HIGH-LEVEL HUMANITARIAN EVENT ON ANTICIPATORY ACTION: A COMMITMENT TO ACT AHEAD OF CRISES

STATEMENT BY CHRISTINA BENNETT, CEO OF START NETWORK

INTRODUCTION

Good morning and afternoon participating delegates. Let me start by thanking The United Nations and the Governments of Germany and the United Kingdom for convening this important moment for anticipatory action.

START NETWORK’S APPROACH TO ANTICIPATORY ACTION

I am speaking on behalf of Start Network which represents over 55 civil society organisations, large and small, set up to bring change towards more effective models of humanitarian assistance.

The reactive nature of the humanitarian system, and the damage that this causes in terms of missed opportunities to better support communities at risk, was one of the problems that led us to launch our network. In this sense, anticipatory action has always been in our DNA.

Start Network has a twin-track approach to its anticipatory action work. The global, and national Start Funds in Nepal and Bangladesh, which are rapid, flexible, pooled contingency funding for small to medium-scale crises. Funds are allocated through collective and local decision-making processes within 72 hours. The Start Funds together have reached more than 22 million people to date and have released funds in anticipation of crises on 46 occasions.

Our second approach is called Start Ready, which is more structured, predictable, triggered funding at scale for foreseeable crises, using innovative risk modelling, collective planning and pre-positioned financing including tools like insurance. We currently have systems active or in development in 6 countries.

The reactive nature of the humanitarian system is rightly, increasingly being questioned, and through our experience implementing anticipatory action on the ground, we can see approaches and attitudes starting to shift. Since we began our anticipation work, over 60% of our members have acted on the basis of a forecast. But we must go further and there is too much at stake if we don’t.

WHY ANTICIPATORY ACTION IS NEEDED

We know that global humanitarian needs, compounded by the climate crisis, are at an all-time high and continue to grow. Humanitarian funding isn’t keeping pace with humanitarian needs. Our analysis has shown us that around 55% of the crises that we respond to are predictable, and yet less than 1% of the funding for these crises is properly organised in advance. We are always waiting and reacting when we don’t need to be.

Anticipating predictable disasters and acting early can protect the most vulnerable from their impacts. Anticipatory action also opens up opportunities to advance locally-led humanitarian action and new forms of accountability to at-risk communities. By moving from reacting to crises, to organising and managing risks in advance, this unlocks possibilities for greater ownership and involvement of at-risk communities, and accountability in terms of decision-making. Community members, who have the greatest vested interest in acting early, should be involved in deciding triggers for crisis risks, and can help determine who needs what support and when, if a trigger is met.
Our experience has shown us that anticipatory action is a more effective way of managing crises and there is a growing bank of evidence supporting this approach. Being earlier, we can mitigate the impact of crises on communities at risk. For example, through our ARC-Replica disaster risk financing project in Senegal which insured communities against potential drought, 98% of children and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers were able to maintain 2 meals a day throughout a drought - this is more cost-effective then allowing people’s nutritional status to degrade until they require a nutrition intervention. We know that when communities sell off their assets to cope with drought, this can impact the most vulnerable for decades. Anticipatory action can prevent this.

START NETWORK’s COMMITMENT TO LAUNCHING THE START FINANCING FACILITY (SFF)

Our years of experience implementing anticipatory action have allowed us to develop a model for how civil society can address risks efficiently and at scale. This is why, this year, Start Network is launching the Start Financing Facility.

The Start Financing Facility, or SFF, is a new financial infrastructure that will house a range of proven, innovative crisis financing mechanisms, offering a solution to scaling locally-led anticipatory action. Through the SFF, Start Network can commit to:

1. **A LOCALLY-LED APPROACH:** The SFF will equip frontline civil society responders with the risk analytics, training, networks and finances needed to be collectively prepared for crises. Local communities will determine which risks should be prioritised and what anticipatory actions can be put in place to mitigate these risks. This process is underway in 6 countries, and will expand to 10 within the next few years.

2. **SCALABILITY:** The SFF will maintain a diversity of anticipatory action approaches; because some crises can and should be modelled in advance, and some can’t. It will scale the flexible funding on offer through the Start Fund, increasing the number of anticipatory activations. It will also ensure predictable funding on standby through Start Ready, ensuring that pre-agreed collective plans can be put into action when crisis triggers are met.

3. **EFFICIENCY:** The SFF will offer a new model for managing pre-positioned anticipatory financing; this draws on global best practice on risk pooling and layering of different finance instruments, taking lessons learnt from other sectors and applying these to humanitarian action for the first time. This ensures that the funds pre-positioned ahead of crises can achieve up to 4 times the impact.

The Start Financing Facility is our commitment to enabling locally-led anticipatory action at scale. And we must scale-up this work in order to meet the climate crisis. But we can’t do this alone. We are working with a wonderful range of partners including our member NGOs, donors, national meteorological offices, national disaster management agencies, universities, the World Bank and many others.

We would particularly like to thank the UK and Germany for driving this agenda forward, and to our fellow members of the Anticipatory Action Task Force; The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), The UN’s World Food Programme (WFP), The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for their work implementing these approaches.

CONCLUSION

Now let me leave you with this thought. If the level of discussion, interest, research and side-events on anticipatory action were any barometer for the level of real funding we see being channelled to this approach, we would be in a very different place today. We have the technology to anticipate crises, in many places we have the systems ready to go, what we need is the funds to scale this up. Let’s support at-risk communities to get ahead of predictable crises.