Regional NGO Perspectives on the Implementation of the Grand Bargain in Asia

Asia-Pacific Regional Dialogue on the Grand Bargain
28 February 2017
Plaza Athénée Hotel, Bangkok

Ahead of this regional dialogue, ICVA arranged a pre-meeting with NGO representatives to discuss their perspectives on regional implementation of the Grand Bargain. As a result of this pre-meeting, the current document was produced. There are many NGOs with diverse perspectives in the region, and we cannot present a consolidated position. However, in contributing to the discussions at hand, we ask participants in the Asia-Pacific Regional Dialogue on the Grand Bargain to consider the following points.

The strong presence and engagement of NGOs is one of the Asia Region’s key strengths. The Asia region has many unique characteristics that will impact the implementation of the Grand Bargain. Therefore this implementation should be thoughtful, nuanced and contextualized to the region. One of the strengths of the region is the active role played by national and international NGOs in disaster preparedness and response. The position of NGOs as frontline responders, their proximity to communities and their unique and diverse ways of working should all be considered as assets to the implementation of the Grand Bargain commitments.

The Grand Bargain is a multistakeholder agreement and NGOs, along with all signatories and partners in the region, must play a central role if it is to be successful. The role played by NGOs in the Grand Bargain negotiations at global level should not be overlooked in its implementation at regional and national level. NGOs firmly believe that the success of the Grand Bargain will be determined by its implementers. The Grand Bargain was a unique multistakeholder forum, with no single agency overseeing or ‘owning’ the result. Therefore in implementation we should maintain this collaborative, inclusive approach.

The Grand Bargain can bring real benefits to the Asia region, if practical steps that build on ongoing work and will have real outcomes in the next major emergency in the region are prioritized.

Commitments related to supporting national and local responders, investing in capacity, inclusive coordination mechanisms, and reduced administrative barriers to accessing funds resonate heavily in the region. Many of these areas are extensions of work that has been ongoing in the region for a number of years and NGOs stand ready to develop or implement further programmes that will help to build on this foundation. However, the mechanisms to support these must be developed now and cannot be improvised during an emergency. It is important to understand the state of this work in the region, to highlight examples of success and to prioritize those areas that will have maximum impact in the next major regional disaster.

Many of the Grand Bargain commitments require collective action towards system change.

It must be acknowledged that any such system change will require time, realistic deadlines and a clear process to get there. Consistent effort and consistent reporting on progress by all signatories and partners will be needed to build trust in this collective action. NGOs recommend that the IASC Regional Network form a Grand Bargain working group, including participation of NGOs representatives, to coordinate these efforts at regional level.
The Grand Bargain was intended as a package and should be implemented as such.

Today’s meeting is focused on four areas highlighted by donors during recent responses; needs assessments, cash-based programming, localization and participation. However, the Grand Bargain should be looked at in its entirety, as it was negotiated as a package. NGOs advocate for similar effort to be demonstrated on commitments related to simplified and harmonized reporting, reducing management costs, multi-year funding, and the humanitarian-development divide. NGOs will continue to advocate for all of the Grand Bargain commitments to be upheld, recognizing that while some signatories may chose to focus their efforts on those areas that play to their strengths, collective efforts should in sum address all of these.

Discussions and actions must reach the ground level so the benefits of the Grand Bargain can go where they were intended.

The Grand Bargain recognizes that the humanitarian system is an ecosystem of diverse actors where those organizations best placed to respond receive funding flexibly, swiftly and sustainably. The Grand Bargain contains a number of elements clearly designed to benefit frontline actors, such as access to multi-year funding and reduced earmarking, and these benefits must be passed on to NGOs and other local actors as intended. This means resources must be dedicated towards the additional support required to leave the ‘policy level’ and reach as close as possible to the communities we all serve. This is what ‘as local as possible’ means. NGOs propose that regional reporting on Grand Bargain progress must wherever possible include real examples of where this work is having an impact at field level.

NGOs support the use of existing mechanisms, networks and partnerships wherever possible.

A key message in the Grand Bargain transition meeting (held in Bonn in September 2016) was the need to avoid creating additional bureaucracy. To the extent possible, signatories in the region should use existing multistakeholder mechanisms (e.g. IASC Regional Network, Regional Humanitarian Partnerships Forum) and networks to implement the Grand Bargain.

Continued regional engagement is needed

The newly-appointed Grand Bargain secretariat (hosted by the IASC Secretariat in Geneva) will begin work soon. She should be supported to proactively engage beyond Geneva, to ensure the Grand Bargain is understood and will eventually have real impact at all levels. To facilitate understanding of the importance of regional processes, ICVA will share NGO perspectives on the key outcomes from this meeting with the Grand Bargain Facilitation Group and the Grand Bargain Secretariat.

The Grand Bargain is about the efficient use of aid and is not a panacea for all humanitarian financing issues.

NGOs and other humanitarian actors are continuously being asked to do more with less funding, and there are real concerns that funding available to humanitarian needs in Asia will continue to be even further constrained. It is important for all signatories and implementors to understand that the Grand Bargain does not address the funding gap, which was the reason the High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing was convened in the first place (see The ICVA Grand Bargain Briefing Paper). Work on the Grand Bargain should therefore not replace the additional work needed to find ways to maintain and increase humanitarian financing.

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