

Oxfam self-report

Grand Bargain Narrative Report

Grand Bargain in 2020

Question 1: Reflecting on the information you have provided in the Excel spreadsheet, please highlight the 2 or 3 key outcomes or results relating to the Grand Bargain that your institution achieved in 2020?

2020 saw Oxfam, along with many other organisations, severely challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic. This had a significant impact on our normal ways of working but also opened up new opportunities; Oxfam's adaptive capacity was tested during this process, but we were able to innovate and apply learning. In this context, workstreams 2, 3, 4 and 6 are the ones on which we saw most progress.

Established **local humanitarian leadership**/localisation measures clearly within [Oxfam's Global Strategic Framework \(2020-2030\)](#) and as a key element of our "Enhanced Humanitarian Action" approach. This strategic commitment is further reflected in Oxfam's "Horizon Planning" which outlines our operational humanitarian/DRR priorities in fragile and development contexts in the coming period.

We have trialled innovative funding tools to demonstrate the potential for locally led funding models and strengthen local-to-local collaboration in responses, including the COVID-19 Refugee Led Organisation Grant Facility (in Uganda) and the Humanitarian Response Grant Facility (in Bangladesh and Uganda over the past 4 years, and for this reporting period in DRC and Kenya). Such local actor response grant facilities are by now also well established in Oxfam programs in Myanmar, the Philippines, and starting up in other countries under new multi-year grants.

To **reduce management costs**, it was decided to exit 18 countries and transform the nature of our presence in the remaining portfolio. This also involved restructure at Oxfam affiliate, secretariat and regional levels. This is projected to save some 15% of management costs. Whilst highly disappointing to be exiting so many countries, it is being used as an opportunity to re-focus resources with a net investment into our fragility work and seek to "do less, better".

Oxfam maintained the prioritization of the **cash agenda** over in-kind work, on average 20-25% of our humanitarian programming is done through CVA. All of Oxfam's sectors, in addition to Emergency Food Security and Vulnerable Livelihoods, now engage with CVA. Maintained through our Covid-19 response this promoted links to social protection as a more systemic way of meeting the secondary economic impacts of the pandemic in particular and to improve the efficiency of humanitarian responses in general. To support this process, Oxfam trained staff and partners and developed tools and guidance focusing on Covid-19 as well as ensuring engagement in global conversations to ensure CVA evolved and linked with key processes. Furthermore, we worked on the role of local actors on CVA to ensure both elements are part of the change agenda for the humanitarian sector.

For the **participation revolution**, the social accountability work that we started several years ago, developing and strengthening the uptake of feedback and complaint mechanisms is maintained with the "your words count" initiative running in 9 countries and expanding to 2 new ones. We have embarked on specific research on challenges to report misconduct and over the last year several new initiatives connected to the participation revolution showed interesting results.

The Community Perception Tracker (CPT) is an approach developed by Oxfam Public Health Promotion team that uses mobile technology to capture, analyse and understand community perceptions during disease outbreaks, the information collected is then used to adapt responses. While the initial pilot of this approach was run in 2018, it was in 2020 with the Covid-19 pandemic that gave the opportunity to mainstream the innovation and operationalize the CPT in more than 11 countries. Whilst developed from a public health perspective we have learned that it has a much wider applicability as a means to understand a wide range of community perceptions.

Separately, but not less important, is Sanitweaks¹ an initiative born to improve consultation and integration of feedback from communities in relation to sanitation infrastructures in emergencies to be shared with the full sector. This project was the result of several pilot initiatives in different countries, the results and uptake are positive and Oxfam Public Health Engineering team is working to expand the approach to all wash work.

Question 2: How has your institution contributed to the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment¹ in humanitarian settings through its implementation of the Grand Bargain? What results/outcomes have been achieved in this regard? (please outline specific initiatives or changes in practice and their outcomes/results).

Oxfam actively participates in multiple gender, protection and GBV global forums. In addition to its membership in the Grand Bargain's Friends of Gender Group and the sub-workstream on Cash and Gender, Oxfam is co-chair of the IASC Gender Reference Group, core member of the GBV Area of Responsibility, member of the INGO Working Group for the GBV Call to Action, member of the Global Protection Cluster, and member of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace & Security to lobby for stronger language on GBV in UNSC briefings.

For most of 2020, like for others across the world, Oxfam's focus was on responding to COVID-19. Understanding that the pandemic was occurring on a foundation of gender inequality, caused by an uneven distribution of care work and discrimination at the intersection of race, gender and class, our work included: shifting some funding at the onset of COVID-19 to support partners working on gender-based violence (protection microgrants); campaigning as allies with WROs/WLOs (#iMatter); and conducting research with WROs/WLOs to understand and support their needs and activities; using our membership and leadership in global platform to raise the voices of our partners; conducted gender analysis in our humanitarian responses.

Throughout this work, Oxfam continued to seek ways to improve on the quality of our partnerships. We had more than 75 active projects promoting women's leadership and empowerment, including in areas of DRR, humanitarian preparedness, the Women Peace and Security agenda, as well as GBV/VAWG.

Internally Oxfam has maintained its resources in Gender in Emergencies, despite broad cuts across the organization. In addition to its regular support for the integration of gender and a feminist approach into our humanitarian responses, this strengthened team was able to develop and revise tools for COVID response. It also conducted 21 COVID and Gender virtual trainings for teams and partners and supported with over 15 COVID-Gender analysis throughout the year. Oxfam also increased membership into its confederation-wide community of practice for staff to connect, learn, and challenge one another to do better and to be better partners.

Following up on its commitments to challenge and address the root causes of structural and systemic inequalities internally, Oxfam held feminist discussions at country level for senior country management teams and staff in two humanitarian contexts. Sessions were held to deepen the understanding of the concept and principles, highlighting how GBV actions should be more grounded on considering women, not just as victims nor just survivors but active agents.

Question 3: How has the humanitarian-development nexus been strategically mainstreamed in your institutional implementation of the Grand Bargain commitments? Please explain how your institution has linked commitments 10.1 - 10.5 with other commitments from other workstreams.

With conflicts and climate-related shocks are becoming more frequent and protracted, Oxfam recognises the need to work differently and has refined its 2020-2030 global strategy, making a commitment to deepening investment and adapting ways of working, programming and influencing work in fragile contexts. We want to be able to contribute to improved responses to causes and consequences of disasters and conflict. This

¹ <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/sani-tweaks-guide-to-best-practices-in-humanitarian-response-sanitation-620604/>

commitment to fragility will provide a good ground to improve the work of the confederation across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (HDP nexus).

Oxfam believes that 'humanitarian relief, development programs and peacebuilding are not serial processes; they are all needed at the same time' to tackle the systemic challenges that trap people in a vicious cycle of poverty, recurrent crisis, increased needs and vulnerability to risks. Over the last year we have invested in harvesting learning from different countries representing a variety of contexts to better understand the approach and potential solutions. These are informing the development of an Oxfam Nexus policy brief (forthcoming 2021) which refines our position on key dilemmas related to the Nexus agenda.

Oxfam is the co-chair of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Result Group 4 on triple nexus. Improving the adoption of the Nexus approach requires a change in behaviours and ways of working, there is no technical recipe but a general recognition on the need to change ways of working, distribution of power and decision making to tackle the recurrent challenges.

Several areas of Oxfam's work around technical development and policy engagement are central to the Nexus agenda and showed advances over the last year. Among them, the localisation work is focusing on giving space to local actors in the leadership of the responses and connecting with development work. The social protection agenda in humanitarian settings is aiming at building shock responsive social protection systems that could deliver efficient responses and found some space in key global agendas in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Grand Bargain 2016-2020: Overall achievements and remaining gaps

Question 4: What are the 2-3 key achievements/areas of most progress by your institution since 2016?

Below are the main achievements as framed by GB workstreams, however, it is worth acknowledging several other significant changes from an organisational perspective that have shaped our reality.

1. A major cross confederation process has been undertaken to move from a situation in which different Oxfam affiliates maintained their own presence in country to having a single shared Oxfam programme under the line management of Oxfam International. This has been a very significant undertaking that stripped out multiple layers of management and cost (for example, going from 42 regional directors across various affiliates to 7 – one per region), merging the different humanitarian departments into one team, and creating new independent Oxfam's in the global south as an explicit attempt to balance power from a primarily global north led institution to one that is more globally balanced, with our global HQ moving from Oxford, UK to Nairobi, Kenya.
2. Harmonising systems is a work in progress, and the challenge of uniting multiple IT systems has limited our ability to report on and analyse a number of areas as reflected in the Excel spreadsheet. However, the decision has now been taken to work on a unified business support base. Currently under design it is expected to take 5 years to implement fully but will realise a significant reduction in management overheads.
3. The scandal of Oxfam staff committing sexual exploitation and abuse in Haiti in 2011 has had a significant impact on the organisation. Organisational reputation and funding were significantly compromised, and it is hard to overstate the internal shock and reverberations the experience created. There has been a massive and systemic look specifically at PSEA but more broadly at organisational culture and ways of working.
4. During the period we submitted ourselves to audit by HQAI and were awarded a certificate of compliance with the CHS we are proud to maintain.

Transparency	<p>We have made significant progress in reporting against IATI, with a significant step forward in the systems needed to enable different Oxfam affiliates to report and publish data against the scheme. In 2016 only two Oxfam’s from the confederation published project records to IATI. Through consistent advocacy and support to fellow Oxfams, in 2020 8 Oxfams (GB, Intermon, America, Australia, IBIS, Solidarite Belgium, Quebec and Novib) published to IATI with increasing use of humanitarian tag, humanitarian scope element, humanitarian cluster, DAC classification, Cash and Vouchers aid types and SDG tags. The number of activities published to IATI stand at 9757, almost double the number of 2016, significantly improving the timeliness, comprehensiveness and usability of Oxfam data for use by humanitarian sector stakeholders.</p> <p>This is recognized by leading sector dashboarding initiatives, such as humportal.org, d-portal.org where Oxfam data and progress are sought out to inform the way forward on transparency on funding flows amongst others.</p> <p>Beyond IATI, Oxfam has also contributed to increasing transparency of humanitarian funding flows in the sector, for example by investing in research such as Money Talks which assesses humanitarian funding flows to local actors in Bangladesh and Uganda, and Enhancing the Potential of Pooled Funds for Localisation report on behalf of Grand Bargain workstream #2.</p>
Localisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created new structures, teams, and tools to promote, monitor and track progress on our localisation commitments. To note, in particular, Oxfam adapted our existing data systems to generate ever more accurate data on funding to partners – from our planning and reporting tools, as well as funding pipeline systems, future Project and Grant management system, etc. The fruits of this work are only <i>now</i> being seen. • Increased the number of multi-year programs investing in localisation, from 2 to 6, and expanded these efforts into more countries (from 3 to 13). • Increased the number and diversity of local humanitarian partners, including growing our number of partnerships to deliver with networks (networked responses). • Revised fund raising and marketing strategies to better recognise the role our partners play in the way we talk about our work with supporting publics.
Cash Based Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uptake of CVA outside of EFSVL with all sectors within Oxfam now reporting use of CVA and/or multi-purpose cash assistance. • All country programs and responses report CVA as a primary response modality. CVA is now appearing in country and regional strategic plans and annual priorities. • CVA represents on average between 20-25% of Oxfam’s humanitarian programming. • Formation of global level technical advisory support for CVA (and social protection) available to all countries and programs and actively part of global discussions on CVA working to influence and advocate for improvements within the sector.

Question 5: What, in your institutional view, have been the main achievements of the Grand Bargain signatories, as a collective, since 2016?

Localisation has moved from an ideological position on the fringe of humanitarian debate to a critical framing for humanitarian action – a *“cultural shift”*: not an agenda for local and national organisations, but a regular feature of national and international aid discussions, part of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19, and widely agreed as an essential commitment for the future of humanitarian action. These

improvements have led to **greater scrutiny on the role of intermediaries**, with increased pressure on international INGOs and UN agencies to become better partners.

Overall **cash** has been picked up (scale and quality) across the humanitarian sector. Technical improvements, accounting for CVA, working on common approaches and standardization- particularly for donors and around inter-operability of systems- has been a huge success of the workstream. In 2020, under Oxfam's co-leadership the sub-group on local partnerships has linked the cash workstream to the localization workstream and started to bring together cross-cutting issues. The cash workstream sub-groups on tracking cash, gender and social protection have influenced how we deliver CVA and pushed us toward better and more accountable forms of assistance.

Quality funding - whilst much more could be done; it should be acknowledged that donors have amended policies and sought to introduce greater flexibility and more multiyear options.

Question 6: What has the Grand Bargain not been able to achieve in its five-year tenure? What outstanding obstacles, gaps, areas of weakness still remain after five years, in terms of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian action?

Whilst strictly beyond the TOR of the Grand Bargain, it is disappointing that there has not been a commensurate political process to address the other recommendations of the High-Level Panel on humanitarian financing. The lack of a tangible quid pro quo has limited the level of incentive in driving the changes called for in the GB leading to institutions mainly working on areas that were existing priorities for them anyway.

For example, with the exception of providing an annual report, it was not clear how work on so many workstreams concurrently would drive reward. (It was additionally flagged early in the process that having many workstreams was making solid delivery against all of them concurrently difficult, but this was not really addressed.) Where these changes required inward investment, it was not clear that any dedicated funding was available to make this possible; it was left as a voluntary endeavour by each agency and this contributed to a lack of not strong incentivisation for change not already considered a priority by the relevant institution. Hence, they picked areas of work that were already important to them.

It has also not been good at reaching the operational level. Most effort remained at the policy level with multiple meetings of HQ level colleagues. Exceptions were initiatives like the localisation workstream field visits, and these reported back that more efforts were needed to communicate the GB at country level cluster and coordination mechanisms. This would have helped drive demand and reinforce the policy changes that were made. however, far too many practitioners still remain largely unaware of the Grand Bargain, it's promise, or the changes successfully made.

Spending some time reflecting on the theory of change for the GB against a complex system such as the humanitarian sector could be worthwhile.

At a more specific workstream level,

WS2. The Grand Bargain failure to meet our "25% as directly as possible" funding commitment – or even significantly shift the proportion of funding shared with local and national actors, collectively – is its most notable gap. In particular, the Grand Bargain has failed to achieve more equitable sharing of international humanitarian assistance to crises with the largest volumes of funding. This is true for Oxfam as well.

WS3. There has been a serious challenge on the achievement of more systemic issues, like cash coordination, multi-sectoral approaches, social protection and other areas that are considered politically sensitive. In order to fully achieve the objectives for CVA and maximize the potential use of cash modalities changes are needed to the actual humanitarian system and the incentive structures of agencies. This remains a barrier to the uptake of more effective and accountable cash.

WS5. Oxfam still believes that having mechanisms to share needs assessment data and facilitate multiple analyses would have the merit of improving our understanding as a sector of a situation whilst minimising the disruption and demand on communities. However, there remains across the sector a lack of willingness to really invest in the information systems necessary to make a leap forward in this area.

It would also be useful to consider the efficiency of the processes involved – e.g., the resources and amount of time spent in conducting these assessments; has the use of digital tools helpful in making the process more efficient and effective – as a way of justifying the upfront expenditure. However, realistically, there will need to be a collective effort from donors given the kind of up-front capital investment this would require.

Question 7a: How has risk (financial, operational, reputational, etc) affected your institution's implementation of the core commitments since you became a signatory to the Grand Bargain?

Localisation Risk does inhibit the flexibility and responsiveness needed in setting up quick, equitable partnerships. The concern that Oxfam would bear such financial liability leads to internal tensions between those who see financial and liability management as their primary concern versus those seeking to respond rapidly, often needed to form new relationships. Related, it has been difficult to harmonize and enforce good partnership or localization standards across Oxfam's confederation. This is a reflection of being a confederation of 20+ different organizations, each with their own ways of working and different cultural backgrounds and attitudes to risk, in part informed by the attitude, rules and procedures of their back donors.

Cash Based Programming Cash programming is diverse, and a focus on cost effectiveness and scale can challenge quality and accountability considerations. For example, where our objective is not scale but sometimes smaller high impact programs (for example cash within protection programs) it is hard to address the financial risks and expectations of not operating at scale.

Oxfam has, and continues to strengthen its safe programming approach and analysis, mitigation and management of risks in cash programming. Given this approach to risk, risk it itself has not negatively impacted our ability to meet commitments on CVA.

Question 7b: How has your institution sought to mitigate or address these risks to enable implementation of the core commitments?

Localisation More and more Oxfam is establishing networked partnership models that increases our relationship to and investment in a diverse range of local NGOs through one local/national NGO partner. While not a driver of our increasing use of this model, we have found the approach has helped to mitigate some of the challenges to flexible partnership in our systems. In addition, Oxfam conducted in-depth learning reviews of our partnerships with networks, refugee led and women's rights organizations in various countries to identify the enablers and barriers for us to partner more and better in diverse response settings. This review will support the development of "flexibility in partnership" guidance for country teams to better navigate compliance systems and improve our partnership models.

Cash Based Programming We have pushed for needs based and context specific programs designed in line with our humanitarian approach (feminist principles, safe programming, local humanitarian leadership and community engagement). This approach, alongside a strong focus on risk management, operational capacity, and accountability, has mitigated many of the overall risks that are commonly cited (perceived or actual) in the uptake of CVA.

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