

Grand Bargain Annual Meeting Statement June 2020

Four years after being agreed at the World Humanitarian Summit, the Grand Bargain continues to show its value as a platform and space to discuss and take joint action among UN, NGO and donors to increase the effectiveness and transform the humanitarian system so it serves the people affected by crisis. The progress made in certain workstreams is creating systemic shifts in policy and practice and positive normative guidance in areas such as cash programming, localisation, participation, joint intersectoral needs assessments, multi-year funding and transparency. Post-2021, the Grand Bargain must adopt a bold intersectional approach to inclusion, anchor women's leadership and gender at its core and be an inclusive, safe, and transparent space that brings much needed change to the humanitarian system.

The Covid-19 pandemic is testing the humanitarian system worldwide, creating new challenges to first line responders and adding impacts to populations already affected by displacement, armed conflict, and the climate crisis. It is positive that the first review of the Covid-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan comprises Grand Bargain norms and guidance that underpins the linkages with the long term structural vulnerability issues and the recognition of the importance of local and national organizations in the response, as ActionAid does in its humanitarian and resilience work. The Global response plan links cash programming with social protection systems, states that funding should go to national and local actors as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs, and recommends that this funding should be flexible and fast-tracked.

Given the gendered impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is crucial that further revisions of the plan situate gender equality, gender-based violence, women's access to sexual and reproductive health services and women's leadership and agency and the role of young people at the centre of the response. This response as well as future and ongoing humanitarian work should take on board and apply the joint efforts made by the Friends of Gender Group in past years. This previous work, which has included extensive consultations with women's organisations in different regions, has:

- Embedded a strategic focus on gender-responsive localisation.
- Ensured a gender lens in data collation and analysis of needs assessments.
- Encouraged greater focus on promoting the leadership of women and girls in their communities and in aid decision-making processes.
- Advocated for increased collation of evidence on use of cash to address gender inequalities.
- Improved the tracking of funding to women's rights organisations (WRO) and women's led organisations (WLO).

The upcoming Grand Bargain annual meeting on June 25th will be a good opportunity to discuss the progress made and the challenges that remain for embedding a gender-responsive approach in the agreement and ensuring a transformative effect in the humanitarian system.

For this to happen, there is a need for greater recognition of the strategic knowledge and experience that national locally led organisations bring to humanitarian and resilience work. Localisation needs to be in the agenda of the annual meeting and addressing the remaining political and practical barriers to progress needs to be a priority for next year's plan.

Secondly, the role of women and local women's organisations need to be singled out and resourced in a manner that supports and considers as key its long-term transformative work. The **localisation workstream** needs to build on:

- Promoting women's leadership and strengthening participation of local women groups in humanitarian coordination across clusters.
- Having dedicated and flexible funding to WROs and WLOs.
- Institutional strengthening related interventions, including ensuring equitable partnerships and capacity building for WLOs and WROs.

Thirdly, the **cash workstream** should develop the facilitating role that women's groups have to play in ensuring cash programming reaches and benefits the community, and those hardest to reach.

Finally, the **needs assessment workstream** should find ways to empower women and their organisations to participate meaningfully in needs assessments and ensure that rapid gender analyses are carried out as part of needs assessments.

ActionAid supports the continuation of the Grand Bargain post-2021. However, the agreement needs to have a renewed form and approach that places gender and power at the centre of the analysis of political obstacles that continue to stall progress in some areas. This approach will also provide clarity on the signatories' common vision for the future of the humanitarian system.

The new transformative platform needs to be accountable at global and local level to affected populations in crisis, women, young people, and their organisations, with a strong commitment to support women's and girls' leadership from the national level. It must be locally owned as well as being transparent in terms of how increased voice and funding of local organisations as well as other agreed transformations are progressing. The new Grand Bargain also requires a new governance structure in which the Friends of Gender Group and local groups, women's and young people's organisations are included. This structure would serve as an overarching umbrella for existing related initiatives, normative frameworks, and commitments, aimed at advancing gender equality and women's and young people's local leadership and decision-making in the humanitarian system.

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