



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION



Grand Bargain Annual Meeting 2020: A Joint Statement from NGO Networks

With another Grand Bargain Annual Meeting and reporting cycle now complete, we would like to extend our congratulations to all signatories for their efforts to implement Grand Bargain commitments over the past year. Now as we enter the fifth year of implementation, the original commitments remain as relevant as ever. Even if the speed of implementation has not matched initial expectations, the Grand Bargain continues to drive improved impacts for affected women, men, and children.

Implications of COVID-19

The rapid onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a unique challenge to the humanitarian system with the pandemic affecting all countries, and a truly global response required to combat its effects. Despite the significant challenges presented by COVID-19, the urgent response required also presents a critical opportunity to put into practice many of the commitments that are at the foundation of the Grand Bargain.

Measures currently being implemented in response to the needs arising from COVID-19, such as flexibility in partnership agreements and a renewed investment in localisation, have the potential to transition into longer term, standard practice. With increased need for global solidarity and the high degree of financial uncertainty globally, measures to improve trust among stakeholders and increase efficiency and effectiveness are more relevant and pressing than ever.

Good progress, and a need for further action

According to the 2019-2020 self-reports completed by signatories and the consolidated Grand Bargain independent annual report completed by ODI, good progress was made in the implementation of many commitments over the last year. However, along with this progress, NGOs also note the need to undertake further action to ensure Grand Bargain commitments result in practical, meaningful change in the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian operations.

With completion of the pilot work to test the **8+3 template for harmonized narrative reporting** we now have a finalized reporting template that can be implemented by donors, UN agencies, and INGOs with their partners to reduce the burdens of narrative reporting and increase consistency in reporting requirements across humanitarian actors. Eight donors and UN agencies are now using the template or in the process of rolling it out.

- NGO colleagues call on donors and UN agencies to make full use of the completed 8+3 template and supporting materials in fulfillment of the commitment to harmonize narrative reporting.
- NGOs will seek to expand use the 8+3 template in partnerships between INGOs and our local and national partners to reduce burdens.

Efforts to push forward with **quality funding** measures to increase flexibility and expand multi-year funding picked up speed in 2019. The need for flexibility in funding has also emerged as a critical issue in COVID-19 response. It is vital that donors and UN agencies work closely with NGO partners to move from dialogue to the development and application of practical tools to improve access to quality funding in the field.

- NGOs call for further efforts to ensure that flexibility arrangements are cascaded through the humanitarian funding chain.
- NGOs commit to transferring flexibility to our own partners, and to using our own independent funding in flexible ways.

- NGOs also call on donors to address blockages in funding and to ensure that money reaches frontline workers as directly as possible.

The commitments identified under the **need to reduce duplication and management costs** inspired action to develop the [Money Where It Counts Framework](#), under the leadership of Norwegian Refugee Council, to simplify and harmonize cost classifications across humanitarian actors. In January 2020, NGOs and UN agencies also pushed forward the discussion on [reducing the burdens of partnership agreements](#), with a strong push from UNHCR to make significant changes to financial, due-diligence, and other aspects of partnership. The work undertaken by the IASC through the Humanitarian Finance Results Group to introduce [flexibility measures in funding agreements to improve the ability of partners to respond to COVID-19](#) is also linked to the Grand Bargain commitments to simplify oversight processes (including assessments and verifications).

- Much of the work to simplify and harmonize conditions of funding has been undertaken by UN and NGO colleagues. NGOs ask donors to step up their engagement in these efforts to reduce burdens across the system.
- Where products have already been developed for further piloting or implementation - such as Money Where It Counts, and IASC Funding Flexibility guidance – NGOs call on signatories to take action to move forward quickly with implementation and demonstrate progress before the end of 2020.

The need for **enhanced partnership with local and national actors** was identified early as a key component of the COVID-19 global response. Beyond the discussion on increasing direct funding levels to local and national partners, efforts have been made over the past year to engage local partners in the IASC bodies, in identification of COVID-19 GHRP needs, and to develop localisation as a cross-cutting lens for how to improve humanitarian action. However, these efforts still fall short of what is needed.

- NGOs call for further recognition and visibility given to the role played by national and local actors, ensuring they are engaged in decision-making at all levels. [The Charter4Change](#) sets out what this should look like.
- On an equal basis with other humanitarian actors, NGOs support the call from national and local actors to access improved quality funding, including appropriate indirect costs.
- To realise the vision of a participation revolution, NGOs call for stronger championing by humanitarian leaders of practical participation in programme design and delivery, in particular the early participation of affected people and local partners in activity and budget design.

An emerging dialogue on risk

All humanitarian actors will recognise that risk is an inherent factor in humanitarian action. Although numerous references were made to the need to manage risk in the original Grand Bargain text, it is only more recently that signatories have begun to explicitly link risk with the underlying issue of trust that is critical to the achievement of the objectives of the Grand Bargain. It is through improved mutual trust that donors, UN agencies, and NGO colleagues can build solid partnerships and reduce oversight and administrative burdens that can divert time and resources away from efficient and effective humanitarian response.

- We call on signatories to take forward the dialogue on how to move from risk transfer – the passing of risks on through the chain of humanitarian funding, to risk sharing – the equitable management of appropriate levels of risk among partners.
- We also call on those with power – primarily donors – to think through how they can support those with less power – particularly local and national NGO partners – when things go wrong.

Although this work does not represent the fulfilment of any single Grand Bargain commitment, it is a cross-cutting issue that is critical to carry forward in order to achieve the overarching objectives of greater efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

The future of the Grand Bargain

The Grand Bargain continues to serve as a unique framework within the humanitarian system, with representation from donors, UN agencies, and NGO partners alike. Heading toward the fifth anniversary of the Grand Bargain in 2021, it is clear that we need to consider the future of the agreement and how to ensure continued and deepened implementation of its commitments.

While changes to how we implement the Grand Bargain may be necessary, it is important that we do not lose sight of the value of the original commitments. Humanitarian needs have continued to grow and will continue grow further: COVID-19 direct and indirect consequences are creating deep socio-economic damage, and the warning signs for hunger have already emerged. Along with the expansion of needs, the gap between needs and the funding available to address them has also expanded. The year leading up to the 2021 Annual Meeting will be critical to develop a future vision for the Grand Bargain that matches action for ongoing implementation of commitments with an appropriate support structure.

We call on signatories to support:

- Maintaining the Grand Bargain as a multi-stakeholder framework with equal participation from donors, UN agencies, National and International NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. To do this effectively, signatories must also consider how to engage more effectively with national and local actors.
- Continued refinement of core Grand Bargain commitments. Looking ahead, we must refine and carry forward selected transformative commitments that offer the greatest opportunity to unlock and cascade system-wide change. Implementing substantive change in the enabling areas of transparency, reduced duplication and management costs, needs assessments, quality funding and risk sharing will greatly contribute to this goal.
- Clear political commitments to fight inequality within the humanitarian system, accompanied by investment in the practical changes required so that all actors can truly engage on an equal level. With the recent focus on structural racism, we commit ourselves, and call on other signatories to commit, to working to decolonize aid and address racism and discrimination within our sector.
- Further development of linkages with external groups, initiatives, and mechanisms to support improved practical implementation of commitments. While the Grand Bargain framework retains an important role to ensure broad stakeholder representation in dialogue on humanitarian efficiency and effectiveness, there is a need to better connect with IASC Results Groups, donor groups such as the Good Humanitarian Donorship group, etc. to mutually support the development of policy, tools, and guidance to implement Grand Bargain commitments.
- Increased dialogue with field practitioners to ensure that the implementation of Grand Bargain commitments result in clear action and measurable change at the field level.
- Development of clear guidance on sustainability for the Grand Bargain, including: Transition of workstreams as commitments are met; adjustment of workstream leadership over time; needed structural changes to maximize support for implementation of commitments.
- Using the fifth anniversary of the Grand Bargain as a key opportunity to examine linkages to the two other recommendations of the HLP report focused on shrinking humanitarian need by addressing the root causes of humanitarian crises, and deepening and broadening the resource base for humanitarian action.

The need to ensure political commitment to the Grand Bargain has been a recurring theme throughout the first four years of implementation and remains key. For the year leading up to the 2021 Annual Meeting, it will be particularly important to ensure that signatories renew political will and are able to dedicate the resources necessary to develop a sustainable model for the Grand Bargain moving forward. NGO signatories commit to be propositional and work closely with stakeholders to build a strong joint vision for the future.