

Facilitation Group Sherpa meeting with Grand Bargain Ambassadors

Summary Note

19 March 2024

The Facilitation Group (FG) Sherpas (EU/DG ECHO, Germany, OCHA, UNICEF, IFRC, InterAction, NEAR) met with the Grand Bargain Ambassadors Manuel Bessler and Michael Köhler on 19 March 2024 in the margins of the European Humanitarian Forum in Brussels. Co-chaired by the EU/DG ECHO and OCHA, the meeting offered an opportunity to strategically steer the localisation agenda within the Grand Bargain, emphasising the importance of collaboration between the Ambassadors, the Facilitation Group Sherpa and all Signatories to find practical solutions to existing challenges as essential to drive progress.

In his opening remarks, Ambassador Köhler recalled the role of the Facilitation Group as a sounding board to assess progress within the Grand Bargain and drive reforms of the humanitarian systems to make it fit to address the needs of vulnerable people.

Ambassador Bessler highlighted the importance of capitalising on the existing success within the Grand Bargain, such as the outcome documents of the caucus on [funding for localisation](#) and the [role of intermediaries](#). He stressed the need for Signatories to implement these outcomes within their institutions to improve their policies, standards and operational practices. Ambassador Bessler underscored his commitment to closely monitoring this progress and ensure the comparability of data to identify areas for progress, with Facilitation Group members concurring and noting that the revised self-reporting would serve as a means of tracking advancements.

Initiatives to drive progress on localisation:

- **Best practices catalogue:** a collection of good practices, particularly on quality funding for locally-led action is planned to encourage progress and scalability.
- **National Reference Group event in Türkiye:** this event aims to facilitate direct dialogue with the local and national actors and to include their perspectives in the Grand Bargain discussion. Acknowledging the role played by National Reference Groups (NRGs), Ambassador Bessler would like to invite any interested donor Signatory to co-chair the event with him (date yet to be confirmed).
- **NEAR-led mapping of localisation initiatives:** this preliminary mapping focuses on three main areas: localisation strategies, local actors' networks, local actors leadership and participation in the UN system. The mapping will be shared with the Secretariat.
- **UNICEF-commissioned case studies:** these case studies, available after October 2024, aim to better capture pathways of change and share more information on lessons from implementation of locally-driven actions.
- **Technical discussion on localisation:** IFRC and Denmark are set to officially conclude the Workstream on localisation on April 26 and discuss the subsequent steps.

- **Risk-sharing:** several Signatories are currently testing the [Risk-Sharing Framework](#) through pilot programs. An [outcome report](#) detailing learnings from a simulation exercise has been released. This report provides insights and lessons for organisations looking to implement the Risk-Sharing Framework, highlighting findings and recommendations from the simulation.

While acknowledging the progress achieved by the Grand Bargain on localisation commitments, the co-chairs of the Facilitation Group, EU/DG ECHO and OCHA, highlighted that more needs to be done to unleash the transformative potential of localisation. To this end, the Facilitation Group members were invited to reflect on existing challenges and barriers to promote sustainable localised approaches.

The discussion focused on the below challenges:

- *Capacity of local and national actors:* very often decisions are shaped on the basis of the generalised assumption that local and national actors have limited capacities to implement and scale up operations in line with humanitarian principles. This is not supported by evidence. In addition, it should be stressed that the lack of access to quality funding generally undermines local capacity to invest in quality staff, systems, and processes. Similarly, the growing trend of 'nationalising' international humanitarian aid organisations and the staff poaching is also considered as limiting the internal capacity of local and national organisations.
- *Risk aversion:* donors and international aid organisations are generally considered being risk-averse and they often tend to pass high compliance requirements to local partners, creating a significant reporting burden for them.
- *Leadership:* while efforts have been undertaken to include local and national actors in international or UN-led coordination structures, their participation has not always been translated in equal or meaningful role of local and national actors in decision making.

The Facilitation Group also highlighted that challenges are contextual and should be analysed on a case-by-case basis.

Originally, the meeting was intended to address engagement with Signatories and other stakeholders. However, due to time limitations, it was decided to concentrate solely on localisation for the entire meeting. A virtual call between the Ambassadors and the FG Sherpas will be arranged separately to discuss this topic.

Key recommendations:

- Push the localisation agenda forward through continued advocacy and awareness raising, capitalising on the convening power of the Grand Bargain.
- Continue monitoring the progress made within the Grand Bargain, including the implementation of the caucus outcomes by the Grand Bargain Signatories. Build on existing initiatives, scale-up actions that promote equitable partnerships with local and national organisations.
- Consider the impact on risk-sharing and their potential limiting effects on meaningful localisation.