

Grand Bargain Annual Meeting 2021: IFRC Statement

IFRC remains committed to the Grand Bargain and to the spirit of reform which underpins it. Consultations within our network confirm that there is a benefit to engaging in a process that is mutually owned by all members of the humanitarian community and that seeks to bring us together as equal partners, jointly challenging one another to make our systems more efficient and effective for the people we serve.

We believe that the Grand Bargain has made a difference. There has been real progress against many of the Grand Bargain commitments, though our joint achievement remains uneven and incomplete. This is certainly the case for our collective commitments around localisation. We see important signs of a culture change in the humanitarian system on this issue. Partnership practices are starting to improve, more local actors are being invited into coordination mechanisms, and donors are starting to shift their expectations of intermediaries, providing greater room for local leadership in the delivery of aid. But there is still a long way to go before we have reached the tipping point for true transformation of the international humanitarian system.

We were therefore pleased that localisation was identified both as the top priority issue for the humanitarian system going forward and as a top “value-adding workstream” of the Grand Bargain (GB) by signatories in the GB Facilitation Group’s survey and the Independent Report.

COVID-19 has been a global test on how local actors deliver in the absence of extensive international deployments. We have seen many pass this test with flying colours. As auxiliaries to their governments in humanitarian action, our member Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have been at the forefront of the local response to COVID-19 with their unique reach into communities, their extended networks of local branches and scores of dedicated volunteers and professional staff.

With support from the IFRC, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have reached hundreds of millions around the globe with public health and humanitarian support over the last year. COVID-19 reinforces the distinct advantage of National Societies and other local humanitarian actors that can respond quickly to the unprecedented health, economic, and social challenges, and sustain their response.

Despite increased visibility of local action in the COVID-19 response however, the overall percentage of direct funding to local actors has barely budged beyond the low single digits.

The IFRC and other networks that have local partnership models, have managed to pass an overwhelming majority of funds received to local humanitarian actors for programming. IFRC data shows while many National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies successfully raised funds domestically for their COVID-19 response, the funds mobilized by the IFRC internationally were a lifeline over the past year for many low and middle-income National Societies that did not receive adequate support from Governments or the private sector domestically.

This funding overcame, to some extent, global inequities in COVID-19 funding. However, if we are truly serious about providing “greater support [...] for the leadership, delivery and capacity of local responders and the participation of affected communities in addressing humanitarian needs”, a



greater overall proportion of quality funding must be channeled to local actors, not only to carry out immediate humanitarian response but also to strengthen their capacity towards financial sustainability.

We understand that there are risks involved, which is why with this kind support must come accountability. Both the local actors and their international counterparts must be accountable for the funding they receive and ensure that it reaches the communities who need it most. This is critical to build trust, without which local actors will not be able to achieve their missions. **Investment in local actors' institutional capacity is critical for effective risk management and strong local action.**

Local actors have capacities that international organizations can learn from – whether it is local knowledge, reach to the community level, or the ability to seamlessly connect “peace-time” work with crisis response. At the same time, local actors recognize the need to further strengthen their capacities, and they welcome and deserve our support in doing so. The IFRC’s approach to what we call “National Society Development” is about accompanying every National Society to build a sustainable organization able to deliver relevant, quality, and accessible services in full respect of the fundamental principles. Capacity strengthening takes time, results are not immediate, and investments must be long-term. **Most importantly, capacity strengthening must be founded on an equal partnership between international and local actors.**

A large gap still exists in humanitarian funding when it comes to supporting local actions--such as those provided by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies - that provide humanitarian, development, and climate action, all at the same time. This is due in part to institutional rigidities between humanitarian, development, and climate financing sources. Each sees the building of longer-term institutional capacity of local humanitarian organisations as slightly outside its core mission. **The humanitarian institutional development funding gap is ripe for change through our collective engagement in the Grand Bargain 2.0.**

We also have more work ahead to achieve a “participation revolution”. One-way and supply-driven approaches not only waste time and money, but they also exacerbate crisis, with people rejecting protective measures such as masks and vaccines in the middle of a pandemic because they do not trust or connect with those delivering such services. **We must continue to build our investment in community engagement and accountability** and to take the difficult steps needed to be able to change gears when community feedback shows that our way of providing aid is not what is really needed.

Let us stop waiting for the perfect time to truly invest on local action, local communities, and local actors. Now is the time. And COVID-19 has given us the proof that such an investment makes the difference between life and death.