

Grand Bargain and the reverse engineering

The third annual meeting of the Grand Bargain signatory parties took place in Geneva on June the 27th. All signatories congratulated the Outgoing Eminent Person and World Bank CEO Ms. Kristalina Georgieva for her vision and ongoing contributions to the Grand Bargain process. Participants were also introduced to the new Eminent Person, Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Netherlands Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. Sharing her vision, Ms Kaag highlighted how although not perfect, the Grand Bargain is still the best available motor so far and called for a reverse engineering, i.e taking time to deconstruct and analyse the purpose of the various elements and how they have progressed so far.

The 2018 independent report provided food for thoughts in this regard. Areas where progress has been reached include increase multi-year collaborative and flexible planning and multi-year funding, ‘with 78% of donors reporting that they had maintained or increased their multi-year funding in 2018, including five donors who increased the share of their overall humanitarian funding that was multi- year to over 50 and two providing four-year agreements for unearmarked core funds’. Cash programming in humanitarian settings has expanded, while there is also a renewed commitment in addressing sexual and gender-based violence. The workstream on localisation also performed well with seven signatories reporting they had met or exceeded the 25% target, compared to five in 2017. Progress has been achieved also with workstream on harmonised reporting, where the co-conveners ICVA and Germany, together with participating signatories, have had substantial success in testing the use of a challenging single, simplified reporting template by a range of donors and aid organisations.

In terms of challenges it was highlighted however how progress remains uneven between workstreams and commitments. There is little exchange and collaboration between the workstreams and co-conveners with the Grand Bargain considered both over-structured and under-governed, creating an unnecessary burden on signatories to engage. More efforts are needed in areas such as considering the impact of domestic politics on donors’ risk tolerance; increasing the transparency of aid expenditures down the chain; on identifying and addressing the barriers to more flexible funding and on reducing or mitigating the impact of compliance requirements.

The Eminent Person called the signatories to scale up successful piloting and make them a well-established practice while addressing challenges, including through high level political dialogue. And as we move ahead, may be the Grand Bargain needs to lose a bit of its grandeur in scope and transaction costs, to gain in focused results and trust. As some signatories duly highlight, it is not only about financing, it is rather about making a system based on values work.

The Independent 2018 report can be found at: <https://www.odi.org/publications/11387-grand-bargain-annual-independent-report-2019>