



LEARNING BY DOING: Start Working differently 2014 summary report

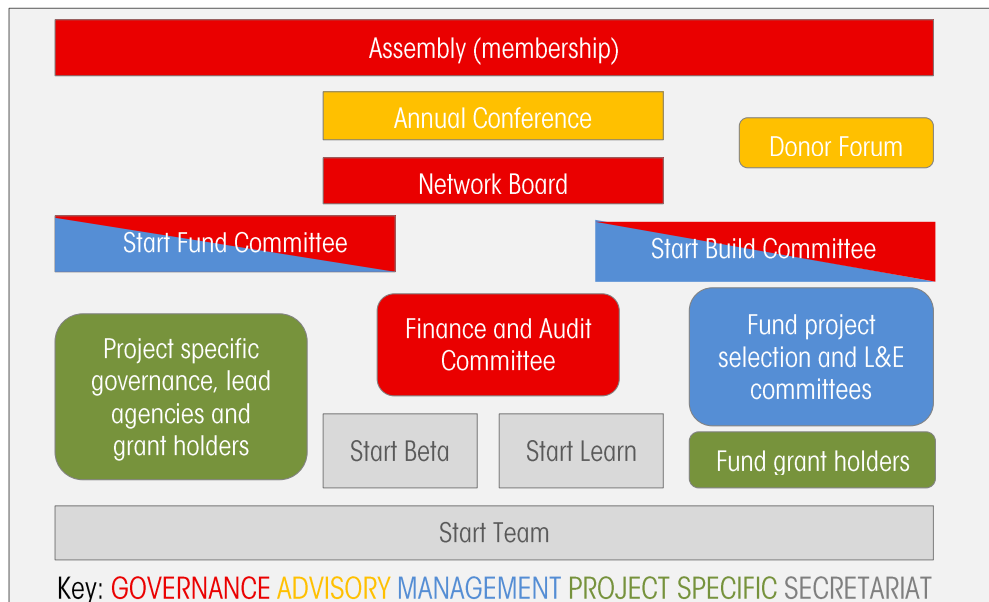
PAGE 2	“We can’t learn to swim standing on the edge of water” A crucial moment in the Start Network’s story
PAGE 3	How it happened A summary of the events
PAGE 6	Alignment not agreement Breakdown of the voting
PAGE 8	Putting the recommendations into action Priority timeline for the Start Network
PAGE 9	Working toward the Annual Conference 2015 Building on what we have learnt
PAGE 11	Annex

“We can’t learn to swim standing on the edge of water”

The week of June 9th, 2014 represented a crucial moment in the Start Network’s story. From the close of the CBHA pilot in 2012, to the announcement late last year that DFID and Irish Aid would support the Start Fund, the members have incubated a bold idea with the potential to transform the humanitarian sector. But this vision was never meant to be reserved solely for the 19 current members.

This year the members agreed a declaration of intent that commits to shaping a humanitarian system which is diverse, decentralised and collaborative. They also designed a governance structure which nurtures the collaborative leadership model developed during the pilot whilst enabling nimble decision-making.

This structure places the Assembly at the heart of the organisation, setting the agenda to be implemented by the Network Board. It also sets out a clear role for our Donors as partners and identifies the need for wider collaboration with internal and external stakeholders through an Annual Conference.



The *Start: Working differently* week of events launched these new structures for the Start Network. The ethos behind this was the belief that the best way to learn is by doing. This week established the Start Network as a new organisation, with a vision for the future that we want you to be part of.

OBJECTIVES OF THE WEEK

Governance in action!

Establish the new governance structure, testing the boundaries of each body, exploring the possibilities of new partnerships with donors and ensuring we start working differently.

Collaboration is a political process

Provide a forum for a wide group of stakeholders, agency representatives and donors to critically debate and discuss the future for the Start Network, ultimately shaping its direction of travel.

The Start Network is a movement

Build on momentum and interest generated by the recent funding award, and spread understanding of the bold ambition of the Start Network and excitement about the potential of new ways of collaborating.

When planning these events, it was useful to identify what attendants should know, feel and do after they leave:

Know

- A clear understanding of the Start Network and its ambitions for transforming the sector.
- Its direction of growth over the next year.
- A better understanding of the individual agency, stakeholder and donor positions regarding this direction.

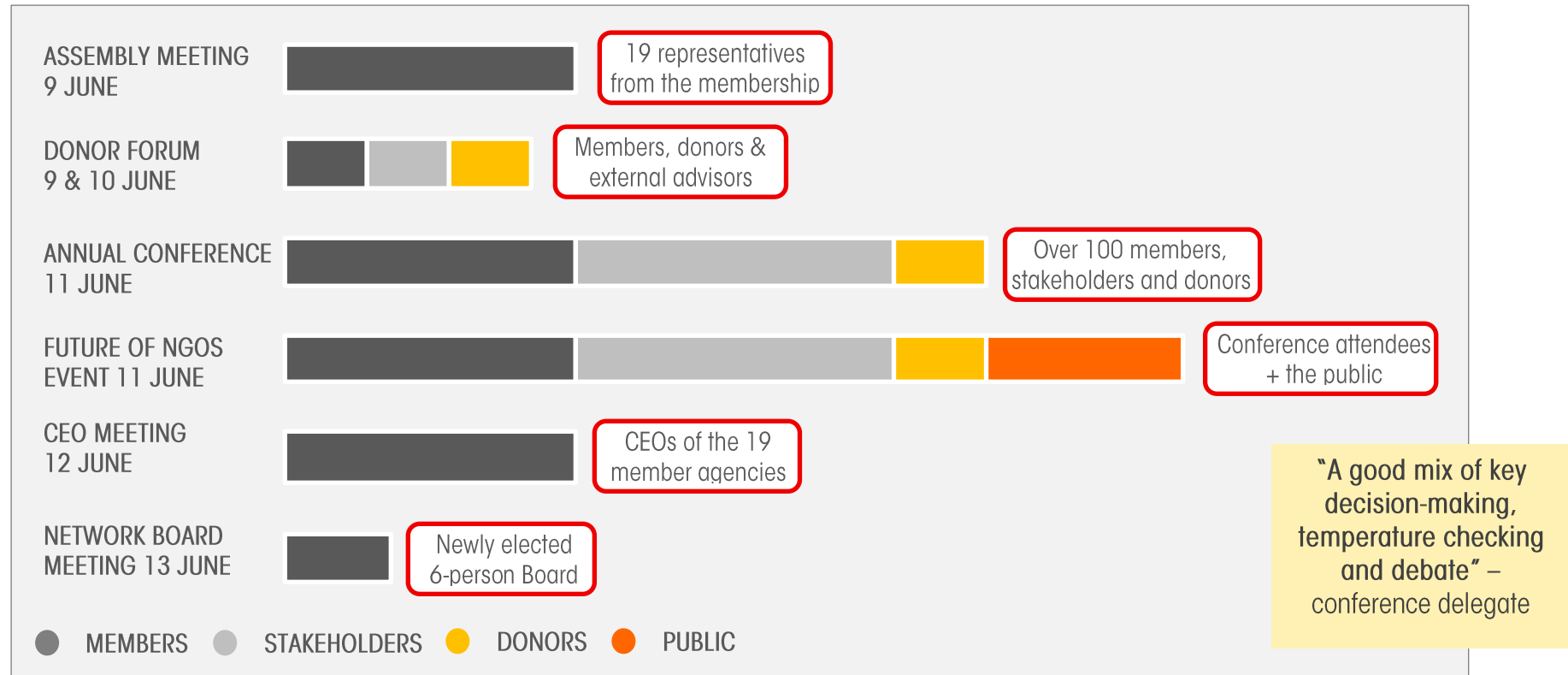
Feel

- Excited by the ambition and motivated to maximise the collaboration.
- That all views and perspectives have been respected, heard and met with a healthy challenge.
- A sense of ownership over the recommended strategy that delegates help to shape.

Do

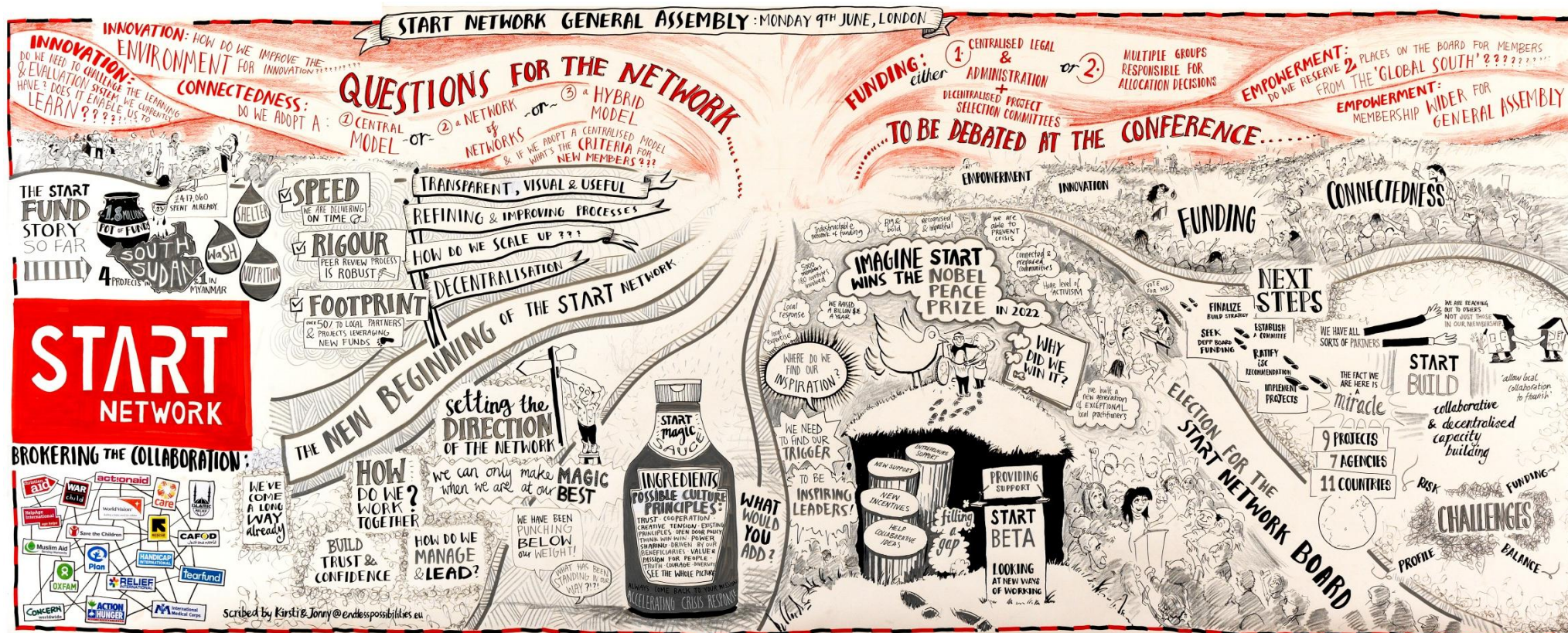
- Talk about the Start Network: to colleagues, partners, stakeholders, donors and friends.
- Make time to engage with the issues and explore the opportunities presented.
- Identify what actions can be taken to contribute to the Network’s success; by approaching a donor, collaborating with other agencies or changing ways of working.

HOW IT HAPPENED

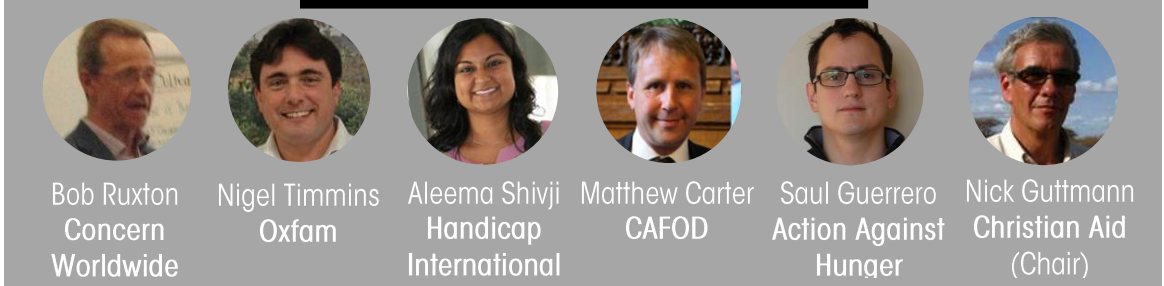


We structured the events in this way for three reasons:

1. To save our members time and maximise their engagement, condensing the important meetings into one week where they could immerse themselves in the pressing issues for the Network
2. To assess the appetite within our members and wider stakeholder base for this type of event
3. To enable the members to set the agenda for the Conference, encourage wider buy-in from stakeholders and donors to these issues, and ensure that the recommendations were considered and implemented by the Network Board.



THE NETWORK BOARD WAS ELECTED...



The Assembly members also discussed motions and proposals for the upcoming conference within the following themes: • Funding • Innovation • Empowerment • Connectedness
 The most popular ideas were carried through and Assembly members volunteered to reformulate the motions and present them at the Conference.

LEARNING

1. The Assembly must have space and time to determine the key issues to be debated at the conference and to feel that their arguments have been listened to and accurately summarised.
2. Good quality discussion can only take place if agency representatives have the opportunity to gather their agency positions.
3. The Assembly is a space rich in creativity, passion and humanitarian expertise.

The Donor Forum was designed to engage our donors in strategic and structural questions for the Network and the Start Fund. An evening dinner brought together donors, Assembly representatives, and external advisors, to stimulate debate around the Network’s vision. The following morning donors and Assembly members re-convened to review Fund’s performance to date.



Nick Guttman, Christian Aid: “The system wasn’t fair, so we created the Start Fund”

Richard Broyd, Waypoint: “You have a membership choice: either a federal model with loose membership criteria, or a tighter model with interdependencies”

Shoko Arakaki, UN OCHA: “Don’t build another bureaucracy: the Start Fund’s value-add is its speed”

Mike Noyes, ActionAid: “As members we hold ourselves accountable for delivering to a high quality.”

Dylan Winder, DFID: “This Fund makes sense to DFID.”

Lisa Doherty, Irish Aid: “We want to be partners on this journey”

Michael Edwards, Demos: “NGOs will change, let’s just get on with it ... this is a rare opportunity – take it!”

Gareth Owen, Save the Children: “We were brave at the outset, to undertake what we felt to be a selfless act, creating a global good”

LEARNING Clarify the messaging around the synergy between the three work streams, Fund, Build and Beta. Bring donors and stakeholders into the transformative agenda – it should not be limited to an individual work stream.

The Recommendations emerged from an interactive voting process that took place throughout the day. Each vote was informed by a presentation from a member agency or Start Team representative. These recommendations will be actioned by the Network Board and the Start Team in the lead up to the next Annual Conference: see page 8 for more information and a timeline.



The first Start Network Annual Conference combined context-giving speeches with debate and voting on strategic issues. The morning debates were introduced with speeches from member agency leaders and donors, who acknowledged the successes of the Network to date, but urged the stakeholders to avoid complacency, or the temptation to behave more cautiously now that large sums of money are at stake. The overriding message was that the Start Network will need to be brave to pull of its vision. The afternoon focused in on the power imbalance in the sector, with specialists pointing out the lack of funding and agency currently afforded to local actors, and a colleague from the field sharing a local perspective.

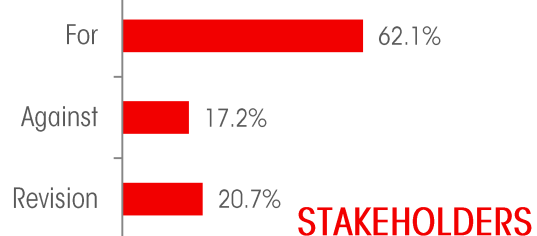
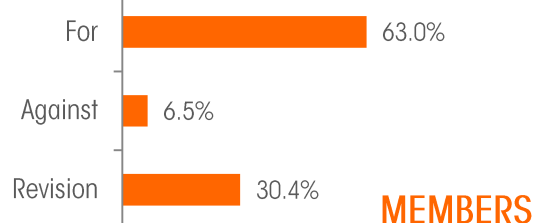
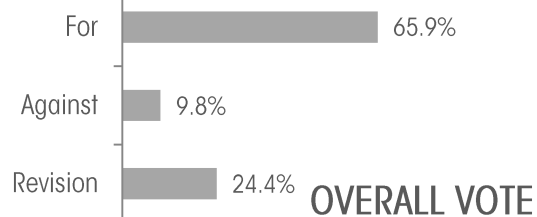
“We moved toward broader ownership of the initiative, creating a trust environment so more challenging critical voices could be heard. The voting system allowed everyone to have a say” – conference delegate

HOW WERE THE RECOMMENDATIONS REACHED?

MOTION 1: presented by Matthew Carter (CAFOD)

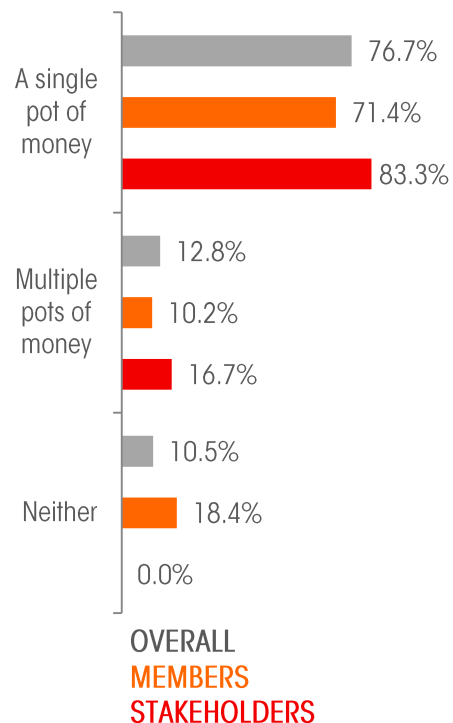
"Start Network will lead and create a global network of networks"

- With support and management from the Start team
- The mission of which will be: funding, capacity, innovation, and platform
- And the Start Network will create an international representative team to guide and develop the formation of a network of networks



MOTION 2 presented by Sean Lowrie (Start Network)

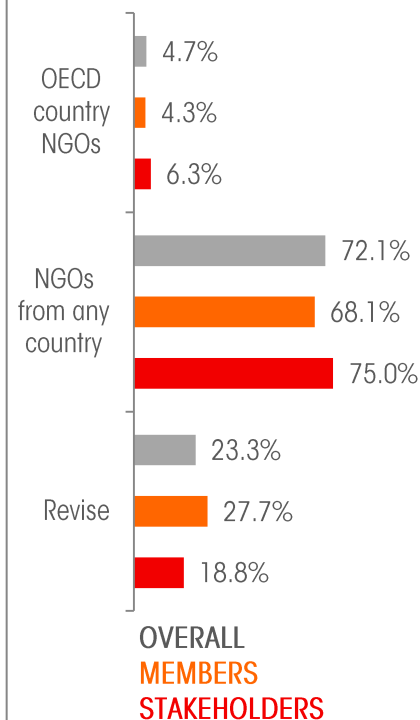
The Start Fund will consist of ...



This vote was preceded by a presentation from Sean Lowrie arguing for a central legal and administrative structure for the Start Fund, providing financial and administrative efficiencies, with decentralised project selection.

MOTION 3 presented by Sean Lowrie

The Start Network membership will expand to include ...



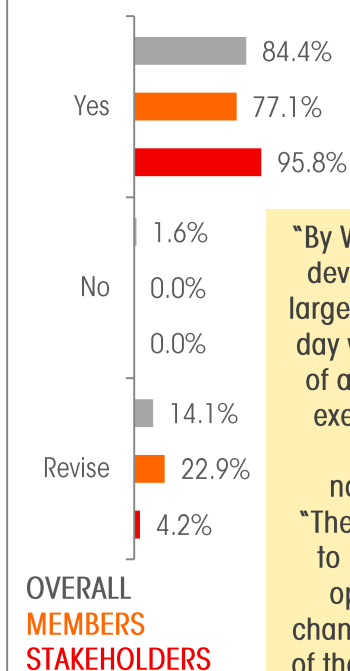
A further motion was discussed but no vote cast: "Start Network membership will expand to include:

1. Bringing in new NGO members to support the establishment of their own 'Start Network hub' in future
2. Bringing in new NGO members on equal terms to the current Start Network members
3. Revise"

MOTION 4.1 presented by Imran Madden (Islamic Relief)

To begin shifting the humanitarian centre of gravity, the Start Network must ...

Proactively seek talented "southern" voices and encourage them to apply for the independent positions in the Network board



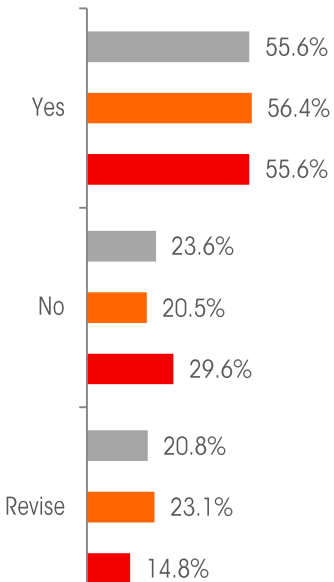
"By Wednesday, the development was largely done and the day was something of a rubber stamp exercise, though valuable nonetheless."
 "There didn't seem to be a genuine opportunity to change the wording of the resolutions or submit new ones."
 – conference delegate

HOW WERE THE RECOMMENDATIONS REACHED?

MOTION 4.2

To begin shifting the humanitarian centre of gravity, the Start Network must...

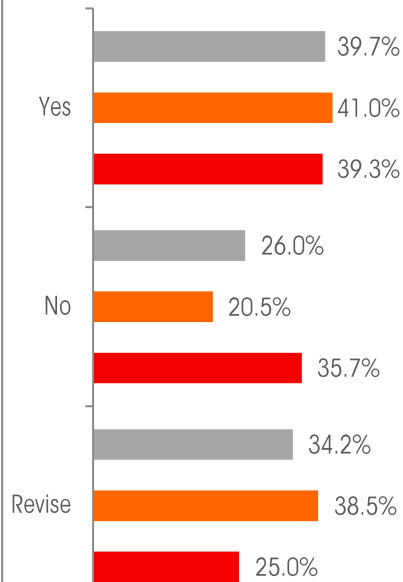
Establish a quota of one or two board positions reserved for southern voices



MOTION 4.3

To begin shifting the humanitarian centre of gravity, the Start Network must...

Create a new role (e.g. Advisory), for southern voices to engage and work with the board without being a formal part of it

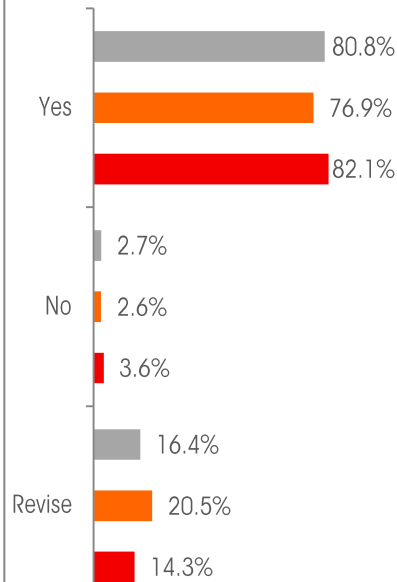


OVERALL MEMBERS
STAKEHOLDERS

MOTION 4.3

To begin shifting the humanitarian centre of gravity, the Start Network must...

Ensure significant presence and engagement of southern voices in the next assembly

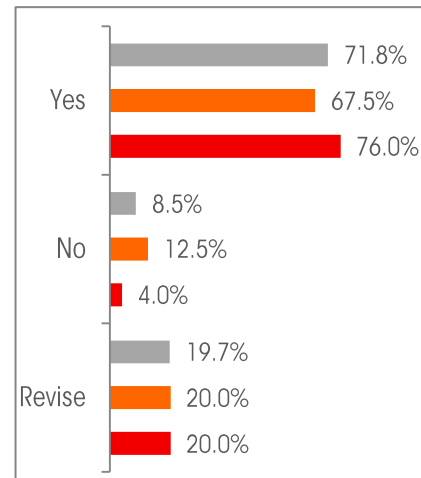


OVERALL MEMBERS
STAKEHOLDERS

There was general consensus in the room around the idea of bringing Southern voices into the conversation as soon as possible, but some difference in opinions about how this should be done...

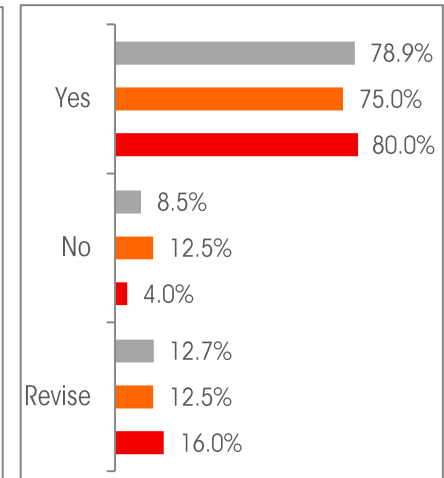
MOTION 5.1 presented by Sanj Srikanthan (IRC) and Paul Currión (Start Network)

Start Network members will foster intuitional environments that lower barriers to innovation for their staff



MOTION 5.2

Start Network members will challenge existing monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes, to connect them to specific decision making needs

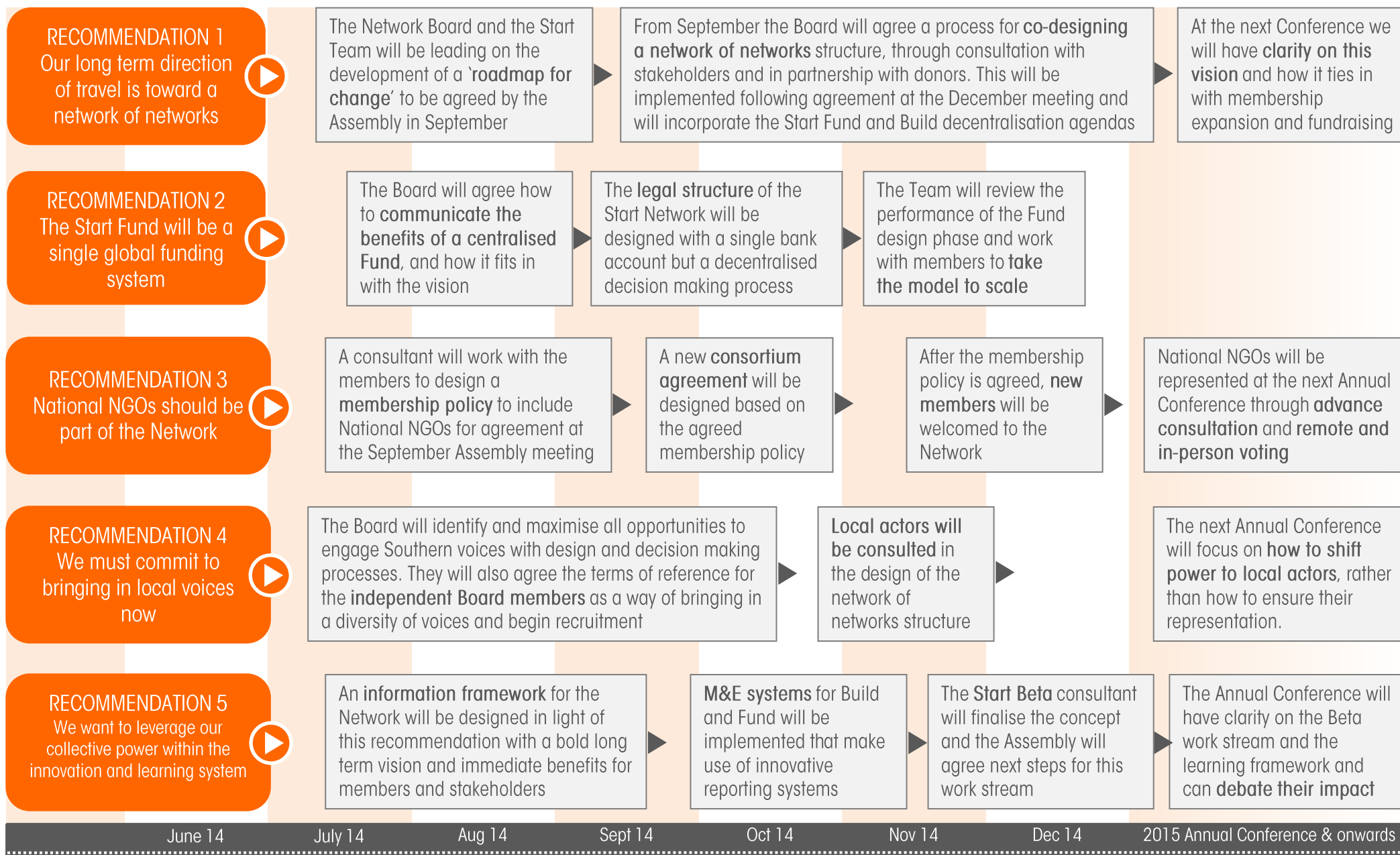


LEARNING

- Good quality debate comes from a well-informed, well prepared group of delegates and speakers who are clear about their responsibility to drive the discussion.
- A Drafting Committee must be utilised to ensure motions and proposals truly reflect the debate and enable the delegates to shape the recommendations.
- It's easy to talk about money, if we want to think creatively about the power imbalance in the sector, it must come first on the agenda.
- A physical Start Network gathering is inherently exclusive: the Start Network must enable virtual gatherings to take place to bring more voices to the discussion.
- The Start Network Annual Conference should be the culmination of a year's worth of discussion, debate and consultation.

"Many attendees didn't realise they were at the beginning of a process and hence the questions were often looking for detail that was not available." – conference delegate

PUTTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS INTO ACTION



WORKING TOWARDS THE START NETWORK ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2015

We aim to adapt the process for designing this year's event, building in lessons from the experience, to ensure next year's Conference provides even more value. The Conference will be the culmination of a year round process which is already underway.

PHASE ONE

AUG '14 – FEB '15

What do we need to talk about? Consultation with the member agencies, core team, donors and external stakeholders to identify the issues which are barriers to the continued development and growth of the Start Network. 3 or 4 key issues are selected to be taken forward for wider discussions.

Gathering agency positions Assembly members return to their agencies to agree an organisational position on each issue for discussion. This is achieved by consulting humanitarian and non-humanitarian departments to ensure a cross-agency position has been agreed.

PHASE TWO

MAR – MAY '15

The internal debate Using an Open Space format, the Assembly present their agency positions and identify common areas of alignment/ discord that they feel would benefit from a wider discussion at the Annual Conference.

Motions and proposals The Assembly works together to develop a set of motions and proposals to be debated at the Conference and an agency is selected to lead the presentation of each one.

PHASE THREE

MAY – JUNE '15

Inviting wider debate Framed by a small number of key speakers who provide context and key information, a unique delegation of 100 stakeholders comes together to debate and agree recommendations. There will be no breakout sessions, plenaries or staged panel debates, just substantive issues and the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Independent voting To keep the day moving and support this large group to reach agreement, each delegate votes for/against or revision on each motion. Votes are cast independently to ensure we capture all voices in the room: agency delegate, donor and independent stakeholder. A drafting committee is tasked with writing revisions and additions moving the Network towards alignment (if not agreement) on these key issues.

PHASE FOUR

JUNE – JULY '15

What we have discovered Recommendations and key insights are synthesised in this report and by the Network Board. They form the basis of the yearly strategic planning process, setting the direction of the Start Network for the year ahead.

Materials from the week are available online:

[Presentation slides from the Conference and Future of NGOs evening event are on our website](#)

[More photographs from the week are on our Facebook page](#)

[Videos from the week are on our YouTube channel](#)

Contents

Start Network Donor Forum, 10 June 2014 minutes	10
Start Network CEO Meeting, 12 June 2014 minutes	13
Start Network Board Meeting, 13 June 2014 minutes	16
Michael Edwards' Opening Remarks at the Start Network Donor Dinner, 9 June 2014	18

Start Network Donor Forum

Donor Advisory Group meeting, 10 June 2014

Attendees:

Mark Bulpitt, World Vision (Assembly member)
 Lisa Doherty, Irish Aid (current donor)
 Shoko Arakaki, OCHA (external advisor)
 Kerry Smith, GHA (external advisor)
 Henry Donati, DFID (current donor)
 Matt Kletzing, Action Against Hunger (Start Team)
 Nick Guttman, Christian Aid (Network Board Chair)
 Rachael Smith (Start Team)
 Sean Lowrie (Start Network Director)
 Caroline Hotham (Start Team)
 Emily Montier (Start Team)

1. Reflections on the Donor Dinner, 9 June 2014

Start Network Director Sean Lowrie encouraged the group to share reflections on the conversations that had taken place at the evening dinner the night before.

- Michael Edwards' speech was well received. Attendees appreciated his honesty about institutional cynicism, and his advice to ensure systems are aligned with the vision for consistency in tough times to deliver the vision. Although he suggested that member agencies' organizational challenges had meant that he hadn't expected the Start Network to succeed, he felt that if the consortium kept sight of the vision and maintained its emphasis on speed and efficiency, it would have a strong chance.
- Attendees found the conversation about the Start Network's transformational agenda stimulating, and wondered about how the consortium would document its journey to shift power to local actors, recognizing the challenges of this when developments were happening at such a fast pace. Members explained the on-going narrative being documented with the Partnership Brokers Association and the work of the Start Fund Focal Points who are feeding back their understanding of the challenges organizations are facing.
- This led to donors asking about the CEO level buy-in for the transformational vision. The Team explained how the development and review of the governance proposal enabled CEOs to feed back their comments and advice on securing agency-wide buy in, especially with member agencies who have large global families. The members described how they had been heartened by the fact that five new members had wanted to join since the CBHA pilot's close, and the knowledge that many more NGOs are waiting for Start to re-open its membership.
- The donors agreed that they would be interested to engage with the challenges and learning for the Start Network during this collaborative process, and that they felt that this group would be a valuable forum for this.

2. A recap on the Start Fund, its niche and focus

Sean Lowrie summarized the Start Fund:

- The humanitarian financing architecture is geared toward Category 3, high profile disasters but as much, if not more suffering occurs in small, under the radar disasters. The Start Fund provides 45 day grants for these low-profile emergencies.
- Start Fund decision are made through peer review, which puts NGO staff on the front foot in that they don't need to wait for media coverage of a disaster before they can leverage response funding. The peer review mechanism was proved in the DFID funded pilot.
- Start Network members hold themselves to account with rigid timelines that force fast decision-making, which enables the Start Fund to make a difference and fill a niche within the current architecture.
- The Start Network is currently engaged in legal conversations about due diligence to eventually enable local NGOs to directly access funding
- The Team is also designing an online platform to provide transparency and oversight to donors. The goal is to have open source software to increase the confidence of donors.

3. The Start Fund's performance to date

Emily Montier from the Start Team presented the performance of the Start Fund so far and shared a summary infographic with the group.

Questions and comments

- An external advisor pointed out the sensitivity of the needs assessments and contextual information that the Start Network uses to make allocation decisions, and that danger of relying too heavily on this data which could lead to the wrong decision if there are errors. The donors acknowledged that this was a challenge they also faced, and one that was difficult to mitigate. The Start Team explained how the Network has made a conscious choice to work with reliable independent bodies such as ACAPS and Development Initiatives who provide additional data that can be triangulated with the assessment information from the members. However, the ethos of Start Network decision making is that it reserves the space for members to use their judgment. There was a suggestion that a wider piece of work could be undertaken, perhaps in collaboration with agencies like FTS, the UN and International Aid Transparency Initiative, to evaluate what 'good data' actually looks like, and whether the Start Network could be a good platform for promoting it.
- An external advisor asked how the Start Fund's disbursement for the crisis in South Sudan fit in with its objective of filling a niche – especially since the DFID RRF had already been activated there. The members explained that the Start Fund response came four months after the DFID RRF activation, and was in response to a spike in a chronic food crisis, rather than for displacement and conflict, which the RRF targeted. There was acknowledgement that the Start Fund money wouldn't change the overall situation in South Sudan, but that it would make a huge difference for those communities that were targeted.
- An advisor asked about member agencies' internal cash flow, pointing out that with their own internal funds they could already act quickly without the need for Start Fund money. The members explained that the Start Fund money is transferred quickly to ensure cash flow issues don't arise, especially for smaller agencies whose internal funds may not be large enough for some responses.
- The Team also clarified that it takes 72 hours for the whole Start Fund process – from alert to transfer of funds, and that the actual transfer of awards takes moments. Time is also saved because agencies begin preparing and planning from when they submit their proposals.
- Donors asked about the criteria for project selection. The Team explained that the members use OECD DAC criteria to rate projects, then reserve the space for judgment to assess whether the project should be funded. Comparing the baseline for this judgment with others is where the rigor comes from, and this is something the members are working to improve upon all the time. They also explained that members do

not challenge the integrity of the proposals funding them either in their entirety or not at all, to incentivize honest proposal writing. The systems are purposely light to remain inexpensive. An advisor pointed out that proposal quality does not always correlate with project delivery, to which the members explained that they are all obliged to deliver to a high quality and hold themselves accountable.

- The donors asked about the relationship between Start Network members and partners who have implemented Start Fund projects. The members explained that they are pre-existing relationships and funds are currently channeled through one of the 19 members. The legal obligations are the same as with other donors. Although the intention to directly fund local partners is enshrined in our Declaration of Intent, the process for doing this has not yet been formalized. Donors and advisors asserted that communicating that vision is extremely important because that is the transformative value of the Start Fund.
- Donors advised the members and Team to stop compartmentalizing the different work streams and put more work into communicating the overlap between them and how together they will deliver the Declaration of Intent.
- The members talked about some of the challenges that have been experienced so far in the design phase, setting up the systems that will enable power to be shifted to the local level. This has involved managing expectations within the membership during the start-up phase, and ensuring the Allocation Committee understands the need to have a measured burn-rate on the current pot to test these things. Though the member organizations make these sorts of decisions internally all the time, strategically and collectively managing this pot of money is more challenging. The task at hand involves setting up a system to enable the Team to manage small scale allocations and larger crises to be managed by interagency committees.
- Another challenge the members shared with the group was risk management – ensuring that scandal doesn't emerge from this new mechanism, through loss, theft or fraud, whilst still enabling power to be transferred.
- Finally, the members talked about fundraising with other governmental donors. The Team explained that other governments want more clarity on the potential role of NGOs from their home country within the Start Network before they commit funding. The donors emphasized their commitment to the Start Fund and how it is adding value by emphasizing NGO collaboration over competition in emergency response. They also agreed to leverage their existing relationships with governmental donors for the Start Fund.
- An external advisory urged the Network to avoid building a bureaucracy, asserting that the value-add of the Start Fund is its speed. The group concluded by acknowledging that they are all driven by effective humanitarian assistance for affected populations, and urged the Start Network to stick to its principles, focus and mandate.
- The group agreed that this forum should take place bi-annually so that donors can engage with the development of the Start Network.

Start Network CEO Meeting

Thursday 12 June 2014, 10:00-12:00. Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, London

Summary of decisions and recommendations

- 1) The CEOs agreed to the proposed governance structure
- 2) The CEOs broadly agreed with the recommendations from the Conference and suggested that the Network should develop a theory of change and plan of activities to achieve the vision
- 3) The CEOs agreed to dissolve their formal governance group and engage with the Network's activities through the Annual Conference, with a recommendation that the secretariat should approach the CEO if agencies are seen to be disengaging
- 4) The CEOs agreed to help activate support from their counterpart agencies in donor countries to urgently engage a third donor for the Start Fund.

Minutes

1. Overview of Governance Reform

Start Network Director Sean Lowrie presented the new governance structure agreed by the members on May 21st, and the steps being taken toward governance reform. This included:

- The election of the new Network Board, which took place during the General Assembly on Monday 9th June. This Board will serve until the Start Network becomes its own independent legal entity and consists of Aleema Shivji (Handicap International); Saul Guerrero (Action Against Hunger); Matthew Carter (CAFOD); Bob Ruxton (Concern Worldwide); Nigel Timmins (Oxfam) and Nick Guttman (Christian Aid). Nick Guttman will serve as interim Chair of the Board.
- An ongoing pro bono relationship with law firm Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer who will help design the new legal agreements required. Bates Wells Braithwaite will also be hired to help design the new legal structure.
- Research currently being undertaken by the Start Team to evaluate the optimum composition of the secretariat and different hosting options for the legal entity.

Questions and comments

The group requested further clarity on the following details of the proposal:

- The composition and process for electing the Start Fund and Start Build subcommittees. The Director explained that the Start Fund Allocation Committee and the Start Build Interim Steering Committee are providing oversight for the two work streams at present. They will be determining the terms of reference for the Fund and Build subcommittees and take this to the next General Assembly meeting in September 2014. One member of the Network Board will chair each of these subcommittees.
- The plan for re-electing the Network Board when the legal entity for the Start Network is created. It was explained that a re-evaluation of the skills and competencies needed on the Board may be necessary when the legal structure is created. Whether these individuals would be drawn from the General Assembly or from the wider membership would be determined at this time. However the balance of six representatives from the membership and three independent Board members would be maintained
- How the wider issue of opening up membership will be built into the proposed structure. It was explained that the Start Team have hired consultant Ben Emmens to produce a membership policy, to be presented to the General Assembly in September.

2. Review of Conference conclusions

The Director presented the main recommendations from the Annual Conference about the evolution of the Network. These were as follows:

1. The Start Network's long term direction of travel should be toward a network of networks
2. The Start Fund should be a single global funding system
3. National NGOs should be part of the Network
4. The Start Network must commit to bringing local voices in now
5. Start Network should leverage its collective power within the innovation and learning system

Questions and comments:

- There was concern from some that the recommendations did not go far enough in devolving power to local partners. Although the recommendations recognize that global voices are needed in these conversations, the emphasis should be on building local capacity to directly access funding, instead of inviting local actors to join the pre-existing 'club'.
- It was suggested that a strategy or theory of change around the phases needed to devolve power to local actors might clarify the process. It would also show that certain implications of the recommendations that may appear contradictory are in fact optional steps along the pathway to this eventual goal.
- The group debated the current donors' risk aversion and how this did not support the Start Network's decentralization agenda. Although DFID did not say that they would never support the Start Network's transition to a fully decentralized network, the Director asserted that the consortium would need to be strong and to bring other donors on board as soon as possible in order to have the power to challenge restrictive terms and conditions.
- Some pointed that this vision of shifting power was about empowering disaster affected communities, and that the mission wasn't simply about building the capacity of local NGOs. The accountability is to local populations not local NGOs – and the members should not lose sight of the mission statement of accelerating crisis response.
- The group recognized that by opening up membership, the current members may not represent the majority in the near future, and that the members will define the nature of the Network.
- The Director asserted the importance of the Network maintaining its adaptive capacity, in order to be able to capitalize upon future opportunities. While the members could achieve alignment on the direction of the Network, planning out the next steps in too much detail would limit the scope for adaptiveness.

3. Role of the CEOs in the future

The Director presented a proposal for the future role of CEOs in the Network as follows:

- The CEOs will exercise control over their General Assembly representative using their internal management procedures
- CEOs will be encouraged to directly participate in the Annual Conference as the leader of their agency delegation. It may also be useful for a side meeting for CEOs at the Annual Conference.

Comments and Questions

The CEOs agreed to dissolve the group and acknowledged that their role had now changed, because in the past their buy-in was needed to re-launch the Fund and seek donors. Now however they acknowledged that to remain formally involved undermined the trust they put in their Assembly representatives. They agreed that it would be their responsibility to remain engaged with the Network via their General Assembly representative. However it was suggested that the secretariat should reach out to the CEO of a member agency if it were felt that their engagement starts to wane, and the Network Board could decide when input from CEOs might be necessary.

4. AOB

The Chair invited further questions or concerns from the group.

- The group requested further clarity on how the engagement of member agencies' wider families would be sought. The Director explained that the secretariat had been fundraising with donor countries for some time and had reached the limit of what could be achieved unless member agencies rallied their counterpart offices to lobby governments on the Network's behalf.
- The group discussed how DFID had suggested that there would be a gap before the second tranche of funding for the Start Fund would become available, meaning that if a third donor is not secured before September the Start Fund would need to be suspended. CEOs recognized that there would need to be fast action to avoid this happening but that the members would need to be careful to avoid setting precedents that would affect where the Network might go in the long term. However some CEOs felt it would take longer to engage sister agencies within their families than others.
- It was recognized that the fundraising issue was linked to the earlier debate about membership, and that some donor countries may be more inclined to support the Network if NGOs from their country were able to join. It was suggested that because the Norwegian government have been engaged with the Network for some time, and because the Norwegian Refugee Council are interested to join, the dynamic at play could be investigated further to figure out how to approach additional donors.
- It was also suggested that other types of donors such as private philanthropy could also provide a solution and enable the Network to become even more powerful in its ability to negotiate the terms and conditions of its funding.

Attendees

Start Network members:

1. ActionAid: Mike Noyes, Humanitarian Director
2. Action Against Hunger: Jean-Michel Grand, Executive Director
3. CAFOD: Chris Bain, Director
4. CARE International UK: John Plastow, Acting Chief Executive
5. Christian Aid: Paul Valentin, International Director
6. Concern: Rose Caldwell, Executive Director
7. Handicap International UK: Aleema Shivji, Director
8. HelpAge International: Val Stevens, Director of Finance and Corporate Services
9. International Medical Corps UK: Kevin Noone, Executive Director
10. International Rescue Committee UK: Sanj Srikanthan, Emergency Field Director
11. Islamic Relief UK: Mohammed Ashmawey, Chief Executive Officer
12. Oxfam: Graham MacKay, Deputy Humanitarian Director
13. Save The Children: Gareth Owen, Humanitarian Director
14. Tearfund: Matthew Frost, Chief Executive
15. War Child: Dan Collison, Programmes Director
16. World Vision UK: Mark Bulpitt, Head, Humanitarian and Resilience Team

Chair: Dr Randolph Kent

Start Network: Sean Lowrie, Director, Rachael Smith, Start Team, Tegan Rogers, Communications Officer

Start Network Board Chair: Nick Guttman, Head of Humanitarian Division, Christian Aid

Apologies: Plan UK, Relief International, Muslim Aid

Start Network Board Meeting

Attendees: Bob Ruxton (Concern Worldwide), Aleema Shivji (Handicap International), Saul Guerrero (Action Against Hunger), Nick Guttman (Christian Aid), Sean Lowrie, Rachael Smith, Olivia Maehler, James Eyre, David Hockaday, Tegan Rogers (Start Team)

Action Points:

- Start Team to create a Network Board agenda plan based on the priority mapping exercise
- Start Team to create a matrix to identify the role of the different bodies in decision making (consult/decide/ veto)
- Start Team to allocate a caucus to each Board member and introduce the individual as a named point of contact
- Start Team to set dates for the Assembly meetings and the 2015 Conference based on member availability

1. Priority Mapping Exercise

The attendees were divided into two groups who each brainstormed the short, medium and long term priorities and activities for the Start Network and the Team based on the recommendations that emerged from the Annual Conference. These activities were then grouped under thematic headings and it was agreed that the Start Team would build these into an agenda plan for sign off from the Board.

2. Establishing the role of the Board

Rachael Smith encouraged the Board members to establish some basic principles and procedures to guide their operations. The Board agreed to the following principles:

- The Board will be a strategic group that holds the Director to account on the Start Team's work. The Director will make proposals for approval from the Board. For example, the Board will agree the organogram and budget and the Director will be accountable for their implementation.
- The Board will meet monthly on Friday mornings. The Start Team will aim to schedule the quarterly Assembly meetings one week before the Board meeting. Minutes from Board meetings will be circulated to the Assembly who will then have the opportunity to feedback.
- The Board members will represent a caucus of the 19 members (their own agency and two others) which will be assigned to them randomly. This will enable the Board to represent the views of the entire membership and ensure quality communications between all members. It will be the responsibility of the Board member to maintain engagement with their assigned agencies.
- The Board will agree a process for recruiting independent Board members. Aleema Shivji and Nick Guttman volunteered to take forward a conversation to identify profiles for the independents.

3. Start Network Budget Discussion

Olivia Maehler presented the 2014/15 budget and a summary of the current funding situation. The current funding from DFID expires in mid-September. DFID have agreed in principle to a no cost extension but only on core costs: the disbursement pot should be spent out by mid-September. There will be a small amount of funding for disbursements from Irish Aid which expires in November. The Board discussed the following issues:

- Fundraising: The Board calculated that the Network needs to fundraise £1 million (£300,000 per month) to continue operating the Start Fund until Xmas. It was determined that Irish Aid and Norway would be the top priorities for fundraising as well as further exploration of leads with private philanthropy.

- Member agency staff capacity: Because the Start Fund secondment contracts will conclude in mid-September, the Board suggested the secondees develop a list of options to address the capacity gap. They discussed the need for evidence on the return on investment for members having a full time member of staff working on Start (or a number of staff members sharing this work load). It was suggested that the Team and secondees outline the expectations on all members to ensure accountability for these roles.
- Donor requirements: It was recognized that with DFID being the primary donor, the Start Network will need to provide detailed budgets and work plans in the short term. This will be necessary to see the Network through the transition to the stage where we can set our overhead rate with donors and not have to give detail on how it is spent. The transition will include any payments to members for their staff time, and spin off costs, and at present it is anticipated that DFID will be covering these costs. It was suggested that the Team could develop some scenarios on the range of costs for the donor.

Michael Edwards' Opening Remarks at the Start Network Dinner, London, June 9th.

Thanks Sean – I'm delighted to be with you though a bit surprised, partly because I've been trying for years to *leave* the international development sector. But like Michael Corleone in the Godfather, "Just when I thought I was out... they pull me back in." So thanks for pulling me back in!

More seriously I'm surprised to be here because I didn't give this project a cat in hell's chance of getting off the ground when I first heard about it. Don't get me wrong, it's a great idea, with a great team behind it, at the right time, but I thought it was *way* too far outside the comfort zone of both the donors and the NGOs to win any significant backing.

But here we are, so kudos to the team for getting us here, kudos to those agencies that have already opened their big fat fur-lined foreign aid wallets to provide substantial start-up funds, and kudos to the NGOs involved for supporting something that bucks the trend towards rising competition and institutional self-interest. I'm impressed.

It's a cliché to say the work starts here but I'll say it anyway (having the money doesn't actually get you very far), but if this project goes well it could be transformative in quite a big way, sending out ripples of influence into and perhaps even beyond a humanitarian system that's in need of radical change, to become one of the building blocks of a more equal, more democratic and ultimately more effective international system that can safeguard human dignity and human rights. Without being grandiose or arrogant, the stakes are high, *if* you can make it work. And that's the 56-million Pound question.

I'm not going to speak for long, and I'm going to speak a little less guardedly than I would normally do at an event like this because it's a small group that wants to get things done. We'll have a better conversation as a result, and unlike the rest of you I suspect, I've got nothing to lose. There's no board that's mad enough to hire me and no donor that's bad enough to fund me. I can't be fired because I don't actually have a job. In fact as a writer I probably work in the only profession that allows me, not just to *bite* the hand that feeds me but to make a decent living from gnawing it to the bone.

And to kick things off in that spirit I have to say that you have chosen what's possibly *the* most difficult context to do what you want to do - to transform a system, in this case the system of humanitarian assistance - from the highly-unequal, technocratic and dysfunctional system of today to something that is *much* more dynamic and decentralized; something that *shifts power* to the frontline organizations who are best-placed to make decisions; something that supports and builds up independent local initiative and capacity for the long term, and identifies a correspondingly smaller but still valuable role for international NGOs and Northern donors.

This is all highly contentious stuff, political not just technical, because it is centrally concerned with the redistribution of power and authority in a very unequal system – a system that contains a tangled web of interests and incentives that have to be unraveled and reassembled piece by piece, with a giant horrible hairy spider sitting right in the middle that represents the nexus between money, control, and disguised self-interest that runs all the way through the international system. It's a monster that has to be crushed, though gently enough to maintain your funding and organizational viability – and that's not an easy task.

Currently I edit a web magazine called *Transformation*, part of openDemocracy.net if you'd like to check it out, and there are 2 things that crop up time and again in the stories we publish regardless of the context. The first is that transforming anything - re-ordering power relations in the way you intend - implies both personal change and political or institutional change – it's no good having one without the other. You can have lots of new economic institutions to deal with climate change, for example, but they won't work at the necessary scale unless people agree to lower their consumption levels. Just as being a vegan won't do much if you live in a tiny cottage garden surrounded by a system of large-scale industrial agriculture.

And the same is true for the Start project. The changes you want to see – like equal membership rights for Southern groups or deeper collaboration between NGOs in the North – have an external manifestation in the form of policies and procedures and resource allocations and governance mechanisms and so on, but their real and lasting implementation rests on much deeper changes in human values and relationships – moving from domination to democracy for example, and from bureaucracy to trust, in order to create a support system instead of a control system for humanitarian assistance.

“Transforming crisis response” as you put it in your Declaration of Intent, and “honoring the belief that the people we serve deserve our best,” are ultimately calls to personal courage as much as to institutional innovation - the courage to do the right thing when your board chair or a local partner or the Gates Foundation or the Permanent Secretary of DFID is bending your ear about the latest fashions for value for money or accountability to taxpayers or Randomized Control Experiments or whatever is the flavor of the week, which are mostly covers for short-termism, fear and our own lack of trust and imagination.

So make sure that all your systems and incentives match up with the powerful moral and political vision that you’ve laid out for yourselves, and that you can monitor and attend to instances when the inevitable backsliding occurs. Inconsistency – especially in the public eye – will be your downfall.

The second common thread in stories of systems transformation, and this is especially problematic for projects like yours, is that developing these mutually-supportive cycles of personal and institutional change is always more difficult where large amounts of money are involved, because money accentuates the negative effects of inequality and other problems. Money itself isn’t the issue – it’s just a medium of exchange that we need to get things done – the problem is what gets *attached* to money in the form of hierarchy, status, self-delusion and control. So you’ll need practical ways of controlling for these problems given the centrality of money in what you’re trying to do.

The new business models you’re exploring may help in that regard by reducing your dependence on a small number of large donors, or they may not. In your enthusiasm for shiny new things and greater diversity in funding, make sure you understand that all commercial or market-based funding has costs and trade-offs in terms of how and where it can be used, and don’t believe anyone who tells you that there’s a perfect blend of social and financial returns out there waiting to be discovered. There isn’t. It’s a fantasy.

But this isn’t just a money problem. There are other pressures acting against system transformation that will surely push you backwards, like the co-optation of humanitarian principles by the War on Terror and the increasing use of soft power in pursuit of hard foreign policy interests, or the creeping corporatization and bureaucratization of the NGO sector, or our love affair with meaningless metrics and data collection for the sake of it.

It’s precisely because this journey is so demanding for these reasons and more that you’re going to have to help each other in ways that go far beyond conventional things like learning and experience sharing and technical cooperation and so forth, to incorporate truth-telling and mutual accountability and critical friendship when things start to go awry, acting like a support group in Alcoholics Anonymous, which is not a random example.

I’ve always felt in the aid industry that we’re a bit like alcoholics ourselves. We insist that we don’t have a problem when everyone *knows* that we do, but they’re usually too embarrassed to tell us to our faces; we make all sorts of promises and often fail to keep them; and we stop at step 3 or 4 and never complete our commitments to empowerment or decentralization or whatever the equivalent would be.

But then, once in the proverbial blue moon, an opportunity comes along to change all this, to set in motion a different process, to establish a new and healthier set of relationships, to take a stand for what we believe in deep down, to harmonize the personal and the political in ways that are fulfilling for ourselves as well as ten

times more effective for those who actually live in situations of crisis on the ground. An opportunity to *transform* and not simply *reform* power structures in the ways I believe NGOs were born to do.

The Start Project is one of those rare opportunities, and you simply *have* to take it. I'm sure you'll feel some discomfort as new ways of working begin to bite, but that discomfort will be worth it. Because not only will these new modalities reduce the depth of human suffering over time, which has to be metric number one, but they can also act as an incubator for ideas that could spread far beyond the provision of humanitarian assistance, helping to create an international system which runs on radically-different principles rooted in collective liberation instead of the web of patron-client relationships and dependency that pollute attempts at cooperation today.

It's a big risk for sure, but that's what makes it exciting. It will be a bit nerve-racking as all important journeys are, but how great is that? How great is it to be in at the start of the Start of working differently? So my advice is to enjoy the ride. Open up your hearts, minds and wallets. Support each-other as critical friends along the way. Keep going against the naysayers, stay well, good luck, and thanks for listening.