

# What have we learned from the Start Fund's anticipatory response in Burundi?

SUMMARY OF LEARNING PAPER BY REKA SZTOPA PRESENTED ON 17 AUGUST, 2015



Concern Worldwide prepositioned NFI and shelter kits in Bujumbura, Cibitoke and Kirundo, Burundi.

**M**oney exists for disasters, but the system is slow, reactive and inefficient. Intuitively, humanitarian actors and vulnerable communities know that earlier response is more effective, yet there are very few funding mechanisms that support these activities. The Start Network is experimenting with ways to positively disrupt this model by using mechanisms (like the Start Fund) that provide early funding in advance of crisis situations rather than waiting until they escalate. This case study, based on a learning paper produced by Concern Worldwide, examines the Start Fund's pilot anticipatory activation in response to the risk of election violence in Burundi.

Every Start Fund project can access an optional 1% learning budget to conduct activities to improve the evidence-base for lessons learned in the field or increase beneficiary influence. Emphasis is placed on making programmatic improvements to emergency response within the project's specific context and disseminating lessons through the Network.



**Background**

On 26 April, 2015, Burundi's ruling party nominated President Pierre Nkurunziza to run for a third term, a move widely viewed as a violation of the country's constitution and threat to the country's democratic system of governance. Violent clashes followed in the capital, Bujumbura, and surrounding areas, triggering tens of thousands of people to flee to other areas of the country and to neighbouring countries. On 5 May, agencies alerted the Start Fund in anticipation that widespread political violence and government crackdowns would lead to as many as 250,000 IDPs in the coming months whose basic needs would not be able to be met by host communities. On 8 May, the Start Fund awarded a combined £442,327 to Care, Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide and World Vision to address anticipated needs associated with Health, Protection, Shelter and WaSH.

Concern Worldwide developed its learning paper from responses to a questionnaire completed by three agencies (Care, Concern Worldwide, World Vision) that received Start funding, four agencies (CAFOD, IMC, Oxfam, Plan UK) that either did not request or receive Start funding, and three UN organisations (IOM, UNICEF and UNHCR) in Burundi. Below are participant reflections and recommendations based on this particular response.

**What types of activities reflect 'emergency preparedness'?**

Typically, anticipatory activities tend to fall under either preparedness or mitigation. In the case of Burundi, Start Fund

▼ People fled into neighbouring regions in Rwanda, DRC and Tanzania due to anticipated and actual election violence



**In a world of infinite need and [finite] resources, donors prefer the relative security of investing in 'actual' disasters as opposed to 'possible' disasters. Although we do continue to receive a considerable amount of money from [one donor] for disaster preparedness work, few of our other donors or institutional partners are willing to invest in counterfactual as opposed to tangible results.**

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projects concentrated on preparedness, with the main activity being the pre-positioning of Shelter, Hygiene and Non-Food Item (NFI) kits, followed by staff and partner training, assessment and coordination. Activities that agencies defined under the term 'preparedness' fit into the following three categories:

- **Information, planning & coordination: e.g. assessments, contingency planning and analysis;**
- **Logistical preparedness (financial, human and material): e.g. contingency funds, donor engagement, ability to mobilise funds, warehouse pre-positioning of relief items, communications equipment;**
- **Human preparedness: e.g. staff training, knowledge/skills mapping, surge capacity, partners and volunteers.**

UN agencies identified nearly identical activities, with greater emphasis placed on early deployment of experts and on coordinating human preparedness through information collection and analysis mechanisms, early warning systems and the development of rapid assessments and other emergency tools.

**General challenges to emergency preparedness**

Participating agencies identified the following general challenges to their preparedness programming:

- **Lack of financial resources from donors for preparedness, especially for staff training and pre-positioning of contingency stocks;**
- **Lack of time devoted to carrying out preparedness**

▼ Christian Aid's partner supported the local Disaster Management Committee as a part of its response in the village of Gasenyi





**The activation was successful in ensuring increased emergency preparedness, particularly in the Shelter/NFI sector**



**Start Network agencies and 3 local partner organisations conducted a workshop together in Bujumbura, Burundi from 18-20 June entitled “Accountability and Protection in Humanitarian Programming”**

activities included in emergency preparedness plans, particularly in countries that have development-oriented programming;

- **Difficulty in planning for areas where their agency has no geographical presence;**
- **Difficulty in and resistance to shifting from preparedness to action, or from development to emergency relief;**
- **Onerous procurement procedures;**
- **Lack of partner capacity.**

### **Was the anticipatory Start Fund activation in Burundi effective in reaching its objective?**

Based on questionnaire responses, the activation was successful in ensuring increased emergency preparedness, particularly in the Shelter/NFI sector. Other than the Red Cross and one other major international NGO that already has an emergency mandate in Burundi, the only other agencies that have contributed stock toward the Inter-agency Contingency Plan for Burundi were the Start Fund implementing agencies.

Implementing agencies also felt that they were effective due to the timely availability of resources, enhanced contextual analysis and coordination amongst agencies, and added benefit of enhanced coordination, which was crucial within the Burundi context, which is more development-oriented and lacks strong humanitarian coordination mechanisms.

The Start Fund’s projects were also seen as the ‘NGO equivalent’ of the DFID funding being received by UN agencies for preparation for the same crisis, and seen as complementary to the actions of the UN, Red Cross and contributing to the inter-agency contingency plan. IOM and UNHCR, co-leads of the Shelter/NFI working group also noted that the agencies that received Start funding seemed to be more familiar with humanitarian standards and response mechanisms than other NGOs.

### **Assessment, Coordination and Training**

Assessment was an important part of the Start project activities. Almost all implementing agencies carried out assessments, some of which were contextual analyses or other types of rapid assessments, while others did monitoring of displacement in specific areas of operation. Many agencies also carried out assessments in neighbouring DRC, Rwanda or Tanzania.

Start Fund implementing agencies also found coordination activities to be very helpful, given the lack of humanitarian coordination mechanisms in Burundi. This has improved with the opening of a temporary OCHA office in Burundi, the establishment of 3Ws (Who, What, Where) mapping and increased sector meetings, but still needs improvement. There was less consensus on training as an effective activity in an anticipatory response. While the agencies that attended the Humanitarian Accountability and Protection training co-facilitated by Concern Worldwide and Handicap International had mostly positive feedback about the training, participation in the training was about one-third of what was originally expected, given high workloads and decreased availability of staff as a result of annual leave and remote work from Rwanda. One respondent also felt that humanitarian accountability and protection work is a gradual process and that little can be achieved in a two-day training. Agencies stated, however, that there is recognition by the UN and others that there is a lack of humanitarian capacity in Burundi, and that issues around participation could be mitigated in the future through earlier communication and greater flexibility around training dates and methods.

### **Challenges of the Start Fund’s Burundi response**

Implementing agencies identified the following challenges:

- 1** | Fewer people were displaced than expected;
- 2** | The tight timeframe of both the submission and project- Many suppliers found a 2-week delivery time challenging, and



[▲] **Prepositioning NFIs was a key component of the anticipatory response activities**

almost all implementing agencies faced problems to receive their items within the 45-day timeframe of Start Fund projects. Procurement and delivery through tender usually takes a minimum of 7-8 weeks, including one week for preparation of supplies requests, waivers, tender documents, 3-4 weeks for advertising the tender (the Ministry of Public Markets in Burundi requires a 4-week tender period for some types of items), 1 week for bid analysis, sample verification and contract signing, and at least 2 weeks for delivery;

**3** | Poor market conditions- few suppliers were available or accepting purchases without guarantees or partial payments, and few transport companies were willing to transport Shelter and NFI kits to Bujumbura given the uncertainty of the security situation;

### Key recommendations

Agencies made the following recommendations for future use of the Start Fund for anticipatory activations:

**1** | **Timeframe:** Extend the timeframe to include a longer lead-in time for coordination with partners in advance, a slightly extended timeframe for proposal submission (3-4 days), and most importantly, increased length of implementation. Some respondents did not suggest the length to increase, while others suggested lengthening the timeframe to 60-75 days, but no longer as the shorter timeframe motivated the teams to prepare quickly.

### 2 | Proposal and Reporting Formats:

- a** Put less emphasis on beneficiary figures, change the 'number of beneficiaries reached' to 'number of beneficiaries prepared/pre-positioned for', and remove age and gender disaggregation, unless estimated based on standard percentages;
- b** Instead of asking 'how the targeted population was involved in the proposed intervention', ask 'how the agency plans to involve the targeted population';
- c** Change reference to already carried out needs assessment to planning of assessments;
- d** Add a section for what the agency plans to do with pre-positioned stock if the emergency does not unfold as planned.
- e** Consider a short secondary report following the emergency, or after a defined period of time, where the final results

of the project can be presented. In the context of the Burundi activation, this could focus on how the Shelter and NFI kits were distributed, or what the agency intends to do with the Shelter and NFI kits if they are not needed by the end of 2015.

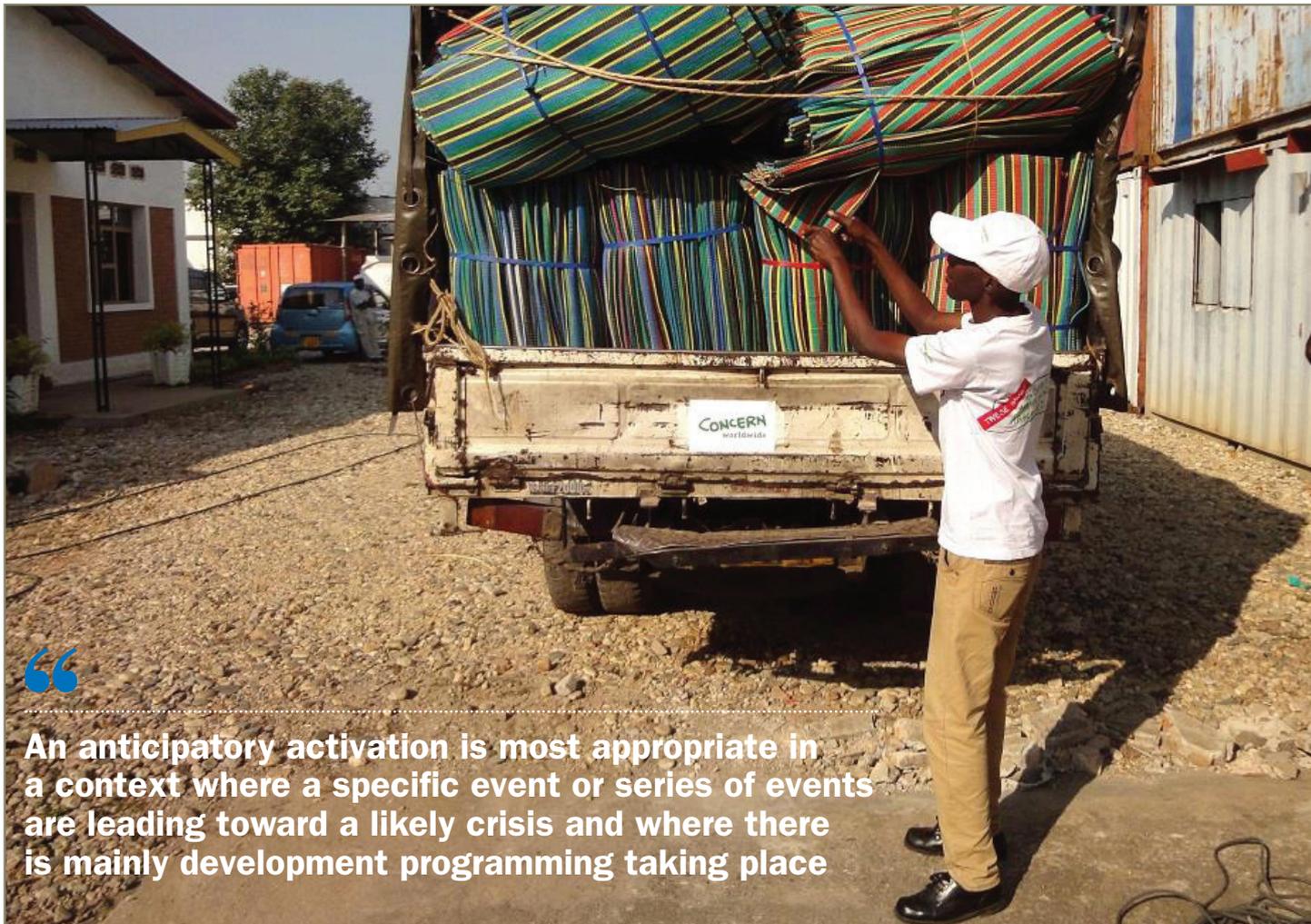
### Additional recommendations

The following additional recommendations were made by one or more agencies:

- 1** | Invite local partners to trainings, have more flexible training schedules, and perhaps offer more in-depth training for longer periods of time. Start agencies should also offer contextual analysis training to the government, include SGBV training as a protection activity, and advocate for online trainings by the organisation 'Building a Better Response' (BBR).
- 2** | Instead of a separate anticipatory activation for a specific crisis, give a percentage of Start funds to agencies for preparedness activities. This might, however, negate the added advantage of preparedness as a 'project' with a specific work plan, timeframe, objectives and activities.
- 3** | Use Start funds to set up national or regional coordination hubs that would pre-position stocks, which would avoid individual member agencies competing for the same suppliers or using the fund to do a general stockpiling of standard Shelter and NFI kits.
- 4** | Use the Start Fund to retrospectively reimburse items procured earlier using an agency's own or other funds in an effort to incentivise preparedness.
- 5** | Make anticipatory activations one part of a two-phase activation, where phase 1 is for preparation and phase 2 is for implementation (if needed).

### In which contexts are anticipatory activations most appropriate?

An anticipatory activation is most appropriate in a context where a specific event or series of events are leading toward a likely crisis and where there is mainly development programming taking place, given that areas with strong humanitarian programming tend to already have pre-positioned



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[▲] **Prepositioning supplies improved speed, cost and quality of the response when needs arose.**

stock, more readily available emergency donors and contingency funds and coordination mechanisms in place.

**What should be done in an anticipatory activation if the emergency doesn't happen?**

In the Burundi context, the two most likely possibilities are to use the relief items for returnees after the crisis, or if the trend continues to result in refugees instead of internally displaced persons, to shift the items to a neighbouring country for donation to Start implementing members working there. Another option might be to keep the items and use them for future smaller-scale emergencies such as seasonal flooding, which would still provide the Start Fund with visibility in-country, but would not be related to the Burundi election crisis. Additionally, as included in the recommendations below, proposal narratives should include

a clear 'plan B' and a secondary report should be required that demonstrates the final contribution of the preparedness activities to the overall emergency.

**Conclusion**

As the Start Fund is designed to fill identified gaps in the emergency funding architecture, including early response to slow-onset crises, and given the complete lack of emergency funding for Burundi, the Start Fund anticipatory activation was important for NGOs operating in Burundi and contributed significantly to pre-positioning of contingency stocks as part of the Inter-agency Contingency Plan. With some modifications to the timeframe and proposal and reporting narrative, future anticipatory activations in a similar development context with an emerging slow-onset crisis could be equally successful.

[ **CONTACTS** ]