

ICVA CASE STUDY #1

THE 8 + 3 NARRATIVE REPORTING TEMPLATE

Short summary of the case study:

ICVA's Humanitarian Financing work advocates to ensure funding can flow as effectively as possible to meet the needs of populations affected by crisis, as well as supporting better access to humanitarian financing for NGOs. Resourcing humanitarian action is one of the key issues for NGOs and all other actors involved in providing humanitarian assistance. As a network ICVA collectively promotes adequate, accessible, transparent, principled and sustainable resourcing for humanitarian action. ICVA understands that NGOs need flexibility to respond to humanitarian crises and to have access to timely, predictable, earmarked or unearmarked funding that has realistic conditions and reporting requirements.

Following the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and the Grand Bargain, nine Workstreams and 51 commitments were developed. Workstream 9, "Harmonise and simplify reporting requirements", contains three commitments:

- Simplify and harmonise reporting requirements by the end of 2018 by reducing its volume, jointly deciding on common terminology, identifying core requirements and developing a common report structure.
- Invest in technology and reporting systems to enable better access to information.
- Enhance the quality of reporting to better capture results, enable learning and increase the efficiency of reporting.

One main outcome of this work is the development of the harmonised narrative reporting template known as the "8+3 template". This mechanism has been accepted by and is in use in a number of organisations. The template is a menu of standardised report elements (eight "core" and three "additional") that each donor can tailor to fit its individual information needs when they ask NGO partners to report on humanitarian activities. In order to further enhance further the positive impact of the reporting template, some recommendations are made below.

Timeline of the initiative:

ICVA is a signatory to the Grand Bargain and has been involved in its processes since it began in 2016. In 2016 ICVA and the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO) were designated as the co-conveners for Workstream 9 and for harmonised narrative reporting, and thus assumed overall leadership on this initiative. One of the initial actions taken by Germany was to contract the Global Public Policy Institute

(GPPI) to lead a review on harmonising donor reporting. In 2017 interested stakeholders from the group of Grand Bargain signatories met in Berlin to discuss the potential for piloting harmonised narrative reporting, and it was agreed to carry out a two-year pilot, in Myanmar, Iraq and Somalia. Germany and ICVA collaborated with the GPPI to develop and implement a pilot on the 8+3 template between June 2017 and June 2019. UNHCR, UN OCHA, UNICEF, and WFP committed to piloting the template initially, also joined by Germany, Canada, Switzerland, Sweden, UK, Norway, and Italy. Additional participants (such as France) were able to join during the pilot.

Once the pilot was underway, ICVA worked closely with its members, through ICVA's Humanitarian Financing Working Group, to provide reports and analysis, and to seek feedback to prepare ICVA's positions related to two of the Grand Bargain commitments: supporting local and national responders and reducing burdensome donor conditions. In 2019 several clear, concise and comprehensive information documents were produced, resulting in improved external dissemination and understanding, including:

- The 8 + 3 template: A new way of standardizing, simplifying and harmonizing humanitarian reporting
- Frequently asked questions
- The 8 + 3 template: Essential guidance on using the new harmonized reporting template

ICVA's role and influence:

A key element in the implementation of the 8+3 pilot was a clear division of labour between ICVA, Germany and GPPI. ICVA's primary role was to engage with NGO partners and the UN system, while the GFFO engaged primarily with government donors and the EU. GPPI maintained primary technical responsibility to develop the 8+3 template, associated guidance, and conduct reviews of the pilot work. This division of responsibility helped to ensure effective engagement with different stakeholders and to capture constructive feedback through the semi-independent role of GPPI. As part of the engagement with NGO partners, ICVA also organised orientation sessions with colleagues in the field to ensure better understanding of the objectives of using the 8+3 template. Field missions were conducted in-person in both Myanmar and Somalia to discuss the 8+3 template and field implications for the broader Grand Bargain. Virtual engagements were also conducted for field colleagues in Iraq. These engagements also helped to facilitate improved feedback from ICVA members in the field as part of the GPPI-led reviews of the pilot work. Whether explicitly part of the pilot or not, all NGO members of ICVA receiving funds from a donor or agency using the 8+3 template have been involved to some extent, particularly where funding comes from multiple donors using the template.

How the process and outcome reflected ICVA's priorities, and related to the Theory of Change:

Three of the "Top Outcomes" in the ICVA Theory of Change have been positively influenced in the creation and use of the 8 + 3 Narrative Reporting Template:

- **Cross-cutting issues:** NGOs navigate and influence changes in the response to affected populations. Policies and systems improve.
- **Humanitarian financing:** Needs of the populations affected by crises are better met. Less Paper More Aid initiative reduces donor conditions on humanitarian aid. NGOs more easily access donor funding.
- **Coordination:** Coordination contributes to effective assistance and protection to those affected by crises. Collective NGO ability to engage and influence coordination mechanisms is strengthened.

How the work has influenced the humanitarian sector:

One main aim behind development of the 8+3 template was to simplify reporting on the part of NGO partners. For these partners, the physical burden (less time and fewer resources involved) and the perceived burden (consistency of reporting) have been lightened. This has allowed staff who otherwise may have been involved with various reporting templates coming from different donors, some more complicated than others, to realign staff time for other tasks in assisting affected populations.

What has been the positive impact so far?

There are several concrete benefits associated with the reporting template:

- Direct feedback on use of the template was collected by GPPI as part of the mid-term and final reviews of the pilot, and field practitioners, donors, and agency representatives reported good results in terms of simplification and report quality. The template has simplified reporting on the part of both donors and partners, thus making reporting more transparent and less cumbersome. The main negative feedback in terms of burden was focused on the need to adjust to a new framework, not an issue with the 8+3 template itself.
- Workstream 9 was one of the first Grand Bargain workstreams to pilot and utilise a new tool which has demonstrated positive usage at field level.
- The fact that UNHCR (with over 1,000 partners) and UN OCHA have accepted and are using the template is an extremely positive development, and in turn may encourage other UN agencies to do likewise. All NGO partners of UNHCR and UN OCHA Country Based Pooled Funds are now automatically using the template as part of standard reporting. Six donor governments are now using the template, and other donors are engaged in partial use.
- International NGOs are also asking their national NGO partners to adopt the template, thus achieving increased consistency with internal management systems.

What could be further improved?

- Though the 8+3 template has been adopted by some UN agencies, donors and NGOs, further adoption by donors and agencies is important to achieve maximum benefit and support systemic change in reporting. This would increase the likelihood that individual NGO partners will have a reporting relationship with multiple agencies or donors using the template, which is an important factor in reducing the burden associated with reporting. There is a need for further advocacy to encourage a broader range of donors and agencies to implement the 8+3 template.¹
- Level of staff turnover is a recurring challenge, with NGO staff sometimes re-assigned or leaving for other agencies. This may create varying levels of understanding among users and call into the question the need for additional orientation on the use of the template.
- The use of the template by international NGOs with their local and national partners would be a further step towards harmonising reporting throughout the humanitarian system. INGOs have been encouraged to consider use of the template with their partners.
- Additional work is underway on other aspects of project management – a harmonised narrative proposal format, a harmonised project description format, the single audit initiative, and financial reporting among them (as for example, the Norwegian Refugee Council “Money where it counts” initiative).
- Frequency of reporting is an issue that was identified early in the discussion on harmonised reporting, but not yet fully addressed by the 8+3 template. The initial guidance for the 8+3 template focused mainly on reporting content with an encouragement to require reporting quarterly or less. However, donors still decide on the frequency with which they require narrative reports. Future review of the template could better address this issue.

The way forward – some recommendations:

- **Additional acceptance and usage:** The number of UN agencies and donor governments using the 8+3 template continues to grow over time. However, greater participation is important to realise the maximum benefit of harmonised narrative reporting in reducing the burden of reporting on humanitarian field staff. It is recommended that efforts continue to secure more buy-in from agencies and donors involved in supporting humanitarian work. Within the UN system, WFP and UNICEF are still considering the degree to which they will adjust reporting to make use of the 8+3 template; a number of donor governments are still working toward implementation of the 8+3; and larger INGOs are encouraged to use the 8+3 with their local NGO partners. This would be another step towards ensuring practical implementation of the Grand Bargain commitments to harmonise and simplify reporting and

¹ A current list of participating agencies and donors is available online: www.harmonizedreporting.com.

would further reduce reporting burdens of field-based NGOs that continue to face multiple reporting requirements.

- **Translation:** The 8+3 template is currently available in English, French, and German. It is suggested that efforts continue on further translation (Spanish and Arabic being likely languages to consider) to enable broader usage in programmatic work in other languages.
- **Usage by development agencies:** Though the Grand Bargain and its follow-up actions have focused on the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action, the reporting elements included in the 8+3 template can be easily adapted for use by development donors and for NGOs engaged in development activities. It is noted that the International Labour Organization (ILO) is initially using the 8+3 template for nexus-related projects.
- **Sustainability and future review of the 8+3 template:** Based on feedback received through the pilot work, GPPI, supported by ICVA and GFFO, has already worked to further simplify some aspects of the 8+3 template and related guidance. In order to ensure relevance of the 8+3 template over time, it will be necessary to carry out a review of the template by users to determine what updates and adjustments may be required, if any. (Some donors have introduced the template only late last year.)