



A4EP statement - Future course for a Grand Bargain 2.0 Time to walk side by side

The World Humanitarian Summit(WHS) consultation process opened the space for voices of local and national actors about their experience of the global humanitarian system and its impact locally. As part of the preparations for the WHS in 2016, the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing sought solutions to close the humanitarian financing gap. Their report made recommendations to shrink the needs, deepen and broaden the resource base for humanitarian action, and to improve delivery¹.

The Grand Bargain, launched during the WHS in Istanbul in May 2016, is a unique agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations who have committed to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action.

In August 2020, Alliance for Empowering partnership (A4EP) became the 63rd signatory to the Grand Bargain. The vision of A4EP is a world where sustainable, independent and accountable local organisations promote a society based on democratic principles, equality and social justice, and particularly in aid-recipient countries, are leading voices and play a leading role in relief and humanitarian assistance.

Our mission is to create an active and effective network of independent and locally grown organisations and global activists. We provide a platform for promoting South – South cooperation through information dissemination, sharing experiences, evidence, good practice and learning. We contribute to on-going research and debates, and develop consulted and commonly agreed positions and advocacy strategies around the global agenda of ‘localisation’ ‘participation revolution’, ‘transparency’ and accountability.

This paper has been developed to articulate the perspectives of A4EP members on the future direction of the Grand Bargain v2.0. The target audience of the paper is the Eminent person, the Facilitation Group, Ministers, Principles and signatories who endorsed the future direction of the Grand Bargain. The paper highlights the key areas that need to be included and addressed by the future Grand Bargain.

Changes to allow local actors to better assist people in need in their countries

From Inequity to de-colonised humanitarian action

Members of A4EP, the local CSO leaders, voice concern at the lack of attention to shrinking needs. The Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO) 2021² shows the sharp increase in the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance in 2021. Over 235.4 million people require humanitarian assistance this year against 167.6 million people in the preceding year. While Covid19 pandemic could be one reason for this higher number, the GHOs of previous years, as shown in the table below, present the same ever-increasing trend with the exception of year 2019.

Year	People in Need	People to receive aid	Funding required
GHO 2020	167.6 million (27.3%)	108.8 million (16.2%)	\$28.8 billion (3.5%)
GHO 2019	131.7 million (9%)	93.6 million (0%)	\$21.9 billion (7%)
GHO 2018	135.7 million (5%)	90.9 million (0%)	\$22.5 billion (4%)
GHO 2017	128.6 million (6%)	92.8 million (9%)	\$22.2 billion (10.4%)
GHO 2016	125.3 million (0.8%)	87.6 million (5.3%)	\$20.1 billion (2.6%)
GHO 2015	77.9 million	57.5 million	\$16.4 billion

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/high-level-panel-humanitarian-financing-report-secretary-general-too-important-fail>

² <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2021-enarfres>

We note that the same signatories who are sitting at the table are also contributing to humanitarian situation because of their support to authoritarian regimes by selling arms and/or providing aid that are perpetrating violence against civilian populations. Currently Yemen is the case example but there are many others. We see a worrying trend of many UN agencies highlighting plight of the people for raising more funds to meet humanitarian needs, however we do not see equal political efforts invested in seeking early and durable solutions to shrink the needs. It is alarming to see social media messages from heads of multilateral agencies thanking the perpetrating countries for providing billions of dollars in aid for the crises caused by them, instead of putting political and diplomatic pressure and holding them responsible for crisis and inviting them to negotiation table. Their geopolitical engagement in supporting authoritarian regimes are contributing to protracted crisis and perpetuating rather than shrinking needs. Serious attention and accountability measures are required to focus on the political and durable solutions to the protected crisis. The principles of Neutrality and Impartiality are being breached in how aid is conceived and allocated. Yet, the principle of Neutrality is particularly referred to when denying direct funding to local actors and justifying direct operational presence of INGOs and multilateral agencies. The way the aid is conceived at present is perpetuating the power imbalances rather than addressing the power differentials. Colonial attitudes, systematic racism, discrimination and lack of diversity dominates the aid system, the impact of which is felt by the local actors and communities. There are negative narratives and ingrained biases and prejudices against local actors both by international and national staff of international actors.

Recommendation: 1

- a) Eminent person and the principals hold high level political dialogue to address issues of protracted crisis.
- b) Renew commitments to seek durable solutions involving people affected by protracted crises to reduce number of refugees and IDPs.
- c) Humanitarian aid must go hand in hand with concerted efforts on humanitarian advocacy and political action by the states to find durable solutions.
- d) Integrate the nexus approach (humanitarian+development+peace+climate) in Global Humanitarian Response Plans. Only relief centric response plans must be discouraged given the increasing frequency and intensity of disasters.
- e) De-colonise aid frameworks and system and develop contextualised frameworks that ensure local and national actors and communities are actively included in providing solutions.
- f) Address gender inequity, racism, prejudice, discrimination and lack of diversity in the aid sector as a high priority.
- g) Address the power imbalance between international and local actors and governments.

From shrinking space to expanding the space

Robust and active local and national civil society is a healthy sign of functioning society, which is very much valued, encouraged and supported in the global North. Since signing of the GB commitments there is evidence of an alarming trend of International NGOs nationalising and expanding their operations in the global South replacing and marginalising local civil society within their own contexts. This is also weakening the local indigenous democratic and rights movements. This is causing existential crisis for the already marginalised local civil society, which was otherwise looking up to the WHS process with lot of optimism. It is understandable that donors need intermediaries to manage multiple partnerships. However, this mechanism should be based on complementarity instead of sub-contracting, risk transfer and exploitation of local actors. Furthermore, intermediaries shouldn't be encouraged to establish their surrogate offices to pass on funds committed for homegrown local and national actors. Large grants by donors to INGOs consortia with conditionality to have local partners is leading to local organisation being approached for securing funding and afterwards there is little benefit or accountability to the local organisation. They are side-lined when making decisions or allocation of funding. We call for GB donor signatory governments to review their partnership arrangements to consider how their framework partners are implementing their mandate.

In the race for deepening and broadening the resource base the INGOs and the UN agencies are now also raising funds in the aid-recipient countries, using their sophisticated fundraising machinery, presenting themselves as local actors when it suits them, while still accessing international funding and competing with local actors at country level. This is leading to suffocation of vibrant and diverse CSO at local level and also the local architecture evolved through generations of experience. Many regional coordination/networking platforms are also dominated by INGOs or their surrogates, the local voices are lost or so weak that they do not contribute meaningfully. Both INGOs and UN agencies are now monopolising every operational, policy and resource space in countries where there is strong possibility to mobilise

and/or raise funding. There is a need to revisit the IASC Definitions Paper to make the definition apolitical and thereby creating a facilitative environment for locally rooted CSOs.

Recommendation 2:

- a) Donors need to pay special attention when providing large grants to INGOs consortia to ensure it does not lead to increase exploitation of local partners.
- b) Stop further nationalisation of INGOs. The existing branches of INGOs registered in countries should not be treated as national CSO but should be required to complement and support home grown CSOs. They should be shifting roles, shrink their operational space while providing support for increasing space for local/national actors.
- c) INGO and UN should only be operational as a last resort otherwise they should be reinforcing and not replacing local actors in operational and policy space should be complementing the local actors.
- d) Establish country-owned and locally led pooled fund in aid-recipient countries earmarking percentage only for access by local actors.
- e) Develop a localisation maker to assess progress.
- f) Review and revise the IASC definitions of local, national and international actors.
- g) Set up a simplified county level dashboard , respecting the IATI principles, that can be used by all actors so funding can be more clearly tracked to where it is most needed at country level.

Ensuring equitable partnership and accountability to population in need

The evidence from local actors is showing that some signatories are exploiting local partners as cheap labour and sub-contractors without any voice in design or decision-making processes. The bureaucratic processes also take time so most of the time the response is not timely and the local organisation then bear the brunt of dissatisfaction of the community in need. At present the procurement is carried out by international partners in faraway locations even within the country, which hinders timely response. Often there is a problem of poor quality products which then must be distributed by local organisation, this exposes them to criticism and complaints from communities they serve. The local actors must bear the brunt of the dissatisfaction when the projects are misconceived and top down and do not meet the needs of the community. It is the reputation of local organisation at risk and they lose credibility in the eyes of the populations and the government. It is hard to explain to the community the local actors are only distributors. Local actors invest a lot in building up capacity of its staff. Their capacity is constantly being undermined by international actors hiring away the most talented staff through unethical and unfair hiring practices. This is because of the high salary scales implemented by international actors which are not locally sustainable.

Recommendation 3:

- a) Acknowledge the contribution of local actors and trust in their capacities and understanding of local context. Form more equitable and respectful partnership.
- b) Allow the flexibility to have more participatory processes in designing and implementing with community involvement in monitoring the procurement and other processes. This would greatly improve community participation process.
- c) Provide overhead costs, multi-year flexible funding to local actors for timely and predictable response to the community.
- d) Stop undermining the capacity of local actors by hiring away their most talented staff by paying much higher salaries which are incompatible in the local context.
- e) Involve community in reducing risk of PSEA, and in realizing localisation and participation revolution commitment of the Grand Bargain.

Fast tracking progress at country level

The last five years of experience of the Grand Bargain has shown that progress is slow and deep rooted systems change takes time. The short term two-year planning is leading to ad hoc activities which are not bringing required system wide change. The Grand Bargain v2.0 needs a longer time horizon and commitment, in line with SDGs and Sendai Framework for DRR and Paris Climate Goals. For the Grand Bargain commitments to be meaningfully moving forward, it needs to be systematically implemented at country level. There must be a country level process road map with M&E framework to ensure accountability. An independent evaluation of how the commitments are being implemented and a more robust and transparent reporting mechanism which is public (not only self-reports) can provide objective view on progress, just

as local actors must provide proof and all the paperwork to report on the implementation of their projects. Same standards should apply to signatories of the Grand Bargain on their commitments. Funds are being raised in the name of the populations. So in the name of good stewardship, there must be more aid transparency as to how much of the funds are reaching the communities in countries. Furthermore, the v2.0 of the GB should come up with strong evidence that the commitments made by the signatories have been decentralised to their country offices as well. Once commitments are made, delivery on them should be mandatory not voluntary.

Recommendation 4:

- a) Extend the timeline for the Grand Bargain v 2.0 to 2030.
- b) Engage Principles in high level dialogue to harness political will to make real progress.
- c) Carry out a review of state of localisation at country level, identify gaps and good practice.
- d) Create a road map and action plan.
- e) Create a localisation task force co-led by local actors and supported by international actors.
- f) Monitor the progress at country level.

Increasing representation of local organizations in global discussions

At present the global and country level aid architecture displays authoritarian tendencies with decision making in the hands of a few powerful actors with patriarchal attitudes who dominate the resources. In some cases the Grand Bargain work stream co-conveners are playing gatekeeping role rather than facilitating collaboration and inclusion. There is a serious lack of diversity and inclusion of local actors in the aid architecture and the Grand Bargain process. Where local actors are present, their voices are not being heard or being able to influence the decision making because they are outnumbered. In some cases, they are being co-opted and instrumentalized, sometimes against their own local CSO colleagues. Many local leaders both men and women, who are now empowered to speak up are facing backlash from International actors. Retaliation takes place through withdrawing funding, not considering them for funding, blacklisting them or deliberately ignoring them. Sometimes this retaliation is institutionalised and other times it is behaviour from individuals that goes unaddressed due to their position of power and privilege.

There are many barriers for local actors taking part in the coordination mechanisms. Often, being member of a network is a pre-requisite for joining coordination platforms. Network membership comes with a subscription cost, which is not affordable for many local actors as they don't get overhead cost. The local women's networks and other local coordination mechanisms are often either ignored or side lined in decision making processes. There must be inclusion of local actors right from the local, district level to national level with diverse actors who work on different issues of disability, youth, gender, etc. Make the participation in discussions beneficial for local actors in terms of tangible progress. Local context should be the basis of any action. Coordination should be closest to the ground and led by local actors. Donors and NGOs should seek complementarity and must identify unique role that compliments local actors.

Recommendation 5:

- a) Open up and broaden the representation and participation of diverse networks of local actors from local, national and regional level at the Grand Bargain table.
- b) Democratize Grand Bargain governance and decision-making so it does not remain in the hands of a few powerful international actors and is more representative.
- c) Create a safe space for local actors to share openly and honestly the issues without retaliation or backlash.
- d) Create an ombudsman to regulate the aid architecture and act on accountability breaches and acts of retaliation.

Showing leadership and becoming strategic partners

Local actors have an important role to play with communities in initiating actions to address root causes of vulnerabilities that requires strategic thinking and leadership. The thinking capacity of local actors has been undermined through the practice of sub-contracting. Local actors need intellectual freedom to innovate and synergise local wisdom with the technological advancement. Local actors should make time to think, innovate, be reactive and be more proactive in coming up with propositions not remain reactive. Local actors need to ensure as well accountability and show good stewardship of the resources that are entrusted to them. They need to ensure they retain their independence and act according to its mission, vision and values to serve the community.

Recommendation 6:

- a) Initiate actions with the involvement of communities to address root causes of vulnerabilities that requires strategic thinking and leadership.
- b) Support movement to create momentum and campaign in countries to raise awareness about the Grand Bargain commitments and demand accountability.
- c) Develop an active communication strategy and gather evidence of progress being made against the commitments.
- d) Pool resources and create solidarity of the willing and move forward. Create their own accountability framework and be propositional.
- e) Create a system for local actors to support each other, galvanise local resources for joint advancement, work more towards South-South CSO co-operation and challenge efforts to colonise their resources or intellectualism.

Members of the Alliance for Empowering Partnership



Website: www.A4EP.net Twitter: @A4EP2

Contact numbers of Persons for further information:

<p>Singh, Sudhanshu S, Chief Executive Officer, Humanitarian Aid International, India, Email: sssingh@hai-india.org Mobile: +91 9953 163 572 https://hai-india.org/</p>	<p>Patel, Smruti: Director, Global Mentoring Initiative, Switzerland email: spatel@gmentor.org Tel: +41 79 561 4749 www.gmentor.org</p>
--	---