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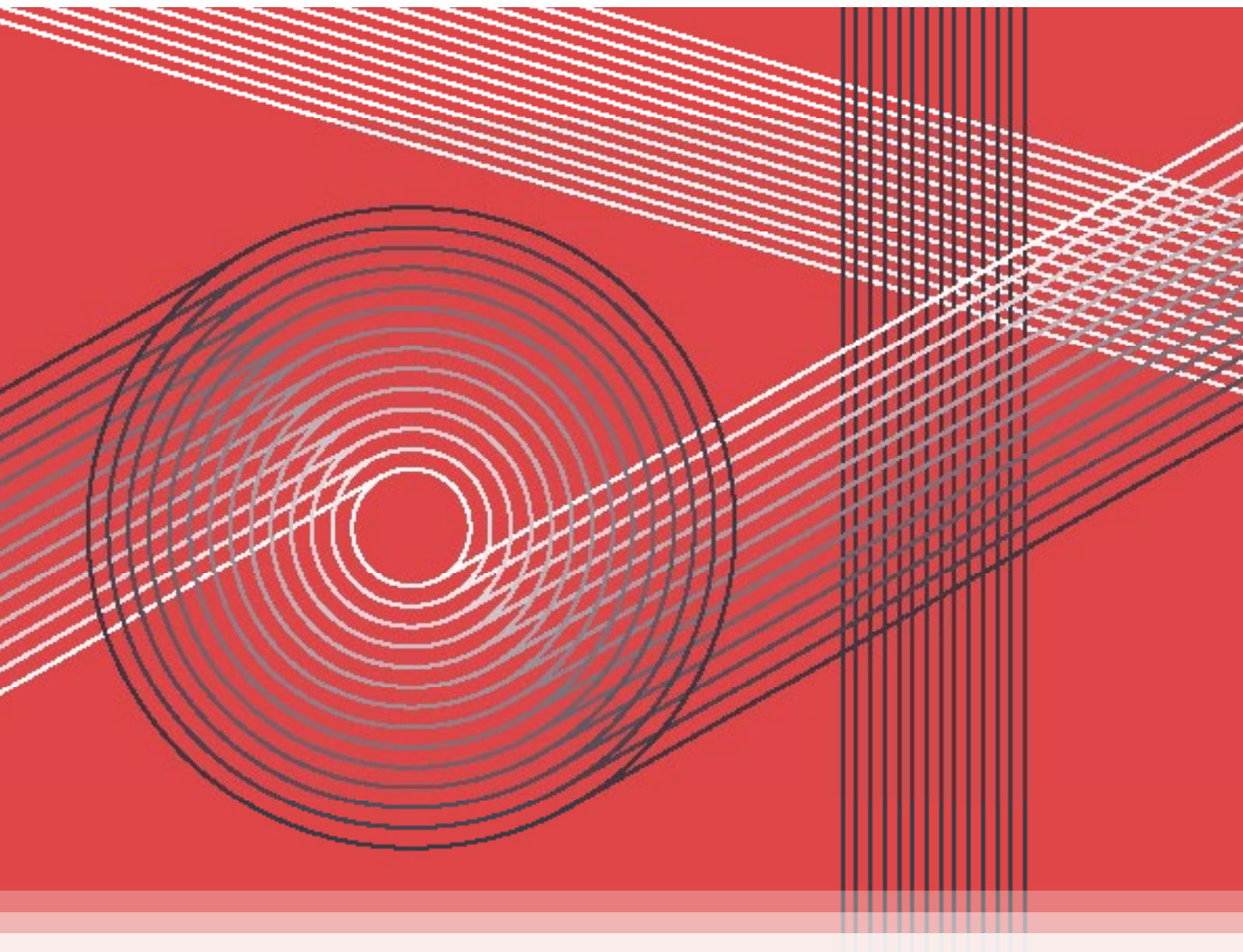
The Grand Bargain in 2021

An independent review

Executive summary

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Executive summary

The year 2021 was one of transition for the Grand Bargain and its signatories, with a shift to a more focused, more streamlined framework aimed at speeding up progress towards the forum's original goals of more efficient and effective humanitarian action. This transition was driven both by what had been achieved under the Grand Bargain framework from 2016, and by lessons identified from the previous five years on how to maximise the outcomes of this multistakeholder forum. The original Grand Bargain framework was intentionally comprehensive, reflecting the complexity of the aid system itself. But in practice the sheer breadth of its scope proved problematic, and even the largest signatories had been unable to engage in more than a few of the 10 thematic areas. These pressures culminated in agreement at the 2021 annual meeting on a revised framework that focused on a narrower set of collective priorities. This new 'Grand Bargain 2.0' focused on two mutually reinforcing 'enabling priorities': quality funding and localisation/participation. The new framework also provided for the establishment of caucuses intended to transcend technical dialogue and focus on negotiating political action to unblock challenges or identify trade-offs among different signatories. Four workstreams were continued through 2021 to support and inform political dialogue and action: workstream 1 (greater transparency), workstream 5 (joint needs assessment and analysis), workstream 6 (a participation revolution) and workstream 9 (simplified and harmonised reporting).

This sixth Annual Independent Review (AIR) of the Grand Bargain, commissioned by the Facilitation Group, analyses the progress achieved and challenges faced by signatories against the commitments during 2021. Data collated for the review evidences continued consensus among signatories that the Grand Bargain is an important – if not the only – multistakeholder vehicle for change at institutional, constituency and system levels; that there is consensus among signatories on quality funding and localisation as key enablers of a more efficient and effective humanitarian response; and that incremental progress continues to be made by the signatories against these two priorities. The data also shows that further clarification is required on how signatories can work most effectively together to advance these two priorities, and how progress can be more effectively measured; that the signatories need to urgently step up their investments to address the political and cultural barriers to system-wide change in these areas; and that greater direction is required from the governance structures of the Grand Bargain to help concentrate political efforts towards addressing those barriers. Given that the current phase of the Grand Bargain is scheduled to end in June 2023, action in these areas is required urgently in order to achieve substantive progress by that date.

The research team reviewed 62 signatory and seven workstream co-convenor self-reports; conducted semi-structured interviews with 52 signatories and seven workstream co-convenors; undertook a review of publicly available literature; reviewed surveys by the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) and the Alliance for Empowering Partnership (A4EP) of local actors within their networks; and reviewed data from field perception surveys conducted by Ground Truth Solutions (GTS). As the 2022 AIR process got under way, armed conflict broke out in Ukraine following the Russian invasion. This had

a direct impact on this year's research process, with many staff in signatory organisations redeployed to the emergency response. The Ukraine crisis also presents an opportunity to reflect on how the commitments made by signatories under the Grand Bargain are being applied in practice.

Quality funding and localisation/participation – the 'enabling priorities'

Quality funding

The vast majority of signatories reiterated that quality funding should be the key priority of the Grand Bargain, and welcomed the decision to elevate it to an enabling priority. As in past years, it is difficult to determine accurately what progress has been made in relation to quality funding due to the paucity of comparable data. However, what data is available suggests that making quality funding an 'enabling priority' has as yet had limited impact in terms of a substantive increase in the *proportion* of quality funding available. The data reported by donors and recipient aid organisations suggests that there has been some increase in the absolute volume of quality funding provided by donors in 2021, but that it has not kept pace with increases in global humanitarian requirements. Data reported also suggests that what quality funding is available from government donors is not allocated equitably across actors, with multilateral organisations receiving the lion's share and local actors reporting that they receive little if any quality humanitarian funding. In terms of the corresponding commitments made by recipient organisations, there is no evidence in the self-reports to suggest progress in aid organisations passing down the flexible or multi-year funds they receive to their implementing partners.

Efforts to increase the provision and distribution of quality funding have continued to be stymied by long-standing challenges. Some donors continue to face legal and administrative constraints on provision of multi-year and/or flexible funding, but there are also concerns across the wider group of donors about long-standing practices of recipient organisations, including contradictions inherent in organisations' fundraising practices (i.e. annual, country-specific appeals) and their demand for more multi-year and flexible funding; what some donors consider to be insufficient efforts to increase the visibility of donor contributions; inadequate transparency of and accountability for funds received; and a failure by some larger aid organisations to cascade quality funding to frontline, particularly local, responders.

Most international aid organisation signatories assert that the complex pattern of when and how they receive funding from multiple donors and the still small proportion of quality funds that they receive overall (if they receive any at all from institutional donors) means they cannot automatically pass any degree of flexibility or predictability down the chain. As a constituency, aid organisations also argue that they have already made efforts to increase the transparency of their expenditures through the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and/or other data systems, and that they have improved the quality and granularity of their reporting.

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More broadly, there are also challenges in relation to the lack of consistent, comprehensive quantitative data, with many signatories still not reporting their funding data. There has also been limited focus on other ‘properties’ of humanitarian funding, including timeliness and predictability, and little appetite among signatories to take the lead in addressing some of the political barriers to more quality funding. With continued entrenched policy positions by both donors and aid organisations, it has been difficult to build the trust required to make breakthroughs on policy. A more frank and transparent dialogue is thus required between all constituency groups to broker an appropriate compromise that benefits all actors in the chain. The establishment of the quality funding caucus offers a new opportunity in this regard. To succeed, however, the caucus will need to set out a clearer objective strategy for expanding the provision and more equitable distribution of quality funding across the system, draw more clearly on the substantive technical work that has been done over the last six years by the workstream and adopt a sequential approach to agreeing compromises on the barriers to quality funding. Most critically, the caucus will need to secure high-level political commitment towards genuine changes in the funding practices of both the providers and the recipients of humanitarian funding. The caucus aside, there are concerns that, following the closure of the workstream by its co-conveners (Canada, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Sweden and the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund) and following the closure by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) of its Results Group 5 on humanitarian financing, there is now no multistakeholder forum for the technical dialogue on quality funding that many signatories believe is still necessary to support political-level action.

Localisation

Localisation was high on the political agenda of the international humanitarian system throughout 2021, but the extent to which this political interest has translated into fundamental changes in practice remains varied. There has been increasing momentum on supporting local leadership capacities in 2021, and a growing interest and practice in relation to provision of minimum overhead costs to local actors as one way to support their institutional development. But there has also been a substantial drop in funding reaching local actors directly. Agreement was reached for local actors to have a seat on the Facilitation Group, and aid organisations have made efforts to empower local leadership at country level, including in Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) and national and sub-national clusters, through the workstream 2 Country Dialogues. The forthcoming National Reference Groups – conceptualised as part of the 2.0 framework but not yet established – may also offer an opportunity to empower local government and civil society actors to lead local responses. However, there was little progress in terms of increasing provision of funding to local actors as directly as possible, and the volume of funding provided directly to local actors halved between 2021 and 2020. There seems agreement among many local actors that the Grand Bargain is an important opportunity to push for increased localisation of aid responses, as evidenced in NEAR’s membership survey. But overall, progress against localisation objectives at the institutional and system levels remains slow, with increasing frustration among local actors that changes in practice by their international partners are still taking too long.

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Progress is being stymied by a range of factors, including the gap between policy commitments of international partners to support local actors and the practical and financial support actually being made available to them. The caucus on intermediaries established in the last quarter of 2021 could, in theory, be used to resolve some of the problems identified by workstream 2, such as in relation to stepping up capacity-building support and/or increasing the flow of funds to local actors via intermediaries, but participants have so far failed to agree on a clear focus or objective.

Participation

Addressing the failure to ask crisis-affected people what they want and how to provide it has been an enduring challenge for the humanitarian sector. Thus, the integration of participation in enabling priority 2 is itself an important step because it has elevated the issue to the highest level of priority among Grand Bargain signatories. However, it is not clear from information available that efforts to elevate participation as a system-wide priority have as yet had any substantive impact in shifting ways of working.

Self-reports detailed much activity on participation (or on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)) in 2021. However, the overwhelming focus of such activity was – as in previous years – on the establishment of mechanisms to receive feedback and manage complaints about aid programmes and on measures to prevent and respond to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA). There is scant evidence on how aid organisations are using that feedback to inform programming decisions, or how the views of affected populations are factored in from the outset of a programme or project design phase. There are some important positive examples, including as documented in this and previous AIRs, but these are as yet too small-scale to have a broader impact, with seeming reluctance by donors to support, and by other aid organisations to replicate or adapt, such programming approaches.

Overall, progress in relation to the participation revolution remained very limited in 2021. This was echoed in the latest round of perception surveys by GTS, which found that most recipients of aid still do not think that humanitarian aid meets their main needs, that they feel unable to participate in decision-making about the aid they receive, feel uninformed about available assistance and are unclear how aid is targeted to those most in need.

Progress against other core commitments

Progress in other areas of the Grand Bargain was mixed in 2021. There were some important developments in relation to some of the other commitments, including at collective level. Key achievements include agreement on a model for predictable coordination of cash assistance programmes (commitment 3.5), increased publication of humanitarian funding data to the IATI standard (commitment 1.1), improvements to the joint intersectoral analysis framework (core commitment 5.1), and an ongoing system-wide effort to enhance collaboration between humanitarian, development and peace actors. But long-standing, largely political, challenges continued to obstruct progress in other areas, including on reducing duplication and management costs and in reaching a critical mass of signatories using the harmonised narrative reporting template for non-governmental organisation (NGO) partners.

Increase transparency

There was some shift in approach in 2021 towards greater transparency on funding data. Following consultations between the co-conveners (the Netherlands and the World Bank) and participating signatories, the workstream moved from an exclusive focus on getting signatories to publish data to the IATI standard to a wider understanding of how to ensure greater transparency in the humanitarian system, reflecting the concerns many signatories have regarding using IATI as the main data standard. Over the year there was an incremental increase in the number of signatories publishing some humanitarian funding data to the IATI standard, and, to a lesser extent, in relation to the core commitment to ‘use’ IATI data. It is not clear, however, exactly how many signatories are publishing consistently across all of their humanitarian funding data. On interoperability between IATI and the Financial Tracking Service (FTS), little progress seems to have been made since the pilots were concluded in 2020, and the majority of signatories are still using FTS and other data tools to inform their analysis and/or decision-making processes.

Increase the use and coordination of cash programming

Cash programming remained a key focus of the Grand Bargain signatories throughout 2021. A political-level caucus was established and led by the Eminent Person in late 2021 with the aim of negotiating a predictable model for cash coordination. Despite an array of challenges the caucus was successful in agreeing on a model that was subsequently endorsed by the IASC Principals in March 2022. In addition, many United Nations (UN) agencies and NGOs continued to expand their use of cash and voucher assistance, with a clear shift to more systematic use across multiple programming objectives. The Donor Cash Forum has been driving common donor approaches at country level and on policy priorities, including ensuring joint positioning and representation in the cash coordination caucus.

The workstream was officially closed in September 2021 following consultation between the co-conveners (the United Kingdom and the World Food Programme) and participating signatories, with sub-groups that remained relevant moving to other forums including the Cash Learning Partnership (CALP) Network and the Social Protection Inter-Agency Coordination Board (SPIAC-B).

While the Grand Bargain has never been the principal driver of progress on cash programming across the humanitarian system, over the last six years it has played an important role in supporting and consolidating a system-wide shift to greater use of this type of assistance across a broad range of objectives. There is however a general consensus among signatories that the approach taken to phase out the technical discussions from the Grand Bargain structure and to use this mechanism to address the outstanding issue of coordination has been appropriate and effective.

Reduce duplication and management costs

There is no evidence of collective progress on this theme in 2021, and very limited information on activities undertaken by signatories individually. The workstream was closed in mid-year and, while the co-conveners (Japan and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)) recommended this issue be elevated to the

political level, it has essentially been dropped from the Grand Bargain agenda. This is unfortunate given the importance of some of the issues originally situated under this workstream to the Grand Bargain's overarching goals, and its two enabling priorities under the 2.0 framework, and it will be important not to lose entirely the work that has been done in this area since 2016. In particular, signatories should consider how to integrate at least some of the original commitments in caucus discussions on quality funding.

Improve joint and impartial needs assessments

Momentum was retained on joint needs assessment and analysis throughout 2021, with the continued focus of the co-conveners (the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) and OCHA) and a core group of signatories on improving the Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF). There was an evolution in approach in response to what have been challenging technical and operational discussions on the framework, and more recent adaptations made to the JIAF approach and to its governance structures have been welcomed, helping build confidence and a more collaborative spirit among the signatories involved that has enabled them to make substantive progress towards a revised JIAF version 2.0. Challenges remain, however, including how to ensure the framework can be used to analyse needs in a way that reflects the specificities of different sectoral areas.

Harmonise and simplify reporting requirements

The workstream continued under the new framework but the co-conveners (Germany and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)) reported that there was much less activity in 2021 than in previous years. The co-conveners' efforts principally focused on advocacy to encourage uptake of the 8+3 narrative reporting template among constituency groups. There was an incremental increase in 2021 in the number of signatories using the template fully or partially for their civil society partners. But there is still not a critical mass of signatories using the template for downstream partners and thus the efficiency savings that widespread use of the template can bring for individual partners and across the system are still not being realised. The value of the template is clear, but there remains a lack of political will to prioritise its use.

Enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors

Following the closure of the workstream on this theme in 2018 there has been no specific strategy within the Grand Bargain for advancing collaboration between humanitarian and development (and peace) actors. However, the platform still provides an opportunity for signatories to both reflect on their work in this area and, in theory at least, consider how other areas of action under the Grand Bargain framework can enable more effective nexus approaches. This was reflected in the reporting for 2021, with signatories continuing to highlight progress including in anticipatory action, durable solutions for displaced persons, integration of humanitarian cash in social protection systems and strengthening local capacities and systems. The self-reports and interviews indicate a growing institutional and collective interest in and understanding of the *triple* nexus, specifically how humanitarian action contributes to sustainable peace.

Gender and the Grand Bargain

Gender equality and women's empowerment is a key area where the Grand Bargain has helped drive progress across the international humanitarian system. Reflecting this, the Friends of Gender Group (FoGG) sought to influence the development of the Grand Bargain 2.0 framework to ensure the explicit inclusion of gender in the enabling objectives and outcome pillars. The FoGG was very successful in this regard, with gender equality and women's empowerment clearly integrated throughout the framework document endorsed by signatories at the 2021 annual meeting. In the second half of the year there was, however, a clear loss of momentum on ensuring that gender equality remains a key priority, and there seems to have been a breakdown in the relationship between the FoGG and the Facilitation Group.

Risk and the Grand Bargain

In January 2021, the Netherlands and the ICRC sought to reinvigorate dialogue on risk within the Grand Bargain through holding an expert meeting and publishing a statement highlighting the key actions needed to shift towards greater risk-sharing. The two signatories worked with InterAction to identify ways to encourage a new approach to risk management in humanitarian action, including establishing a new platform bringing together risk experts and signatory focal points to develop a framework to improve risk acceptance and enable risk-sharing; identify and share good practice and learning; and inform political discussions on localisation and quality funding. This new platform convened in the first quarter of 2022. There remains significant interest in the risk agenda among signatories, and many are engaged in a range of risk-management activities. However, many signatories are still trying to understand the different elements of risk management, including risk-sharing, and how they can work together in this area.

Conclusions and recommendations

At their annual meeting in June 2021, the Grand Bargain signatories agreed on a more focused and more streamlined framework. Since then, however, momentum has dissipated, and concrete progress on implementing the new framework, including transitioning to the caucus model, has been much slower than anticipated (see Figure 1). These delays in adapting structures, clarifying concepts and identifying champions from among the signatories to lead political dialogue has had a direct impact on collective efforts to achieve the two enabling priorities, and collective progress on some of the other areas of the Grand Bargain's original framework basically ground to a halt in the latter half of 2021.

In terms of the enabling priorities, there may be some incremental increase in the volume of quality funding across the system, but it is still not keeping pace with growing needs and not being equitably distributed across aid organisations, particularly those working most directly with crisis-affected people. There were increased efforts to strengthen local capacities, including to enable local actors' access to and influence over international decision-making forums, with for example the two local actor networks that are signatories to the Grand Bargain now able to exert greater influence at global level. But the significant decrease in 2021 in the volume and percentage of funds provided directly to

local governmental and non-governmental actors is concerning, and data on funding provided via one intermediary is so sparse as to render useful analysis impossible. This lack of data is directly related to the ongoing failure of many aid organisations to track and/or report the funding they pass on. The evidence in relation to participation does not indicate any specific progress in this area: although aid organisations continue to report on investments in communicating with affected populations, this tends to be a one-way conversation. Despite rhetoric around a ‘participation revolution’, the failure to make any concrete progress poses a serious reputational risk for the Grand Bargain signatories.

Agreement in the cash coordination caucus on a model for more predictable coordination of cash and voucher assistance is the most visible outcome of the last 12 months of the Grand Bargain, but signatories will need to achieve much more in the succeeding 12 months if their investments in the new framework are to be worthwhile. That said, the success of the cash coordination process demonstrates that the caucus model can deliver: that targeted, high-level negotiations can break through some of the political barriers that have stymied progress in the Grand Bargain. Signatories now need to apply that same energy, sense of urgency and clear focus to quality funding, localisation and participation in order to make similar gains.

Looking ahead, a number of measures need to be taken urgently in order for the signatories to have any chance of making further substantive progress against the goals of the Grand Bargain by mid-2023. Failure now to quickly rebuild the political momentum of the first half of 2021 will jeopardise gains won to date through this mechanism and fall far short of the Grand Bargain’s real potential to drive change.

Recommendations

Increasing the provision and ensuring more equitable distribution of quality funding

With one year remaining of the Grand Bargain 2.0 process, progress towards achieving an increase in and more equitable distribution of quality funding needs to be urgently stepped up. To refocus minds, ODI recommends a short ‘chapeau’ document on quality funding be rapidly developed, negotiated and agreed between signatory groups. Drawing on existing commitments and actions taken, the chapeau should set out the priority actions that each signatory group will take, with relevant targets to be achieved by mid-2023. Key elements should include:

1. A mutual high-level political commitment by donors to provide multi-year funding and recipient aid organisations to engage in multi-year planning/budgeting and programming as the *default* approach in protracted crises.
2. A requirement for all international signatories to take steps to meet the original target of 25% of their humanitarian funding provided to local actors directly *and/or* through one intermediary by June 2023, with those unable to meet the target explaining how they support local actors in other ways (e.g. with in-kind support and/or enabling their direct access to international funding).
3. A requirement for first-line recipient organisations to ensure by June 2023 that they are able to track and report (to FTS and/or IATI) how much funding they pass to local actors directly and via one intermediary, and how much multi-year and/or flexible funding they pass onwards to downstream partners (international or local).

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4. Concrete action from donors to improve the flexibility, predictability and timeliness of the funding they provide to first-level recipient organisations.
5. An agreement between key donors and recipient organisations on standards to enhance the visibility of quality funding provided.
6. A requirement for all donors and international aid organisation signatories to roll out the 8+3 narrative reporting template to all downstream NGO partners.
7. Concrete action from donors and aid organisations to scale up the use of pooled funds.
8. Concrete action from international signatories to enable more direct access for local actors to international donors, both in relation to funding and for strategic-level discussions.

Supporting local leadership and enhancing institutional capacities

Signatories should commit to stepping up the provision of institutional capacity support for local actors. Actions should include:

1. Agreeing on and implementing a collective commitment to provide a minimum percentage of overhead costs to local partners.
2. Scaling up the provision of financial support to local actors for mentoring, capacity exchange and enhancing due diligence systems.
3. Agreeing with NEAR and A4EP what practical and financial support is required to enable them to sustain their engagement in the Grand Bargain processes and structures.
 - a. Working towards enabling co-leadership/co-chairing of relevant clusters as the preferred arrangement.

Giving affected people meaningful influence over aid provided

Aid organisations and donors must work together to bring about the much promised ‘participation revolution’. Actions should include:

1. Putting in place a mechanism to ensure donors are able to work with and support the IASC in delivering on its prioritisation of accountability to affected populations.
2. Ensuring that appropriate resources are allocated within operational organisations to implement policies and guidance on participation.
3. Ensuring donors provide targeted support to scale up programmes designed/led by beneficiaries.

Enhancing coordination of efforts to maximise multiplier effects

Breaking down long-standing silos and ensuring greater connectivity between the structures of the Grand Bargain 2.0 will require the following actions:

1. The Eminent Person, Facilitation Group and Secretariat need to step up efforts to fully socialise the concepts of the political caucuses and the National Reference Groups among all signatories.
2. The Eminent Person, Facilitation Group and Secretariat need to continue to push signatories – particularly caucus champions and co-conveners – to ensure explicit, functional links are made between the two enabling priorities, and between the enabling priorities and original commitments.

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3. Caucus champions need to ensure that the caucus discussions build on technical work already undertaken in workstreams. This includes identifying barriers and good practice/solutions.
4. Greater functional links need to be secured with other relevant international aid forums – particularly the IASC, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development–Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) and the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative – to ensure that investments in relevant forums are mutually reinforcing.

Strengthening the governance and accountability of the Grand Bargain 2.0

There is a need to strengthen the remaining governance structures of the Grand Bargain to support delivery of the objectives of the new 2.0 framework by June 2023. This should involve:

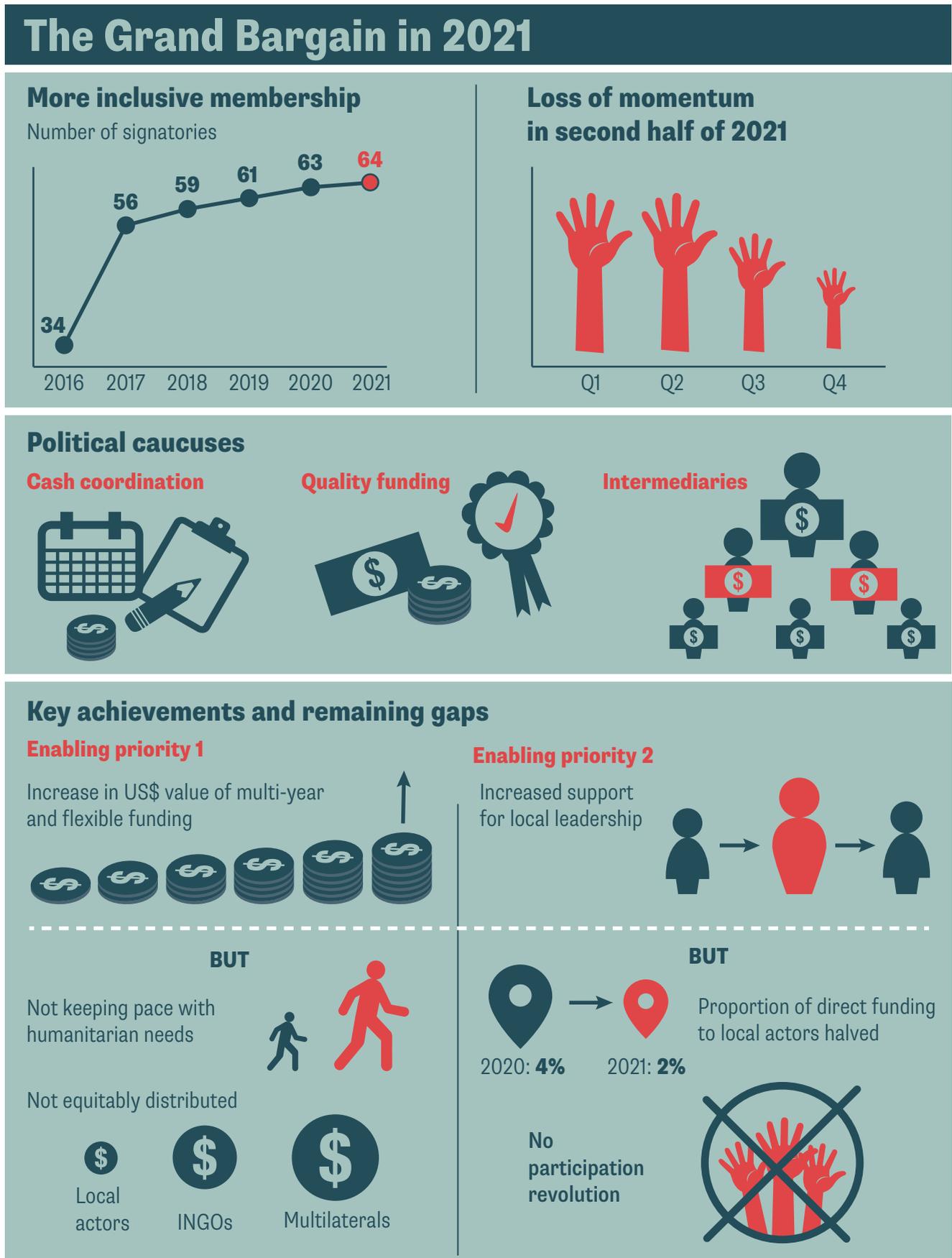
1. Signatories delegating greater authority to the Facilitation Group and Secretariat to assume a more proactive role to help galvanise signatory action, garner and sustain political momentum and consolidate collective progress.
2. Signatories providing the Secretariat with additional resources to scale up their support for the Grand Bargain structures and processes.
3. Ensuring better distribution of tasking between the chair and non-chairs to ensure the Facilitation Group can more proactively and strategically engage in caucuses and workstreams and make links between them.
4. Supporting the Sherpas through more regular meetings to identify gaps or issues that require their intervention and their engagement in caucuses to offer concrete ideas and political support.
5. Sharing the financial burden of sustaining the Grand Bargain structures and processes more equitably between a wider group of signatories.

Simplifying monitoring and reporting to better track progress

Six years into the Grand Bargain process, tracking of progress by the collective of signatories remains a major challenge. Overcoming this challenge will require:

1. The Facilitation Group, the Eminent Person, Secretariat, caucus champions and remaining co-conveners to work together to simplify the current set of indicators used in the self-report process.
2. Concurrently, there should be a high-level political push from the Eminent Person to those signatories that do not currently track or report data requested under the Grand Bargain (e.g. funding to local actors) to adapt their systems to enable them to do so.
3. Finally, with a view to sustaining momentum into the final year of the Grand Bargain 2.0 framework, it would be valuable to conduct a light review of the response to the conflict in Ukraine in the second half of 2022.

Figure 1 The Grand Bargain in 2021





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