

Oxfam statement for the Grand Bargain annual meeting, June 2020

This year's Grand Bargain meeting comes during a global pandemic. Covid-19 has put additional strain on the humanitarian system, and all stakeholders have had to re-think the most efficient ways of working to support people in need. Oxfam is committed to the Grand Bargain and we value this forum to bring together donors, UN agencies and NGOs to collaborate on specific issues and problems. We hope that the Grand Bargain will go on to have even greater ambition and include a broader range of humanitarian actors, especially refugee recipient/ host country governments and national and local NGOs, to lead to sustainable and transformational change.

We would like to highlight two areas, where we see current opportunities for the Grand Bargain:

Localisation (Grand Bargain Workstream 2):

Progress towards localization commitments has been too slow and this emergency response highlights why we cannot wait longer. The international humanitarian system currently does not have the necessary mechanisms in place to ensure quality support and greater direct funding to local and national NGOs, which are essential for this response. The Covid-19 crisis offers an **opportunity to change the way we work and set up new funding mechanisms** to allow our system to quickly direct resources to local actors.

As we continue to respond to Covid-19, it will be crucial to for **local and national NGOs, women's rights and refugee-led organizations** to take the lead. Grand Bargain signatories must encourage and ensure the **meaningful participation of local and national actors** in coordination and decision-making spaces to catalyse a wider shift within the sector and for the sustainability of change.

Funding (Grand Bargain Workstreams 7/8):

Covid-19 has not led to only health impacts but also a socio-economic crisis, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and pushing millions of people into poverty. We have not yet seen the longer-term impacts of Covid-19 but predictions already indicate a dramatic increase in humanitarian needs. The response will **need a scale up of commitments to multi-year, increased and flexible funding**, in particular addressing the needs and priorities of **crisis affected women and girls**.

As we seek to tackle this crisis we must also ensure that how we do so does not perpetuate the same cycles, but rather builds better, sustainable futures. Longer-term investments are needed to build **resilient community structures, to advance the implementation of normative commitments, such as gender equality, and to implement the humanitarian-peace-development nexus**. Expanding cash assistance to address the wider socio-economic impact and building sustainable livelihoods not just to survive this crisis but to be prepared for the looming climate crisis.

Some donors and UN agencies have introduced **new flexibility measures** during Covid-19. These are welcomed and must continue as part of the 'new normal' of humanitarian response. Now all donors must grasp the opportunity of the Covid-19 response to open up modalities that would ensure either **sub-granting to local NGOs or direct funding**.

Oxfam's Grand Bargain commitments:

Oxfam remains committed to the Grand Bargain. While we still have a long way to go, over the last year we have made significant progress on Grand Bargain commitments, including:

- **On Transparency** In 2019 we introduced more humanitarian components in IATI records. We also started introducing cash and voucher markers in IATI data. The dashboarding of monitoring on our localization commitments are now also embedded on our intranet; showing country-level reporting data against key commitments, including some that overlap with the Grand Bargain. Oxfam is one of the seven Grand Bargain signatories providing granular humanitarian data in IATI 2.03 version.
- **On Localisation** In 2019 Oxfam made big strategic and practical investments in this area. Our next 10-year strategy centralises the need to shift power and resources to local and national responders in crises as crucial. We continue to trial different funding models including the roll-out of locally-managed grants in Uganda and Bangladesh, and are promoting a Partnership Management Approach that synchronises with our existing Programme Cycle Approach. We recruited a team of Partnership/Local Humanitarian Leadership specialists to offer more surge capacity in first-phase responses to ensure more partners are consulted re programme design. We have helped set up a new sub-group in the Grand Bargain Cash workstream to strengthen local and national NGO engagement in ongoing discussions and policy settings.
- **On Cash** Oxfam now has a dedicated Cash team as part of our central humanitarian capacity, with a remit to promote cash, markets, and social protection in all our work. More country teams report having a 'cash-first' approach, and of the 14 countries where cash is now over 20% of response costs, 10 are in countries where we have major responses. Oxfam contributed to the briefing paper on cash and social protection under the Grand Bargain cash workstream.
- **On Participation** In 2018 Oxfam agreed a new Humanitarian Approach, making the four elements of Safe Programming, Community Engagement, Local Humanitarian Leadership, and Feminist Principles mandatory aspects of all effective quality responses from now on. This is about increasing the participation of those we seek to help, but also putting them in the driving seat of response and recovery actions.

In conclusion, Oxfam calls for:

- **Continued and strengthened political will to deliver the Grand Bargain.** Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of the commitments to-date and urgency to implement these much-needed changes. Any future iteration of the Grand Bargain needs to be more inclusive of all stakeholders in humanitarian response beyond donors, UN agencies and INGOs. This means engaging and ensuring participation of affected/host states, national and local civil society, the private sector, emerging donors and development actors, to be able to achieve sector-wide, transformation and sustainable change.
- **Prioritization of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls** - Women's leadership and participation in decision making is essential to ensure an effective COVID-19 response and sustainable recovery. Structures and ways of working need to change within the humanitarian system to enable and incentivise better engagement with non-traditional civil society partners, especially Women-Led Organisations, Women's Rights Organisations and youth movements.
- **Increased resources for local and national organisations** and greater participation and representation of all humanitarian actors in the Grand Bargain. Covid-19 has highlighted the need to bring in local and national actors to ensure we have a solid understanding of the challenges faced and for sustainability

of change. In addition, NGOs face growing compliance requirements, which is an inhibitor to flexible responses and localisation. Oxfam supports the recommendations of the Charter4Change, including:

- Given the steadily increasing attention and pressure for **Country Based Pooled Funds** to better deliver on localization for donors, there needs to be clear, explicit guidance at the global level and specific measures in each of the 18 CBPFs to ensure improved access to funding and to engagement in governance for local and national NGOs.
- Even as progress is made, signatories should consider the extent their work supports **transformative partnership practices** that reflect an investment in the capacities, confidence, relationships and experience of local actors. Local actors want to lead on programmes, consortium and funding proposals – as opposed to just become more effective partners to sub-grants from international agencies. Measurement of progress needs to include this essential, qualitative shift.
- A **localised approach to the nexus** is important. Efforts on the nexus are overly centred on UN and government institutions, and too often neglect the contribution of local civil society or attention to local community engagement and accountability. This is a missed opportunity and risks generating conflict-insensitive and unaccountable approaches, which undermine the objectives of bridging humanitarian, development and peace efforts.