

The Grand Bargain Annual Meeting 2019

Outcome document

Opening session: The Grand Bargain Annual Meeting 2019 was opened with a video message by the **outgoing Eminent Person Ms Kristalina Georgieva**: Good progress had been made: a more focused and strategic approach, supported by combining some of the workstreams to achieve greater impact; the developing of prioritized commitments and indicators to better track implementation, and enabling better reporting. *"We now have an irreversible momentum in the Grand Bargain, but also we need to recognise there is more work to do. We saw in the Annual Independent Report a consensus among Signatories that the full potential of the Grand Bargain will require more efforts from all of us,"* said Ms Georgieva, followed by greetings by **Mr Mahmoud Mohieldin**, World Bank Senior Vice President. The message was reinforced by **Mr Mark Lowcock**, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, who said that *"while our system is an effective system, it would not be true to claim that it's an efficient system."* He indicated the following areas as priorities for scaling-up: *cash-based programming, passing on benefits of multi-year funding to implementing partners, better risk management, high-quality needs assessments, and independent assessments on accountability to affected people.* The **new Eminent Person, Ms Sigrid Kaag** laid out her vision for identifying what could practically and collectively be achieved in the next two years to strengthen effectiveness and efficiency through the Grand Bargain, highlighting the need for *"reversely engineered"* steps until 2021, when Signatories would meet in Amsterdam at the five-year mark of the Grand Bargain. By then, the humanitarian system needed to achieve transformative change in its own processes and towards affected people. *"If we want to retain the label Grand, now is the moment,"* Ms Kaag said, highlighting that *"we have a responsibility to propose a suggestion towards improvement."* The Grand Bargain is a process for *"the ones who hold us in trust but ultimately the ones whose lives we seek to save and improve."*

Presentation and Discussion of 2019 Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report Findings: On behalf of the Grand Bargain Facilitation Group, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) had commissioned ODI to review the collective progress made by the Grand Bargain Signatories in implementing their commitments and draft the Grand Bargain Independent Annual Report. ODI presented the key findings of the report. Compared to last year, self-reports provided ODI with much more quality data. According to ODI, there was **tangible progress** and measurable gains in efficiencies and effectiveness were achieved in some areas. ODI identified that there were growing **normative**, and, in some cases, **operational shifts**, including in cash programming, multi-year funding and planning, localization, harmonized reporting and needs assessments. It is also clearer where investments in new technologies, operational modalities or approaches may be worth scaling up to multiply impact for measurable gains in efficiencies and effectiveness, for example the use of biometric registration systems, targeted investments in institutional capacities of local actors, and increased coordination on cash platforms. In addition, the report noted an increased engagement by workstreams and groups/individual Signatories at country level. Finally, the

Grand Bargain was acting as a vehicle to push forward on pre-existing commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment.

However, **challenges** continued to inhibit progress towards the Grand Bargain's overarching goals. Firstly, progress remained uneven as a result of differing nature of investments and the lack of a collective focus. Secondly, despite the efforts to streamline commitments in 2018, Signatories still perceived the Grand Bargain as a heavy burden due to the scope of commitments, annual reporting requirements, and engagement in workstreams. Thirdly, the quid pro quo¹ was not functional as the different constituent groups were not really working together to achieve the overarching goals of the Grand Bargain and were reaching a critical impasse on several key issues. Most critically in ODI's view, there had been limited political dialogue taking place across the Grand Bargain framework at a senior level of respective constituencies.

In conclusion, ODI felt that there was a much more positive environment – a stronger and renewed energy around the Grand Bargain, which **could realize significant and meaningful gains** with 2–3 more years of effort.

The participants recognized that the new reporting template requires more work but that it is necessary in order to get more quality data. Participants welcomed the report as a basis for further discussion. In addition to the report findings, inputs from the Grand Bargain workstream Co-convenors were also drawn on in the subsequent sessions.

Leveraging Progress for Transformative Change: The session, moderated by UNICEF, focused on identifying and agreeing **priority areas where progress has been achieved** and where increased Signatories' participation **could realize greater transformative impact**.

- On **transparency**, publication of data to IATI increased, but still not across the board due to lack of user-friendly accessibility of data for further use, and due to concerns on duplications between IATI and FTS. The discussion focused on centralizing and clarifying the data management systems and ensuring their interoperability (e.g. FTS being able to pull in IATI data).
- A simplified **reporting** format (8+3) had been designed and tested in participative and transparent manner. While the consultations were still ongoing, the experiences so far had generally been positive. There was a call that constituencies should adopt the simplified reporting template to maximize the impact. Political leadership would be key to encourage adoption.
- In relation to **Needs Assessments**, a lot of work has been done to reach a common understanding on approaches, methodologies, SOPs, and other tools by a group of experts and the workstream. While there was some debate about the need for further consultation and validation of the new guidance/tools versus starting to immediately roll-out the newly created guidance/tools, the Signatories agreed on the critical importance of coordinated needs assessments and joint analyses and the need to move forward in specific contexts.

¹ The concept of quid pro quo implies that if donors and agencies each accept changes, aid delivery will become more efficient by freeing up human and financial resources.

- On **localization** a lot of work has been done on clarifying a more holistic conceptual approach and acknowledging access to funding, capacity strengthening and adequate risk management as key for effective localization. At the same time there was a need to refocus on solutions to address barriers. Investing in capacity building was considered important, going together with inclusive decision-making, South-South leadership, and equipping local partners with the right tools for managing risk.
- **Cash** programming had been going through a system-wide normative and operational shift. Now the focus needed to be redirected to strategic issues for operational efficiency and scaling up, underpinned by greater coordination.
- As for **participation revolution**, the Co-convenors proposed some concrete operational ways forward based on the obstacles and bottlenecks document, but dedicated expertise and system-wide interagency solutions were needed, along with capacity to implement the solutions.
- The **humanitarian-development nexus** commitments remained valid and needed to be better integrated in other Grand Bargain areas.
- Also, gender equality and women empowerment showed some substantial advancements, that should be leveraged in the next months.

Participants discussed that to achieve further progress **ways to reestablish trust and the increase in compliance requirements** needed to be discussed, as increasing requirements increased management costs, running counter efficiency gains. It was agreed that Signatories would work on finding ways towards more harmonization of requirements.

The following actions were identified:

- **Greater transparency:** Align or better connect data platforms, ensure complementarity, simplify data and publication requirements, focus on 'data for a purpose', and on user-driven data needs.
- **(True and Equitable) Localization:** Focus on quality in partnerships and support, through capacity development, engagement of women and youth organizations, involvement of organizations championing results for other marginalized groups and help managing the risks adequately, including by addressing compliance obstacles, such as counterterrorism legislation, and building trust..
- **Cash programming:** Focus on coordination, including more inclusive participation, and continue working towards the improvement of cost management and enhancing the quality of cash funding.
- **Impartial needs assessments and joint analysis:** Roll out joint needs analysis and supporting tools collectively, ensuring adequate capacities are in place to do so.
- **Participation revolution:** Incentivize participation of local actors in program planning and implementation, for example through compliance if deemed appropriate with Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS).
- **Harmonized simplified reporting:** Scale-up the adoption of the 8+3 reporting template, supported by political leadership for Signatories to agree to use it.

- **Gender equality and women's empowerment:** Focus on outcome level as opposed to only mainstreaming and ensure its inclusion in the workstreams. Refer to the IASC definitions of gender equality and women empowerment, available [here](#).
- **Communication:** Provide better visibility of best practices in implementation of commitments, transformative changes, good incentives, and of progress.

Addressing barriers to individual and collective progress: InterAction moderated a session focused on **unlocking the barriers to progress**, specifically looking at the inter-relationship between four key priority issues: transparency, coordinated needs assessments and joint analysis, management costs, and quality funding.

- On **transparency**, the moderator proposed a small, action-oriented coalition to determine what degree of transparency can be achieved or not through IATI publishing and how it relates to what donors need to build confidence. The second suggestion included organising a discussion on the need to develop a harmonized, multi-stakeholder platform where all aid funding flows (including IATI data) is accessible and usable. This could also include considerations on how best to enhance an existing platform or integrating the work in existing platforms, without overburdening field offices with numerous reporting requirements or new platforms.
- On **coordinated needs assessments**, it was proposed to focus on operationalizing the tools developed by the workstream, through a pilot in 1-2 country contexts to roll out the tools with all IASC partners at the field level. This would include not only a roll out the tools, but a parallel review of staffing structures and other capacity and resource considerations. Needs analysis was equally important as assessments and should have appropriate resources dedicated to it.
- In relation to **quality funding**, the suggestion was to have a time-bound and focused strategic dialogue between a core group of donors, UN agencies, ICRC/IFRC and NGOs following completion of the research currently underway gathering financial figures on existing multi-year funding mechanisms. The dialogue should focus on the following:
 - Diagnose the discrepancy in reporting on multi-year funding to achieve a better understanding of from whom and to where these funds are flowing.
 - Refine a set of recommendations for moving forward on tracking both multi-year and unearmarked funding flows from donor to frontline responder.
- In addition, it was suggested to work on a set of case studies on what existing quality funding allowed organisations to do. The discussion revealed further work needs to be done on clarifying definitions, including earmarked vs. unearmarked, predictable and flexible funding.
- Finally, to move forward with unblocking progress on **management costs**, it was proposed to have a small, inclusive, action-oriented group of senior UN, donor and NGO representatives to come together to discuss options for a way forward in relation to this issue and quality funding. .

The following actions were identified:

Transparency and needs assessments

- A coalition (with technical inputs) to determine how FTS and IATI could interface to avoid duplication and maximize availability and usability of information, without increasing reporting burdens.
- Determine ways to reduce the burden and duplicative reporting of financial data.
- A systemwide pilot was proposed and debated in one or two countries, however it was emphasized that country-based pilots should not inhibit the ongoing rollout and operationalization of tools (including the current IASC guidance and tools) and workstream priorities in other response settings. Should they be implemented, the country-based pilots should also aim to assess collectively the tools and their impact to improve effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian response – in particular to ensure that coordinated needs assessments and joint analysis enable a more principled humanitarian action.

Quality funding

- Develop and refine the evidence base for both multiyear funding and reduced earmarking, including by following up on the study (Money where it counts) currently underway by the Norwegian Refugee Council, on gathering financial figures on existing multi-year funding mechanisms.
- Reinforce high-level political dialogue among donors and other Signatories, to address the outstanding barriers and obstacles to progress in enhancing quality funding through reduced earmarking and multi-year planning.
- Come to agreement on common definitions, identify institutional constraints related to tracking and passing on quality funding once common definitions agreed, and identify workable solutions and ways forward.

Management costs

- Conduct a survey and analysis of individual donor assessments on the scale of the problem, the impact on operations (including partnering) and develop recommendations.

Mr. Elhadj As Sy, Secretary General of IFRC, concluded the session by highlighting that the Grand Bargain Signatories shared a commitment to 'do good': *"A commitment for shared principled humanitarian action, shared knowledge, expertise, and results on the ground."* To this end, the practical proposals identified at the Annual Meeting would be included in a dynamic 'workplan' that would guide the work of the Grand Bargain in the next two years, leading toward more concrete results in 2021. In addition, the Eminent Person stressed the importance to **use innovation and technology to help advance the Grand Bargain commitments**. Last but not least, **better sharing of risks within the humanitarian system** would need to be addressed to unlock further change, starting with a discussion in the context of the Grand Bargain.

Grand Bargain Facilitation Group update and communications strategy: Sweden provided an update on the Facilitation Group, currently consisting of Sweden, the USA, OCHA, UNICEF, IFRC, and InterAction. In October 2019, the new members would take over, including WFP, ICRC, SCHR, and OCHA to ensure continuation between the two Groups, while the donor members were yet to be identified. Last but not least, a new **Communications Strategy** was endorsed at the Annual Meeting, which would be a vehicle to improve communications both internally and externally with a view to mobilizing political support, demonstrating efficiency and effectiveness through operational impact and real improvements for affected people, fostering inclusiveness by enhancing the information flow between all Grand Bargain entities and Signatories, and ensuring adequate advocacy at the country level.