh provides financial support to its awarded members for implementing projects aligned with its objectives. Members are required to adhere to the aims, methods, activities, and budget specified in the approved project proposal. Projects are expected to be completed within 45 days, unless stated otherwise in the award letter. All allocated funds must be utilized during the project implementation period. Monitoring activities are to be carried out during project execution, with the possibility of conducting post-distribution monitoring after the project end date. Compliance with these guidelines ensures effective utilization of resources and accountability in project implementation.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The Local Actor who raised the alert took the lead in coordinating the response. They engaged with local affected communities, social leaders, community-based organizations, and other local organizations to identify and prioritize projects. Through a participatory approach, they ensured that the affected communities had a voice in decision-making and were actively involved in the response efforts.

The localized response supported by the Start Fund had a significant impact on the affected communities. By involving local actors, the response was timely, culturally appropriate, and responsive to the specific needs of the communities. The engagement of local volunteers and organizations fostered a sense of ownership and empowerment, strengthening community resilience in the face of future crises. The success of this localized response served as an example for other humanitarian actors, highlighting the importance of localization in addressing small and medium-scale crises.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Throughout the project implementation, the Start Fund team provided technical support and guidance to the local actors. They facilitated regular monitoring and evaluation exercises to assess the impact of the response and identify areas for improvement. The local actors actively shared their experiences and lessons learned with the wider Start Network, contributing to collective learning and strengthening future localized responses.

## CAPACITY SHARING/STRENGTHENING CAPACITY OF LOCAL ACTORS

During the whole journey, SFB also invested in organizational development, capacity strengthening of its local and national members and contributed to strengthening the humanitarian eco-system through the development of the national [FOREWARN](#) platform and introduced multi-hazard joint contingency planning, MAAP (Mechanism for Accountability to Affected Population) and Disaster Risk Financing (DRF).

## CONCLUSION

The Start Fund's approach to localization in the humanitarian sector is creating a powerful example of how involving local actors can lead to more effective and sustainable responses. By empowering local communities and organizations, the Start Fund is not only addressing immediate needs but also building local capacity and resilience. This case story demonstrates the transformative potential of localization and serves as an inspiration for the wider humanitarian community to embrace and prioritize local leadership in crisis response.

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The Start Fund makes available short-term funding for life-saving activities that is accessible to local actors.**
- **Start Fund's extensive and inclusive governance structure ensures the voice of local actors is present in all decisions.**
- **The Start Fund Bangladesh incorporates many opportunities for feedback at a variety of levels, including member surveys, decision-making meetings, and complaint mechanisms, all of which makes its programming more locally-led.**



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