

Engendering Transformative Change Beyond 2021: Grand Bargain 2.0

Friends of Gender Group

As we advance towards the future of the Grand Bargain beyond its original five-year time horizon, the Friends of Gender Group (FoGG) calls for engendering transformative change. The 2019 Grand Bargain (GB) Annual Independent Report highlighted progress in relation to gender equality commitments, including increased reporting by Grand Bargain signatories on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG) initiatives. At the same time, barriers to achievement of Grand Bargain commitments have been identified, including a lack of quality data on funding for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, compounded insufficient sustained, substantial funding and capacity investments in support of GEEWG. A further challenge is a lack of clarity and accountability on the translation of Grand Bargain commitments into actual investments for GEEWG at program level¹.

In a series of consultations with local women's organizations, leaders and activists raised concerns and drew attention to challenges that stand in the way of advancing a gender transformative humanitarian agenda.² For example, inclusive and life-saving programming for gender equality and the empowerment of those most vulnerable in times of crisis, including SRHR and GBV responses, as well as efforts to empower and build the self-reliance of crisis affected women and girls, remains disproportionately underfunded.³ Social norms related programming aimed at addressing the root causes of gender inequalities is still not seen as a priority for humanitarian funding. The recognition of women's agency and leadership in the humanitarian programmatic cycle remains limited, fragmented, and in some cases, politicized⁴. While women and local women's organizations in all their diversity⁵ play a critical role in helping affected communities cope and adapt to crises, they continue to face barriers to their meaningful participation in humanitarian responses. Predictable and sustainable funding for local women's organizations remains a key challenge: humanitarian funding remains largely short-term, which limits investments in institutional capacity strengthening and core operational support for women-led organizations (WLOs) and women's rights organizations (WROs)⁶.

More recently, the fast-paced nature of the COVID-19 response has exposed gaps between Grand Bargain policy-level commitments and implementation on the ground; as well as the need to scale up investments in a comprehensive approach that covers crisis prevention, response, and resilience through a gender lens.⁷ The Grand Bargain will have to address the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, and emerging new ways of working. The digital divide presents an unquestionable challenge to the participation of women and girls in a now predominantly digital process, particularly as COVID-19 prevention and response measures continue to limit the ability of affected communities and local partners to access

¹ Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2020. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-official-website/grand-bargain-annual-independent-report-2020>

² This brief draws on a series of multilingual participatory consultations with LWLOs and women rights activists. Consultations commenced on May 28th, and were convened by UN Women, CARE, and Action Aid in English, French, and Arabic. The virtual sessions were complemented by a widely circulated survey, offering an alternative route for input.

³ The recent UN Women-UNFPA study on Funding for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Programming study indicates that only 39% of funding requests is for programs addressing the needs of women and girls are successful, compared to 69% of coverage for overall appeal request.

⁴ The 2018 IASC Gender Accountability Framework Report found that less than 60% of crisis countries held consultations with local women's organizations in the formulation of the official IASC coordinated humanitarian response plan.

⁵ Including women with disabilities, LGBTQI women, LGBTQI rights organizations, refugee women associations, and others.

⁶ This challenge continues to make it difficult for local women's organizations to sustain operations over the longer term. Overall, consultations with local women's organizations revealed that, to a large extent, Grand Bargain commitments have not resulted in increased investments or a stronger positioning for local women's organizations in the field.

⁷ ActionAid, (2020). "Creating Lasting Impact: The Power of Women-led localized responses to Covid-19": <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/publications/creating-lasting-impact-the-power-of-women-led-localised-responses-to-covid-19>

information, contribute and engage in humanitarian processes. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, displaced and refugee women face additional barriers in accessing humanitarian services, particularly sexual and reproductive health services, healthcare support, and access to GBV services, while also facing increased risks of losing existing opportunities for livelihoods, employment and income generation⁸. These challenges are especially pronounced for women with disabilities and older women, who are disproportionately affected by the multi-faceted impacts of COVID-19. The unprecedented socio-economic crisis presents risks for women and vulnerable groups, including displaced populations, and risks reversing gender transformative progress achieved before the crisis. These impacts in turn can contribute to food insecurity and increased protection and psychosocial risks. Girls are exposed to heightened risk of child marriage; while young and adolescent girls are twice as likely to be out of school in crisis situations and face greater barriers to education and vulnerabilities such as domestic/gender-based violence when not in school⁹. Local women's organizations are not systematically included in decision-making around the humanitarian response and are not receiving their fair share of funding.¹⁰

Against this rapidly changing global context, Grand Bargain signatories must pave the way for sustainable recovery efforts that are grounded in sound gender transformative programming along the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. The Friends of Gender Group (FoGG) urges Grand Bargain signatories to strengthen the linkages and synergies between Grand Bargain commitments and global normative frameworks aimed at advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the humanitarian system.¹¹ Post-2021, the Grand Bargain, regardless of the form that it takes, must adopt a boldly intersectional approach to inclusion, anchoring gender at its core, with stronger elements of accountability, greater transparency and local ownership.¹² Women's leadership is essential to ensure an effective COVID-19 response and sustainable recovery efforts that are inclusive of the needs, priorities, and interests of women and girls affected by the pandemic.

An intersectional and inclusive approach that responds to overlapping forms of marginalization and exclusion, including those related to age, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and other factors should be at the center of these discussions. GEEWG programming and financing should guide the design and implementation of Humanitarian Response Plans in relation to the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. As posited by the new Humanitarian Policy Group think piece on the future of the Grand Bargain, "there is both a moral imperative and a well-evidenced efficiency argument for ensuring that the future objectives of the Grand Bargain are more inclusive."¹³

Against this background, we acknowledge that the excellent collaboration and partnership with the Grand Bargain workstreams on localization, cash, participation revolution, needs assessments, and enhanced and quality funding enabled the FoGG to identify opportunities and entry points for further scale up action to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian settings. We as

⁸ For cluster specific information that highlights the needs and priorities of women and girls in humanitarian settings, please refer to the 'Interim Guidance: Gender Alert for COVID-19 Outbreak' accessible here: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-standing-committee/interim-guidance-gender-alert-covid-19-outbreak-developed-iasc>

⁹ <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/covid-19/>

¹⁰ CARE, 2020. "Where are the Women? The Conspicuous Absence of Women in COVID-19 Response Teams and Plans, and Why We Need Them" https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/CARE_COVID-19-womens-leadership-report_June-2020.pdf

¹¹ Including but not limited to the IASC Policy and Accountability Framework on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action and the Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies.

¹² A gender transformative approach entails that promoting gender equality, the shared control of resources, inclusive decision-making, and women's empowerment, be central to the design, delivery, and monitoring of humanitarian assistance.

¹³ Humanitarian Policy Group (2020). "The Future of the Grand Bargain: A New Ambition?"

representatives of the Grand Bargain Friends of Gender Group¹⁴ call on Grand Bargain Signatories and the Facilitation Group to prioritize the following actions:

Place gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at the center of discussions on the future of the Grand Bargain

- We call upon the Facilitation Group and the Eminent Person to facilitate a high-level political dialogue on centering gender equality in Grand Bargain core commitments, with a view to assessing progress and identifying entry points for accelerating progress towards achieving gender equality and accelerating transformative change- in and through the various commitments of the Grand Bargain beyond 2021.
- We urge Grand Bargain signatories to provide and integrate predictable, flexible, and multi-year core funding to WROs and WLOs across all workstreams—facilitated through country-based pooled funding mechanisms, as well as direct funding to WROs and WLOs. A deliberate effort to ensure that local women’s organizations have the power and resources to meet institutional needs and strengthen capacities will fuel long-term gender equality gains. As WLOs and WROs increasingly call for the accountability of all Grand Bargain signatories at the country level, women leaders’ voices must inform a robust, locally driven accountability framework.

Built-in accountability for gender equality and the empowerment of crisis affected women and girls, bridging the sustainability of humanitarian action and crisis response

- The Friends of Gender Group calls for the development of a strong accountability framework and monitoring mechanism that will be used to track high-level commitments, programmatic, and financial contributions towards the achievement of GEEWG-related outcomes and results across thematic areas that hold the potential for gender transformative programming.
- We are committed to working with the Facilitation Group and across all workstreams to develop GEEWG commitments, targets, and indicators in support of scaling up action and accountability for the rights, needs and concerns of crisis affected women and men, girls and boys. We believe that establishing tracking mechanisms to systematically monitor progress towards these targets is a prerequisite to successfully implementing this priority¹⁵.
- We highlight the need to further enhance the quality of GEEWG reporting, including intent and type of reporting across workstreams; coordinating existing information and reports; as well as strengthening institutional systems and tools to monitor and report progress against GEEWG related commitments and targets, including reporting on funding directly awarded to WLOs and WROs¹⁶.
- We call for the adaptation of existing tools and methodologies, such as the Financial Tracking System led by OCHA and the Refugee Response Financial Tracking System (RRFT) led by UNHCR to track funding to local women’s organizations and gender equality more broadly, and more accurately. There needs greater strengthening in the disaggregation of data, the connectivity/interface of tools (e.g. the Gender and Age Marker (GAM) and the Financial Tracking System hosted by OCHA) and systematic mechanisms to allow for more consistent tracking of data on gender in humanitarian funding flow¹⁷.

¹⁴ The Friends of Gender Group convenes representatives of donors, UN agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and INGOs.

¹⁵ This centering process should draw on existing commitments reflected in global normative and accountability frameworks, including the World Humanitarian Summit, the IASC Gender Policy and Accountability Framework, the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants and the Global Compact on Refugees, the Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies, and the follow up to the Oslo Conference on Ending Sexual and Gender Based Violence in humanitarian crises.

¹⁶ The FoGG acknowledges ongoing discussions on defining WLOs and WROs, currently underway in the localization workstream and integrated in the localization workstream’s annual 2020 workplan. We support accelerated action on this area.

¹⁷ UNFPA-UN Women (2020). Funding for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Programming.

- We urge Grand Bargain signatories to scale up commitments to multi-year, increased, predictable, and flexible funding to address the priorities and needs of crisis-affected women and girls. This is key to bolstering resilience and contributing to transformative programming in line with existing commitments on gender equality.

Systematize provisions of inclusive participation and transparent decision-making

- Building on the above cited series of consultations with local women’s organizations, and the 2020 ODI think piece *The Future of the Grand Bargain*¹⁸, ensuring a more diverse approach to participation and engagement will also be crucial. In this light, we call upon the Facilitation Group and Grand Bargain signatories to ensure that local organizations (including women’s organizations and groups) are formally and consistently represented in all stages of the humanitarian response. Complementing the above, accountability to women and girls can be bolstered through the consistent and meaningful participation of WLOs and local women’s organizations, in global- and country-level decision-making spaces.
- We call for transparent and inclusive information sharing, bringing the Grand Bargain to the country level, and ensuring that local actors and local women’s organizations have timely access to new developments in relation to the Grand Bargain commitments and opportunities to meaningfully engage in strategic decision making. In line with the principle of inclusive participation, we request that workstream progress updates capture and report on the inclusion of women and girls in decision making spaces, from planning, to implementation, to evaluation¹⁹.
- Grand Bargain signatories must support and encourage community-led and community-owned approaches and programs. In the same vein, increased investments should be channeled to support building a gender-responsive enabling environment, particularly through the sensitization of social norms reference groups (religious leaders, men and boys in local communities), and social norm related programming more broadly.
- Specific commitments should be integrated with regards to the promotion of meaningful and safe participation, transformative leadership and the collective action of women and girls, men and boys of all backgrounds with special attention to women and girls in hard-to-reach areas, marginalized women, women with disabilities and women with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.

¹⁸ HPG (2020) *The Future of the Grand Bargain: A New Ambition?*

¹⁹ Consultations, discussions, and all relevant communications and foundational materials, must be held in local languages to enable effective and meaningful engagement.