



The Grand Bargain in Action

An ICVA statement on implementation of the Grand Bargain 2.0

June 2021

Five years after the Grand Bargain was introduced in March 2016, signatories to the agreement now have an important opportunity to take stock of progress and propose ways forward. While substantial progress has been achieved in many of the commitments of the Grand Bargain, it is also clear that significantly more work remains to be accomplished. In ICVA's view many of the challenges we face today in the humanitarian sector can only be addressed through multi-stakeholder collaboration in platforms such as the Grand Bargain. As we approach the June 2021 Grand Bargain annual meeting, ICVA is committed to both support the continuation of the platform and assess how we can reframe the process to be more effective and inclusive.

Why do we still need a Grand Bargain?

The Grand Bargain was explicitly developed to address effectiveness and efficiency in humanitarian funding, ensuring thereby enhanced people-centered responses. It is a unique initiative where donors, UN agencies, the Red Cross movement, and diverse NGOs come together as equal participants committed to jointly change the system for the benefit of people in crisis.

Despite the efficiency gains achieved during the first five years of the Grand Bargain, humanitarian needs continue to increase exponentially. The existing gap in available funds constitutes an imminent threat to the lives of millions of girls, boys, women and men around the world; finding solutions is not up to bargaining anymore, but an imperative for which we are all responsible.

Now, more than ever, it is critical that stakeholders in the humanitarian system improve the efficiency and effectiveness of existing funding. The global response to the Covid-19 pandemic clearly demonstrated that there are ongoing issues with efficiency in humanitarian funding that prevent frontline responders from accessing resources when and where they are needed. In some cases, the bureaucratic impediments that the Grand Bargain was intended to overcome have strengthened. *Fulfilling the core commitments of the Grand Bargain remains a critical part of the solution through which more effective and efficient humanitarian response can be achieved.*

The Quid Pro Quo

The concept of 'quid pro quo' has been closely associated with the Grand Bargain from the start. The commitments included in the agreement represent a collective set of complementary actions for different humanitarian stakeholders, that when accomplished together, are designed to improve the system. *It is critical that the 'quid pro quo' in Grand Bargain is not interpreted by signatories in a way that limits action pending another group of signatories acting first. Signatories to the Grand Bargain agree to take action to fulfill the commitments of the agreement - not wait for other to act first.* The goal of improving efficiency in humanitarian funding is not to benefit donors and their partners, it is to better meet the needs of people in crisis to the benefit of all humanity.

During the past couple of years humanitarians have increasingly focused on issues of trust that guide the relationship between donors and partners. The need to build trust, including more equitable sharing of risk, between humanitarian donors and partners is an important foundation for moving the Grand Bargain forward beyond the concept of 'quid pro quo'. *ICVA strongly supports efforts to better understand risk, improve risk sharing, and build trust in parallel to action on Grand Bargain commitments.*



Connecting the Grand Bargain to frontline action

For the Grand Bargain to be effective, implementation of commitments must result in real change for frontline responders. Although developed as a global policy initiative, the Grand Bargain was intended to change the humanitarian system and improve its ability to meet needs, increase support for those at the frontline, and expand participation of national and local actors in decision making. So far, we have witnessed mixed success among the Grand Bargain workstreams in initiating action that results in measurable change. Greater participation of diverse frontline responders throughout the process would contribute to enhanced ownership and more inclusive humanitarian action.

This improved focus on support to frontline responders must also involve enhanced engagement with diverse local and national NGOs in the implementation of the Grand Bargain. Local and national NGOs, including women-led organizations, are uniquely placed to reach and represent affected populations. Ensuring their participation is critical to more efficient and more inclusive humanitarian action, reflecting better considerations of age, gender, disability and other diversity factors of affected populations. Doing this well will require a balance between the Grand Bargain commitments and support for implementation that is flexible enough to respond to the expressed inputs of local actors.

ICVA supports both expanded direct participation in Grand Bargain global discussions, meetings, and workstreams by local actors as well as a focus on bringing the Grand Bargain to the country level. More explicit efforts to implement Grand Bargain commitments in ways that are relevant and beneficial to local partners will be important to future success; this will be a key focus for ICVA under the Grand Bargain 2.0.

Gender and the Grand Bargain

Although there is no dedicated workstream on gender within the Grand Bargain, there is a need to ensure that commitments are implemented in alignment with efforts to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Women and girls are frequently affected disproportionately in humanitarian crises, and it is critical that the humanitarian system is structured in a way that ensures womens' groups are represented in leadership, planning, and implementation of the Grand Bargain.

The Grand Bargain 2.0 proposal

The proposal for a Grand Bargain 2.0 is a significant change to the logic and structure of the framework. ICVA supports the identification of quality funding and localization as overarching enabling priorities, under which the commitments of the Grand Bargain can be effectively organized. Access to quality flexible funding as defined in the Grand Bargain commitments is vital for humanitarian NGOs to effectively respond to humanitarian crises. Likewise, the need to improve support to diverse local actors and ensure the meaningful participation of affected communities are critical elements of effective response, as demonstrated also by the COVID-19 recovery efforts and remain relevant top priorities under which we can organize the next phase of the Grand Bargain.

Under the new proposed enabling priorities, efficiency and effectiveness, visibility, risk sharing, and accountability are identified as crucial themes for effective implementation. Risk sharing and accountability, in particular, are critical to ensure that sufficient levels of trust are maintained among Grand Bargain signatories to support mutual implementation of commitments.

What must not be overlooked in the reform of the Grand Bargain are the agreed commitments - particularly the core commitments - that are the foundation of the initiative. The proposal to shift toward a structure focused on resolving political blocks, enabling priorities, and better engagement with local partners will not be



effective unless the link to underlying commitments is clear. Furthermore, the strength of the Grand Bargain in general will be weakened if signatories do not maintain sufficient dedication to fulfill agreed commitments. ICVA continues to support refinement, simplification, and reorganization in the interest of facilitating improved implementation of the agreed Grand Bargain commitments. Updating the approach to the Grand Bargain for the sake of improving the process without sufficient focus on what we are working toward will not result in greater effectiveness.

Although supportive of creative approaches to overcome political barriers to implementation of commitments, ICVA is mindful of the need for strong accountability among signatories to the agreed commitments of the Grand Bargain. Success of the proposed voluntary-led caucus approach requires that signatories take their commitments seriously and choose to actively engage.

The critical roles of the Eminent Person and the Secretariat

In addition to adopting a new approach under Grand Bargain 2.0, there is also a significant opportunity with the transition in the role of Eminent Person. The success of a revised Grand Bargain 2.0 is also highly dependent on the Eminent Person to play an active role in driving change. A hands-on and visible Eminent Person will be needed to work with signatories and drive commitment to change at a high-level.

Kristalina Georgieva and Sigrid Kaag, in their roles as the first two Eminent Persons, both contributed significantly to the overall tone and approach to implementation of the Grand Bargain. Now, Jan Egeland will have the opportunity to shape the dialogue, notably bringing the NGO perspective to the Eminent Person role. During the initial Grand Bargain negotiations in 2016, NGOs, IFRC, and ICRC were added to the dialogue to improve representation of those on the frontlines delivering aid. With a renewed focus in Grand Bargain 2.0 placed on connecting to support for leadership, delivery, and capacity of local responders, the timing is right for Mr. Egeland to take on the leadership role.

Likewise, the role of the Secretariat will also be important moving forward in a new structure to support the improved logic impact, enabling priorities, outcomes, outputs, and activities. The dual objectives of strengthening the logical organization of the Grand Bargain while at the same time reducing bureaucracy and simplifying will require strong leadership and effective support from the Secretariat to guide the process.

In summary

The experience of Grand Bargain implementation over the last five years demonstrates that positive change is possible when there is strong political willingness accompanied by collaborative efforts on technical solutions. Today, a renewed commitment by signatories is critical if we expect to achieve the full benefits of the agreement.

The improved framework represented in the Grand Bargain 2.0 is an important part of the solution. But this will require that signatories maintain their level of commitment, take advantage of simplified structures, work through political barriers, and keep their focus on achieving what needs to be done to better meet the needs of people in crisis. To steer the Grand Bargain 2.0, Jan Egeland as Eminent Person and the incoming Facilitation Group will depend on the committed engagement and actions of all signatories.

Importantly, the Grand Bargain is no longer an initiative among high-level global signatories only. There is a growing expectation among local actors and affected people that they should see the benefits of implementation at the frontlines. The people we work with expect from us today not to shy away but build upon our existing work to do more and better. As signatories of the Grand Bargain, we must deliver. Reform to the humanitarian system is too important to let fail.