

START
NETWORK

**LOCALLY DRIVEN
PATHWAYS
FOR HUMANITARIAN
PEER LEARNING**

**FINDINGS FROM SHARING KNOWLEDGE
AND IDEAS UNDER LOCAL LEADERSHIP GRANT**

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01 INTRODUCTION

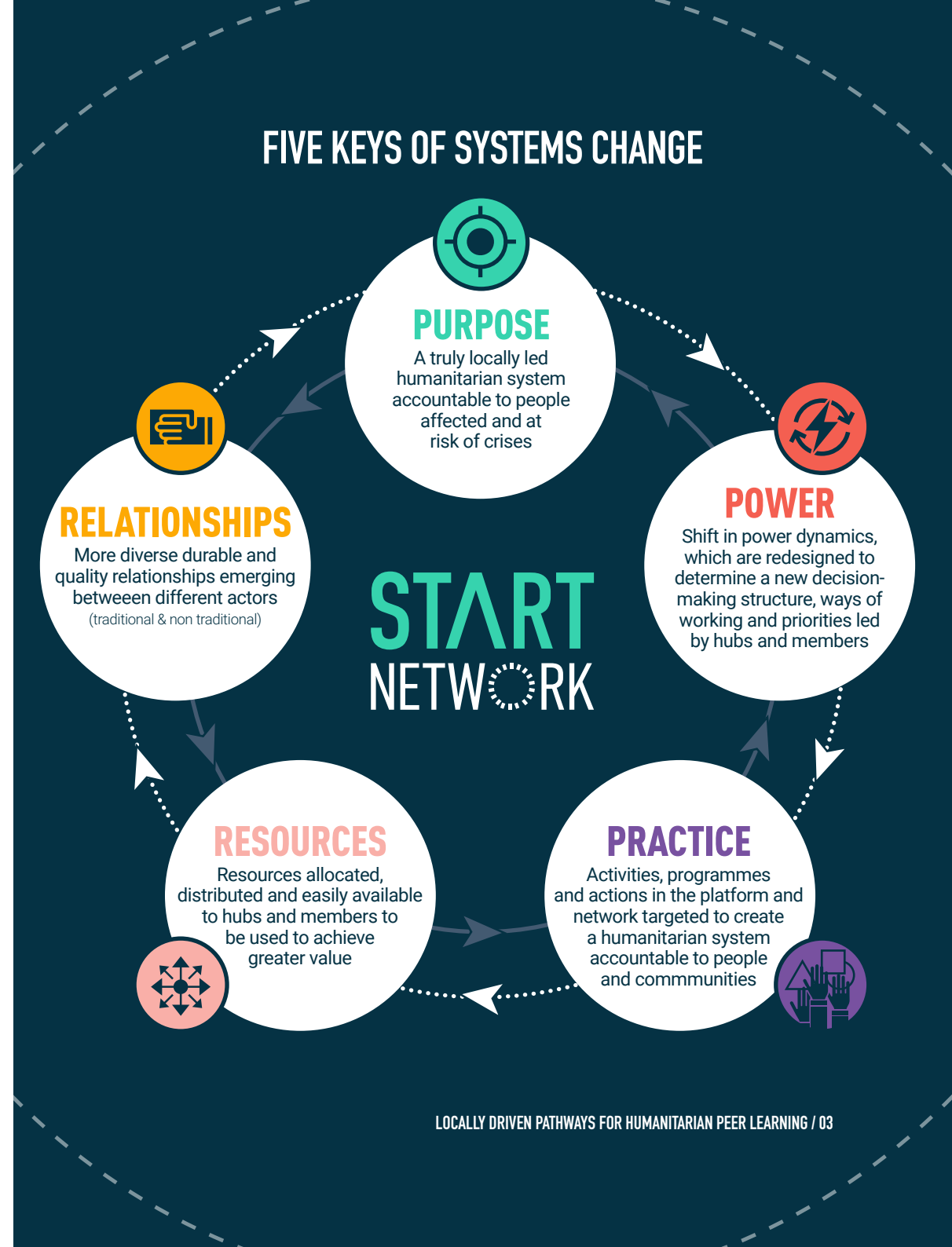
At Start Network, we believe that a more balanced international aid system which shifts power to those closest to the frontline will generate more effective and appropriate support for people affected by crises.

The Sharing Knowledge and Ideas under Local Leadership (SKILL) grant was created so that Start Network's local members could lead research projects, learn through partnerships cultivated during project implementation and provide insight that will support improvements in peer learning within the Network.

From January 2022, through grants of up to £15,000 GBP, local members worked with a variety of stakeholders to find solutions to, and to develop best practices tackling humanitarian issues that are important to them and the communities they serve.

This report shares our learning after one year managing the grant. We have used our five keys of systems change⁰ to frame our analyses and learning: Purpose, Power, Practice, Resources and Relationships.

⁰ The concept of the five keys of systems change was introduced to Start Network at the beginning of 2022 building on work by [Rockwoll Foundation](#) and others. The aim was to create an organisational learning approach to understand and track our systems change journey.



02 APPROACH

04 / LOCALLY DRIVEN PATHWAYS FOR HUMANITARIAN PEER LEARNING

Hazard mapping exercise
by with IDEA and Khagara
Development Organization
Photo ©IDEA





PURPOSE



Our purpose is to drive system-level shifts in the way humanitarian action is approached, resourced and delivered so that we can transform the humanitarian system. We aim to build a locally led humanitarian system that is accountable to people affected by and at risk of crises.

The Sharing Knowledge and Ideas under Local Leadership grant was created in response to feedback from members regarding the need for peer learning. In line with [Start Network's Locally Led Framework](#), the grant also incorporated elements of locally driven design, taking into account the political, structural, operational and cross-cutting factors covered by the framework.

THE GRANT HAD TWO AIMS:

- 01** Contribute to Start Network's learning on how to achieve a locally led humanitarian system with an active peer learning network.
 - 02** Provide an opportunity for local members to lead on learning and research opportunities enabling them to overcome challenges and identify best practices in the humanitarian sector.
-

POWER

We are dismantling unequal power dynamics and shifting decision making so that local and national organisations determine ways of working that support humanitarian risks and needs identified by communities.

For the projects to be locally led and accessible, the grant was designed and operationalised in ways that encouraged local members to have agency and autonomy in decision-making around the research they undertook.



GRANT DESIGN

01 STRAIGHTFORWARD AND FLEXIBLE



This grant aimed to have a straightforward application process, offering flexibility in terms of budget, activities, outputs, and timeframes.

02 LOCALLY LED RESEARCH



Initiatives could be focused on any area of learning that was important for local members responding to crises (more broadly the chosen topics would also inform Start Network's theory of change).

03 100% PASS SELECTION PROCESS



Start Network aimed to provide funding for all interested organisations¹ that submitted an expression of interest.²

04 LIGHT-TOUCH REPORTING AND LEARNING

Member organisations' reporting requirements (both financially and during project progression)³ were designed to be light-touch and tailored to the needs and strengths of the participating organisation.

1. Start Network local members that had completed the tiered due diligence process could submit an expression of interest
2. Seven members initially submitted an expression of interest, and the budget allowed for each grant to be a maximum of 5, a small reserve was kept for applications made later in the year, of which there was one .
3. Start Network gathered learning via flexible (but often monthly) video conferencing calls. Start Network focal points tracked the projects to understand the challenges, strengths and opportunities for peer learning experienced by participating local members.

GRANT PROCESS

01 INITIAL INTEREST



Organisations were asked to submit an expression of interest to the Evidence and Learning team focal point. Calls were then set up to talk through objectives, timelines, milestones and budget considerations. The dates to apply were flexible, and organisations could apply until the grant pot was empty.

THE POT WAS OPEN FROM SEPTEMBER 2021.

02 SELECTION PROCESS



Interested agencies worked one-on-one with a Start Network Evidence Team focal point until their project met the minimum criteria to be funded. These included development of a budget plan, three milestones, aims and objectives, as well as a strategy around partnerships and peer learning.

FOR MOST ORGANISATIONS, THIS WAS FROM OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2022.

03 THE PROJECTS



Once agencies had finalised designing their projects they were transferred to tranche 1 of the grant⁴. Projects were largely undertaken independently of Start Network. To adapt their projects, agencies adjusted their milestone and budget documents and these were signed off by the Start Network focal point.

The timeline was flexible: Start Network suggested a duration of six months.

PROJECTS WERE UNDERTAKEN THROUGHOUT THE YEAR (2022).

04 REPORTING AND FOLLOW-UP



Agencies conducted financial reporting through written records of spend against the budget. They used a Microsoft Excel template after concluding projects linked to each tranche of the grant.

Once agencies completed the three milestones they had decided on in their initial project proposals, they reported on them and Start Network focal points signed off to ascertain their completion.

All other reporting materials, such as learning reports, were discretionary to the agencies and new approaches to reporting on learning were encouraged.

THIS STEP SPANNED FROM THE MIDDLE OF 2022 TO THE END OF THE YEAR.



⁴ Funding for the grant was provided in two equal tranches. Tranche 1 had to be reported on before tranche 2 was disbursed

PRACTICE

Our activities, programmes, procedures and behaviours are locally designed to be accountable to people and communities affected by and at risk of crises.

In practice, the projects that local members chose were highly varied and driven by the needs of people affected by, and at risk of crises. For a summary of the projects please see page 9.

Complaints, feedback⁵ and safeguarding⁶ reporting mechanisms were made available to local members to share with their partners and community members.



Children-centric disaster preparedness training in Assam, India
Photo ©NEADS

⁵ Complaints and feedback: Reporting@startnetwork.org

⁶ Safeguarding: email safe@startnetwork.org or call +447939088467



DECISION-MAKING FROM THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

SEEDS, INDIA

Aim: Create a community disaster resilience fund where decisions are made by the community and funding is released at their request.

Method: Designed the community fund which was tested by a community project to restore a drinking water pond.

Learning: Learnt practical ways to set up a community fund and ways to support the community overcome challenges. Acting as a facilitator for the community to lead the process was a new way of working.

COMMUNITY TRAINING IN DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

NEADS, INDIA

Aim: Organise training with community members to incorporate methods of anticipatory action for flooding.

Methods: Collaborated with university students, CBOs, and local government to explore the importance of anticipatory action. Trained community members on flooding response and learnt how to incorporate traditional coping mechanisms.

Learning: Successfully facilitated collaboration with university students to lead learning within the community. While they encouraged the community to take part in the trainings organised, mobilising them was a challenge.



BEST PRACTICES IN ENGAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS DURING HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES

CARITAS INDIA, INDIA

Aim: Understand how to tailor volunteering opportunities to volunteers and train them according to their needs and skills.

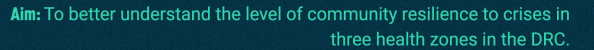
Method: Used community surveys and needs assessments to understand the volunteers needs, developed training module that volunteers undertook and shared learning on approaches to train volunteers based on strengths in a workshop with the volunteering network.

Learning: How to better work with community volunteers, how to tailor volunteering to their strengths, and the importance of gathering their opinions to ensure effective volunteering strategies.

Aim: To better understand the level of community resilience to crises in three health zones in the DRG.

Methods: Collected empirical data using community surveys and focus groups and a two day workshop with 40 participants from a range of stakeholders.

Learning: The workshop enabled participants to identify strategies that were integrated into a roadmap. The roadmap was used to advocate for community resilience in projects to local, provincial and national authorities.



COLLABORATING TO EXPLORE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

AFPDE, THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

GENDER AND CONFLICT SENSITIVE PROGRAMMING

AFEDEM, THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Aim: To make programmes more sensitive to issues around conflict and gender for crises in North and South Kivu.

Methods: Created a questionnaire to understand the current situation, had internal consultations, and then AFEDEM organised a two day workshop to connect with INGOs and LNNGOs.

Learning: Workshops enabled attendees to understand how programmes take into account the sensitivity of conflict and gender-based violence and how they could overcome these problems by incorporating recommendations into contingency plans.



SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS UNDER LOCAL LEADERSHIP

PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS

IDEA, PAKISTAN

Aim: To understand partnership policies and to form a partnership with a Community-Based Organisation (CBOs).

Method: Designed a Due Diligence assessment to identify the needs of two CBOs. Designed and provided training courses that the CBO's undertook, e.g. Leadership Management Skill Training (LMST).

Learning: Ways to form partnerships that will allow them to do more community work and learnt methods to review their own programmes and procedures.



COMMUNITY CONFLICT RESOLUTION

MIDFEHOPS, THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Aim: Understand how to reinstate community conflict resolution structures.

Methods: Community solution/ decision tree to understand the perspectives of community leaders, community members, church leaders and women's groups on conflict. Produced a roadmap and shared this with councils and local military leaders.

Learning: Learnt to always listen to the community to understand their needs in order to find sustainable solutions, for example one village integrated the roadmap into their village strategy plan.

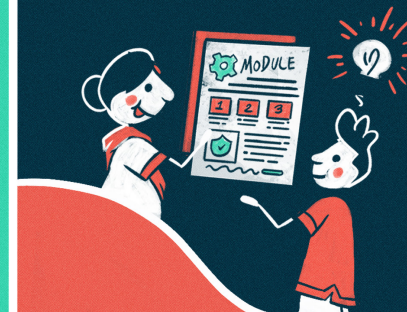
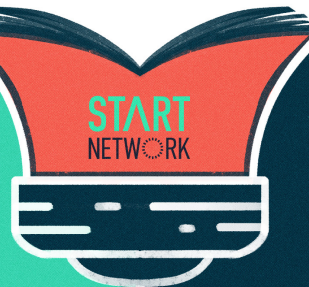
DIVERSIFYING FUNDING

HANDS, PAKISTAN

Aim: To diversify funding sources.

Method: Hired a consultant to internally map funding sources and gained internal support to work towards accessing faith-based funding. Worked with other NGOs, CBOs and local health officials to identify ways to access new types of funding.

Learning: How to adapt their strategy in order to receive more faith-based diversified funding and have written a new organisational strategy to reflect this learning. They learnt the importance of internal information sharing amongst teams.



RESOURCES

We ensure that flexible resources (money, technology, knowledge) flow to local organisations and are managed by them.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Initially, a maximum budget of **£13,000 GBP** was available for up to **13 local Start Network members** that had completed tiered due diligence. This amount allowed for all of Start Network's local members to access a grant of £10,000 GBP, with the remaining £8,000 GBP from the pot being set aside for Start Network to produce learning products. **Seven organisations** were interested, and this allowed us to increase the maximum budget to £15,000 GBP per organisation. This amount matched the **Start Fund Learning Grants** budget and ensured that all interested local members could access the same amount of funds. We kept a small reserve of funds; this meant a local member that applied later in the year, for instance, would be able to access the grant.



HUMAN RESOURCES

The grant was designed so that local organisations had to spend as minimal time as possible on administration. For example, the financial reporting process was high level, avoiding too much detail and was conducted using software that was simple to use and that was available to all members (Microsoft Excel). Documents were translated into French where necessary, and organisations completed reporting in their language of choice. We aimed to reduce the time that organisations spent on unnecessary reporting, and therefore did not ask for formal learning reports. We instead, encouraged organisations to share their learning and experiences in ways they felt suited the project and their organisations.

Hazard mapping with flood affected communities
Photo ©NEADS



RELATIONSHIPS

We foster and support diverse, equitable and sustainable relationships that actively drive our systems change ambitions.























To learn from this grant, Start Network focal points – two members of the Evidence and Learning team who were leading the coordination of the project – met with participating members on a monthly basis. Meetings were held virtually via video conferencing (Zoom) and the aim was to talk about how the previous month had progressed, following a learning journal for guidance. When required, interpreters joined the monthly calls. This approach helped Start Network to gather learning about the projects in a light-touch way, while building and maintaining sustainable relationships.

To encourage peer learning among members, we set up an introductory workshop explaining our aspirations for the grant and also a mid to end-of-grant workshop for participants to share their reflections. The workshops were held in English with French interpretation. Attendance, which was not compulsory, was about 50% for both workshops. The attendance is likely to be due to the high workload of local member representatives. The workshop recordings were shared with members participating in the grant.

An end-of-project survey (Annex 1) was sent to organisations to anonymously share their thoughts about the grant. Respondents were able to complete the survey in English or French. Five of the eight organisations answered the survey. The findings of this survey can be used to inform future designs of the constructive criticism on processes, thereby presenting opportunities for us to course correct where necessary.



SNAPSHOT OF THE LEARNING JOURNAL

	Phase of journey	Month 1: 19.04.2022	Month 2: 20.04.2022
	Learning: How are the learning plans progressing? What are you learning?	  	 
	Successes: What is working well? Why do you think this is so?	 	
	Challenges: What have been your challenges? What hasn't worked? Has anything changed in the general context in which you operate?	 	 
	Collaboration: What opportunities have you had for peer learning so far? What do you feel is going well/challenge you are facing? How is learning from the individuals doing the project shared across the orgs?	  	 
	Local Leadership: Do you feel like you are able to lead and make decisions during the process as a local/national member?	 	
	Change: How are things changing in your practice/organisation?	 	

03 LEARNING AND RECOMMENDATIONS



**Hazard mapping and
vulnerability assessments
with the community.**
Photo ©NEADS

NGO and private sector stakeholders share their best practices on resource mobilisation in Pakistan
Photo ©HANDS



RECOMMENDATIONS

POWER

CO-DESIGN

We set up an initial workshop to gauge feedback from members on ways to design the grant to meet their needs. We also incorporated a few design aspects from our end (such as the maximum budget available and reporting obligations) to ensure fairness and monitor accountability. Finding a balance between collaborative design, risk and boundary-setting was challenging, especially during project application and selection leg of the grant.

APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

In the planning process, Start Network focal points decided that local members would vote for projects that would be funded. However, we had enough funding to approve all the projects, so a voting system was not necessary. All the projects were approved and the Start Network team then worked with local members until their project proposal met feasibility and application criteria. This flexibility, while positive overall, led to confusion for some members as they did not know when their project was 'good enough' to be funded. We suggest that guidelines should be clearer and co-developed with local members. Ideally, design and management processes for projects should be managed collaboratively by organisations working in the same countries or regions. This would provide more opportunities for organisations to meet in person for planning, informed by their unique local contexts.

01 | Work with the Innovation team to learn how to more effectively co-design the report.

02 | Involve local members sooner in the design of the grant so they have greater ownership. We plan to plan to conduct a redesign process with local members at the end of the inaugural grant cycle.

FLEXIBILITY TO ADAPT THE PROJECT

Project implementation aspects of this grant are flexible so that organisations have leeway to adapt their activities for increased contextual relevance. For example, Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society (SEEDS) had to change how communities could access funds because of restrictions in India. The Initiative for Development and Empowerment Axis (IDEA) increased its budget in order to extend the project and made some changes to activities to ensure that their community-based partners could attend training they had organised for them. In fact, most organisations extended the length of their projects during the course of the grant. The five organisations that responded to the end-of-project survey agreed they were able to adapt the grant to meet the needs of their organisation or community.

When organisations were asked whether the grant guidelines affected their control of the project, responses varied. One of the organisations explained how the flexible grant guidelines gave them the ability to adapt the project how they wanted to, while another respondent said that the short timeline affected their control. Many organisations did choose to extend their projects due to unforeseen circumstances. Communicating more clearly that this option may have helped organisations to feel as though they had more flexibility to adapt the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 01 Continue to ensure that grant timelines, budgets and activities are able to be adapted based on the needs of the community.
- 02 Communicate guidelines clearly to participating organisations.



We will say that the grant was a great opportunity for our organisation, because it allowed us [having worked for some time in the area of] conflict management and resolution to integrate a new approach in learning, that of the matrix of 'tree to problem' and 'trees to solution', which was beneficial in all the steps that led us to the implementation of a roadmap for community conflict management and resolution."

Anonymous, end-of-project survey



Control during a project is normally very rigid. You have timelines, managing staff, but this [project] was extremely different. There is a lot of flexibility, the time you have given us to develop processes rather than pushing it through, so it was a very good experience. I have told the committee 'I will not give you timelines because I am not being given timelines by Start Network.' We were able to give them flexibility because you [Start Network] gave us flexibility. I can just leave it to them which is a very different way of working. A lot of learning experience [was] not just for me but for the NGO we worked with."

SEEDS India



Flexibility of the project timeline has supported our organisation's learning capacity. Along with it, the flexibility of the project supported [us] to a great extent in achieving what was planned."

Anonymous, end-of-project survey

CO-LEARNING

The learning journal (Annex 2) proved to be a useful way to regularly catch up with grant recipients and to provide support throughout the projects. It was based on a learning journal format made by the Innovation team, and designed to be completed on **Miro** by the participants in real time. However, problems with internet connections made the calls cumbersome which meant that they tended to be more like an interview, with Start Network staff recording the answers in note form on the Miro board. Hence, collaboration on Miro did not work as expected. As well as this, writing on Miro in note form was hard to do while listening to organisations speaking about their project, and reduced the focus we had on the organisations. It also meant notes were brief, paraphrased and missing detail.

The way the Miro board was used by the Start Network team changed depending on the organisation, and became less structured the longer it was used. For example, it was clear that some organisations responded well to very open questions while others preferred more closed questions; some preferred to present their progress while others preferred to be asked specific questions. The flexibility of conversations using a Miro board are one of its strengths.



Community training
on women's health
Photo ©NEADs

AFTER SOME REFLECTION, ADAPTATIONS WERE MADE TO THE LEARNING JOURNAL:

- Moving questions on overall learning to the end and including questions about general progress at the start to help warm up.
- Asking specific questions for members in the DRC and stating they are specifically asking about the grants (this mainly affected DRC due to interpretation).
- Sending questions to local members in advance.
- Including more probing questions that would help Start Network to learn – particularly around local leadership; asking what Start Network can do to help local members have more control.
- Rephrasing the question about relationships with INGOs from “how” to “why not”, because local members rarely worked with them on these projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 01 Use a different method to complete learning journals collaboratively (not Miro).
- 02 Ask local members how they think this could work, whether a learning journal is the best approach to gather learning from the grants, and whether they feel a collaborative approach to gathering learning is important to them.

PRACTICE

THE VALUE OF BEING LOCALLY LED: SUSTAINABILITY

The unique value of the grant was that local organisations were able to do a piece of research that was important to them, and were able to use the learning from the research in their humanitarian work. The projects also helped local members to build sustainable relationships with other stakeholders and community members. For example, Appui aux Femmes Démunies et Enfants Marginalisés (AFEDEM) aim to continue their peer learning after the project ends, with a commitment from stakeholders to attend online monthly calls to keep the discussion going. Following a workshop for their own research project, Health and Nutrition Development Society (HANDS) formed a WhatsApp group to continue coordinating humanitarian work with other local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Pakistan. Caritas India made sure local governments were part of community volunteer training sessions so they could support the project after the grant funding had ended. IDEA officially partnered with a Community-Based Organisation (CBO) and designed a training programme tailored towards their specific needs, later using this approach to partner with two more CBOs outside of the grant.



We feel we are doing something very unique as this is a very new concept in Assam (community led anticipatory action). Being a local organisation who are rooted in communities, we are in a good position to implement this and we hope with this grant we can show some evidence and examples of how this can be done. We are feeling confident we can transfer and share good practices which can be integrated into community-led crisis anticipation.”

North-East Affected Area Development Society (NEADS)



Every partner participating in the workshop will join online monthly calls because they agree with the need for continuous discussion to be aware of what needs to be done. Also, the participants are asking what the next steps will be. Is it possible to define and decide on the steps? The interest from different stakeholders is really expressed. Everybody is interested to be involved and see change far from the end of the grant.”

AFEDEM



We have identified locations for disaster-prone areas where crises happen, as identifying these locations, and working with volunteers we have also worked with local government. They are expressing their interest that we should work together to save lives, that is what we heard from the local government, after local training the local bodies are coming and addressing their thoughts that these need to be addressed in a holistic way. Every training has been taken in a place with the local government. This will help us, as local governments and bodies can take it over after so it is really sustainable.”

Anonymous, end-of-project survey

FEEDBACK ON SKILL GRANT SUSTAINABILITY

Some respondents in the end-of-project survey mentioned adaptations that could be made to improve the grant. One said that sustainable funding to help with organisations' internal requirements should be prioritised; a second asked for delays in processes to be reduced so they did not have to wait for funding transfers, and a third asked for feedback on their project to understand how to improve.



... we would also appreciate some feedback from Start Network so it would great if you could tell us what we could do more of."

Midfehops asbl

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 01 Continue to support the locally led aspects of the grant that allow it to be sustainable.
- 02 Recognise that some local members undertaking the grant would appreciate constructive feedback on their projects.



A panel of NGO and private sector representatives share their experience of resource mobilisation during the Covid-19 pandemic
Photo ©HANDS



RESOURCES

INFLEXIBLE FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Organisations could access a maximum value of £15,000 GBP for the grant. All organisations applied for the full amount (or very close to it), except one organisation that later applied for a funding extension for the full amount. In the end-of-project feedback, participants said that £15,000 GBP was enough to complete their projects.

However, some projects were specifically designed or adapted to fit within the budget amounts. Some members could not complete all activities, but this was due to non-financial challenges. The main negative feedback about funding was about funding delays. These happened for three main reasons:

- Some organisations were being directly funded for the first time. This caused delays in the first tranche of funding reaching them because test payments had to be made first, and this slowed down when the activities could begin.
- In March 2022 there was a pause on funding to local organisations while the donor asked for clarification on spending. For members who were expecting their second tranche of funding, this created a delay in their planned activities. In one case, this had a negative impact on relationships they had formed during their project.
- Another delay in funding was caused by bank transfers within Pakistan taking a long time.

FINANCIAL REPORTING CHALLENGES

- Organisations made budgets on other templates aside from the ones provided and it therefore took time to transfer the data across. This happened because Start Network updated the financial reporting templates after projects had begun.
- Due to flexibility in project design, the proposed budget spend varied for members that adapted their activities during the projects. However, reporting on Excel sheets was relatively flexible and regular catch-ups with members meant we were able to adapt their budgets. Video calls with participating organisations and Start Network's finance team were arranged in some cases to support the reporting process.



What we can say is to encourage Start Network to lighten the administrative procedure in the processing of financial files, because the more there is a delay in disbursement it disrupts the schedule of activities.”

Anonymous, end-of-project survey

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 01** | Review the maximum funding available and understand how much funding local organisations require to complete a sustainable research project.
- 02** | Factor realistic times into project timelines to account for funding transfer processes. Work closely with Start Network finance teams during the projects to ascertain these timelines. Provide local members with realistic timeframes for payment transfers.
- 03** | Share complete templates at the outset of projects, along with clear instructions for local members so they can understand what is required of them throughout the project.

RELATIONSHIPS

LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS ESTABLISHED WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

Local members were encouraged to work in partnership with other organisations or stakeholders. Rather than joint partnerships, the local members tended to work with other stakeholders to gain their perspectives and experiences of the issue, rather than helping to identify the issue and complete the empirical research together. The type of stakeholders that engaged with the projects varied and in some cases the partnerships were novel. Local members tended to partner with other local NGOs, community leaders and community groups, some of whom they had previously worked with. The relationships with local authorities varied between projects, with some relationships being challenging and others easier. In many cases the grant gave participating members the opportunity to show local authorities the importance and relevance of their learning project. Some organisations, AFEDEM and Association des Femmes pour la Promotion et le Développement Endogène

(AFPDE), had INGOs attend their workshops but found it difficult to interest them in taking part in the project. For example, AFPDE found it particularly difficult to shift the mindsets of INGOs.

In a successful partnership, NEADS worked with university students who facilitated a learning exercise with community members and this contributed key community participation in their project. At the end of their project, NEADS organised a peer learning workshop between community members and these university students. This allowed NEADS to develop their peer learning process and gave the students an opportunity to participate and present in a workshop. Community members actively participated, sharing problems they had been facing in relation to flooding, and how they could collectively tackle these problems.



We invited five or six INGOs but they either did not respond or they assumed it wouldn't be important as we are local. The two that did respond enjoyed it and are keen to engage in future projects. I physically went to the different INGOs to invite them and talked to them about the project and in the meetings two or three of them asked if they were a local or international organisation and then they asked if they really had the capacity, so it was from the in-person meetings that I really got this impression."

AFPDE



We have had volunteers from academic institutions to help under this hazard to do the vulnerability mapping. [They are] students studying social science who are coming to do internships with us. ... they are connected to academic learning, so this is very practical, which is a gap. They have lack of exposure to real world."

NEADS



So many NGO resource mobilisation people came together – the first time it was held in the city. It was a very unique one-of-a-kind workshop. Some are from health sector, and some are doing multi-sectoral and humanitarian – a big spectrum of people."

HANDS

The value of a local organisation carrying out the project was that they could work directly with community members and/or community-based organisations to hear their perspectives and understand the problems communities were facing. For Le Mouvement International des Droits de l'enfant de la Femme de l'Homme veuf et de leur Promotion sociale (Midefehops), working so closely with the community meant that a village adopted the community conflict resolution roadmap that they co-developed into their strategic planning.



It was a chance to listen and hear representations of the community who often aren't heard. We learned they (the community) aren't really resilient, and that each person has a responsibility in this, from the local authorities to NGOs."

AFPDE



We live very close to the community, and their problems affect us directly, given the big security concerns in the region, INGOs don't have the resources or aren't prepared to face these risks... [We] Work with the public to identify community problems and propose realistic solutions. Starting from local knowledge to better test the problem tree matrix and the solution tree in the management and resolution of community conflicts... We got together all the actors that would be involved... community, leaders, so they could take ownership...The project has been integrated into the Kwiwanja village plan and has been well received by the village authorities. The tool we have developed s a good approach to conflict resolutions. We have received recommendations that we need to make the roadmap widespread, and we need to publicise it and we should hold some kind of training and feedback with the stakeholders [in the hub]..."

Le Mouvement International des Droits de l'enfant de la Femme de l'Homme veuf et de leur Promotion sociale (Midefehops).

**Workshop with
community leaders
to gather perceptions
on community
conflict resolution**

Photo ©Midefehops asbl



PEER LEARNING BETWEEN GRANTEE ORGANISATIONS

Start Network organised two workshops to help local members share learning with one another. The first was a kick-off workshop for all participating organisations to meet each other. The second was held towards the end of the projects for organisations to share their experiences of collaboration, leading the project and the challenges they had faced. The workshops were hard for Start Network to convene and hard to facilitate as members were from three countries and spoke differing languages. Engaging the organisations was also challenging as the workshops were held over a short period (1.5 hours) which was not enough time to explore issues or topics in depth. Due to time differences, the busy work

schedules of local members and poor internet connection some members also arrived late to the workshop. This reduced flow and meant many participating organisations did not understand the tasks. Furthermore, a key piece of feedback from members was the difficulty in sharing learning with others with different experiences and contexts. Overall, it seems that a longer time in workshops and in-person meetings would help participating members engage with one another to explore their shared learning in more depth. During a conversation at the Start Network Assembly, one organisation's representative recommended that funding should be specifically put aside for peer learning activities within the grants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 01** Support collaboration between members in the same countries. Explore opportunities for the grant to be hosted by Start Network hubs because hub members accessing the grant have similar contexts and can meet in person rather than virtually.
- 02** Encourage long-term partnerships and peer learning with stakeholders that engaged in the projects.
- 03** Explore the option to put aside funding specifically to be used to support peer learning among members accessing the grant.

04 CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS



AIM 01

CONTRIBUTE TO START NETWORK'S LEARNING ON HOW TO ACHIEVE A LOCALLY-LED HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM WITH AN ACTIVE PEER LEARNING NETWORK.

From this year's grant, we learnt that achieving an active peer learning network is challenging, especially as this was the first time our team had interacted with most of the members. We built relationships with the participating members while supporting them with the administrative aspects of the grant.

- **Local members didn't find it easy to partner with stakeholders that had very different contexts and instead partnered with organisations and communities in the same local context.**
- **The virtual aspect of the project was difficult and made peer learning between participating members challenging. We recommend that participating organisations should be supported to meet in person to collaborate and share learning.**
- **We learnt that projects varied greatly both within and across countries, and members reported that sharing learning across these different contexts was particularly challenging. If the grants ran again, collaborations within countries may work more effectively, so we recommend exploring the opportunity to host this grant in hubs.**



AIM 02

PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR LOCAL MEMBERS TO LEAD ON LEARNING AND RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES TO FIND SOLUTIONS AND DEVELOP BEST PRACTICES ON HUMANITARIAN ISSUES THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO THEM AND THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE.

Conversations with participating members told us they felt the grant was an interesting and flexible way to learn about something in their own context. They generally partnered with a mix of existing stakeholders, and in some cases formed new relationships.

- **This grant was a unique opportunity for many of the members that took part, as it was the first time they had been able to undertake research on a topic that was decided only by them and was important to them and the communities they aim to support. Local members valued the opportunity to lead research projects that allowed them to choose the topic. This helped them build strong relationships with communities and local stakeholders, who recognised they were helping to explore local issues.**
- **Decolonising our ways of working was central to the design of the project. Upon reflection, for the grant to truly be locally-led, members should have been involved in the design process of the grant early, along with designing the guidelines of the grant itself. This could have prevented issues such as local members not always being sure when their project was “good enough” to be funded. It could also support their access to the grant, such as through the design of templates for applications and reporting, the design of the learning framework and the processes for funding transfers.**



CONCLUSION

The main aims for this grant were to understand how to achieve a locally led humanitarian system through an active peer learning network while providing an opportunity for local members to lead on learning and research. In theory, these approaches would help participants develop best practices on humanitarian issues that are important to them and the communities they serve. The grant provided £15000 to 8 local members took part in undertaking a variety of projects on climate resilience, community conflict resolution, community led fund, diversified resource mobilisation, gender programming, partnerships, volunteer training based on their strengths and community disaster preparedness.

The grant and the projects they funded were underway from October 2021 to November 2022.

After a year of the grant, we have seen that local members have valued the flexibility of scope which has allowed them to develop unique research projects to issues important to them, and that support Start Network's learning around our Theory of Change. The opportunity for local members to lead meant that they had the space to test new approaches to support them overcome challenges, to learn, and to form new partnerships in their local areas. Going forward local members have asked for more funding to continue their projects and to support them to understand the impact of the projects.

The grant has made a start in supporting Start Network's learning on how to support a peer learning network and reaffirmed that the contexts the members operate in are important factors to consider – members from DRC, India and Pakistan found their contexts were quite different to share learnings with. Even within countries members found it easier to partner and create learning with local stakeholders and other L/NNGOs as opposed to INGOs. We therefore propose that grants could be focussed more on organisations with similar contexts (possibly the network of hubs) and resourced with funding and expert knowledge.

Local members were able to design their own research projects however they did not always feel like they had the power to control decision-making. This was highlighted by members stating that they were not sure when their projects were 'good enough' to be funded and for asking for feedback on how to improve. Going forwards, we propose that a second round of grants should be co-designed with local members. Co-design would be done with the support of the innovation team at Start Network as they have technical knowledge in this area.

We also learnt about approaches we can use to manage grants in a light-touch way for local members. We found that having calls with members on a monthly basis supported Start Networks learning and helped us to build a relationship with the members. Although we had positive feedback about the grant management, there is more to do to support local members to apply and to report in ways that are most applicable to them and their needs and that don't take them too much time but give them visibility and summarise their learning.

This grant has been small in scope but has started to help Start Network learn how to support peer learning amongst members and how to design a locally led grant. A second round of the grant would 1) support local members to continue understanding the impact of their projects and would support the sustainability of local member projects; and 2) support Start Network to continue building on learning around peer learning in the network using a more contextual approach and local member leadership using co-design.



ANNEX 01

END-OF-PROJECT SURVEY



ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

- What was the main value of undertaking a learning grant for your organisation?
- What aspect(s) of this grant supported your organisation's learning?
E.g. flexibility of the project timeline.
- Please explain why.
- Any other thoughts or comments around organisational change from the project?



LEADING

- Did the grant guidelines and requirements allow you to do a project where you felt you were in control of activities? (1 - Strongly disagree; 5 - Strongly agree)
- How did the grant guidelines affect your control of the project?
- Were you able to adapt the grant to meet the needs of the organisation/community? (1 - Strongly disagree; 5 - Strongly agree)
- Did you face any challenges working with Start Network during the project? (Focus on the partnerships between yourselves and Start Network.)
- If you wish to, please share any of the challenges you faced (your answer will be anonymous).
- Please state one way you think the grant could be improved to suit your organisation's needs.
- Any other thoughts or reflections on leading the SKILL grant?



PEER LEARNING

- Who was the most valuable person, group or partner you engaged with on this project?
- Why were they the most valuable?
- What is your main reflection on the best way to collaborate on a learning project?
- Any other thoughts or reflections on peer learning?

ANNEX 02 LEARNING JOURNAL

EXAMPLE OF SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONS ASKED IN THE LEARNING JOURNAL CALLS:

PROGRESS: How is the project progressing?

SUCCESSSES: What is going well?

CHALLENGES: What have been your main challenges?

COLLABORATION: What opportunities have you had for peer learning so far? What is successful/challenging?

LOCAL LEADERSHIP: Do you feel you able to lead and make decisions?

LEARNING: How is your organisation learning?

CHANGE: How are things changing in your organisation as a result of this grant?

START NETWORK

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