

Grand Bargain Annual Meeting 2021

Summary note

Virtual, 15-16 June 2021



Five years after the Grand Bargain was launched, the Signatories met for a virtual Annual Meeting on 15 and 16 June 2021 to acknowledge progress made and to ensure a commitment to the Grand Bargain 2.0. The high-level participation, as well as the strong commitment expressed, speak to the enthusiasm and dedication of the Signatories to pursue the Grand Bargain's objectives, and to expand its strategic outreach. This was further demonstrated by virtually all

speakers both at Principal and Sherpa level.

This is a summary note of both the spoken interventions during the meeting and contributions to the chat.

Day 1: Grand Bargain 2.0, High-level segment, Principals level

As demonstrated by the **progress achieved since 2016**, the Grand Bargain remains an important vehicle for change at institutional and operational level, as well as within broader donor and aid agencies groups. The Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2021 lists several areas where the Grand Bargain has driven or significantly contributed to a system-wide shift in policy and practice. As noted by the outgoing Eminent Person Ms Sigrid Kaag, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of The Netherlands: *"Changes have been achieved, although sometimes they did not make political headlines, but it's important for humanitarian workers and partners who do the job on a daily basis. More people can meet their needs through cash-based programming, and localisation has become a central part of principled humanitarian assistance. The needs of affected people are better reflected in our responses through better analysis. Gender equality is embedded more deeply in the bargain, and simplified reporting to give humanitarian workers more time to do the job to assist people who need protection and support."* The Facilitation Group Principals agreed on the importance of the Grand Bargain and its achievements, noting it has provided a unique platform for collaboration for different constituencies. It also provided an environment for all actors to come together as peers, including local actors, and discuss in an integrated way important issues, such as risk and gender.

The Grand Bargain was one of the recommendations of the report *"Too important to fail: addressing the humanitarian financing gap"* – and it remains too important to fail. The **extensive consultations** through 2020 and 2021 led by the Facilitation Group with both Signatories and non-Signatories across all constituencies have shown that the Grand Bargain continues to be a highly relevant space for addressing the most pressing issues that the

humanitarian system is facing – including a massive increase in humanitarian needs, a still widening financing gap, and the need to make faster progress on localisation of humanitarian work. To this purpose, the Facilitation Group developed the **Grand Bargain 2.0 Framework and its annexes, which were endorsed by the Signatories** ahead of the Annual Meeting.

Grounded in the **original objective of the Grand Bargain**, and maintaining the validity of the initial commitments, the iteration 2.0 aims to achieve better humanitarian outcomes for affected populations through enhanced efficiency, effectiveness, and greater accountability, building on progress achieved and lessons learned in the last five years. The Signatories will elevate collective efforts to the political level, and focus on the enabling priorities that are essential for achieving the objectives: quality funding, localisation, and participation of affected populations. The Grand Bargain 2.0 Framework also breaks the silos among individual priorities and commitments through the establishment of four outcome pillars: 1. Flexibility, predictability, transparency, and tracking; 2. Equitable and principled partnership; 3. Accountability and inclusion; 4. Prioritisation and coordination.

The Annual Meeting was also an opportunity for a formal **handover to the new Eminent Person, Mr Jan Egeland**, Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, who took over from Minister Kaag. Welcoming the Grand Bargain 2.0 Framework, Mr Egeland noted: *“For me the test for progress is with the people we aim to serve. It's the Kivu test that we should pass when we try to make progress in the Grand Bargain.”* According to Mr Egeland, quality funding allows aid workers from both international and local organisations to access funding they need when they need it. It also means spending less time and resources on bureaucracy. For a truly sustainable transformation, local groups have to be at the centre of humanitarian action. *“And finally, the participation revolution is an area where we need to make a quantum leap. It is not about us. They need to tell us how we are doing and how we can improve.”*

Underlining that the new framework provides a stronger focus to guide renewed efforts and maximise impact over the next two years, the Facilitation Group Principals expressed their **commitment to promote and support the endorsed Grand Bargain 2.0**.

This was echoed by the Signatory Principals taking the floor. In addition to the six Facilitation Group members and two Eminent Persons, 25 speakers took the floor, among them nine local and international local NGOs, one representative from the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, ten donors, and five UN agencies. The largest humanitarian donors and agencies renewed their commitment to leading and contributing to the reform objectives of the Grand Bargain. *“All challenges compel us to collective action, through this unique platform,”* one speaker noted, with other Signatories further reinforcing the commitment to collective action, while also highlighting the need for individual institutions to look internally at where they can achieve change.

As noted by another speaker, *“the pandemic raised the needs to unprecedented levels. Without the Grand Bargain, the system would have been less efficient in delivering aid.”* The Grand Bargain 2.0 enabling priorities reflect the need to move the focus from Geneva to the operational level – where real transformation is needed, as emphasised by several speakers. The Grand Bargain 2.0 is more centred around the people we are committed to serve. While

the outputs and activities will be continuously evolving, it was clear throughout the Annual Meeting that to achieve the objectives, progress is needed on more quality funding, quality partnerships with local actors, particularly women-led organisations, and making response mechanisms more demand-driven. The new framework breaks down the existing workstream silos, which was appreciated by several speakers. It also foresees an additional seat for local actors in the Facilitation Group, a change welcomed by the Signatories.

From the initial lack of any **gender** commitments in the original Grand Bargain agreement, gender was integrated into the various workstreams throughout the years, largely thanks to efforts of the Friends of Gender Group. Gender features as an important cross-cutting issue in Grand Bargain 2.0, and will be further integrated across the outputs. Further discussions will be held to ensure greater linkages with the work of the Facilitation Group.

Other notable topics flagged by Signatories included increasing trust to develop a better **sharing of risks**, building upon the statement published by The Netherlands and ICRC ahead of the Annual Meeting, the importance of grounding the framework in humanitarian principles, the role of intermediaries and local actor leadership, and engaging with affected governments.

The Signatories suggested that **indicators and targets** should be reviewed or developed soon after the Annual Meeting to ensure implementation of the objectives and to not lose momentum. Targets and indicators will need to be measurable and meaningful, without adding layers of bureaucracy but rather increasing the efficiency of the system and the speed of delivery.

In his summary remarks, Mr Amir Abdulla, WFP Deputy Executive Director noted that *"the best tunes are often harmonies with a choir made up of many voices but if one by one we go silent only soloists are left. We must not let a loud few determine the nature of the sound. Poor harmony diminishes the song."*

Eminent Person Mr Egeland concluded that there is a remarkable degree of unanimity on what has to be done. The Signatories agreed on shared goals, and were energised to accelerate progress. Mr Egeland stressed the importance of the 'how': we need to transform strategic issues identified in the endorsed 2.0 Framework, into concrete, time-bound, accountable and transformative actions.

Day 2: Grand Bargain 2.0 Operationalisation, Sherpa level

The purpose of the second day of the Annual Meeting was to translate the strategic direction endorsed on the previous day into practical action. As Eminent Person Mr Egeland noted: *"We have the orders from the Principals. Today we focus on the how. It's about the people in need, not so much about us – we need to work together and partner."*

The first part of the day focused on operationalising the enabling priorities, cross-cutting issues, and structure:

LOCALISATION AND PARTICIPATION REVOLUTION

Proposals by the Signatories included focusing on the future role of intermediaries in supporting locally-led humanitarian action. To ensure meaningful engagement with local and national actors, the existing country-based dialogues could be utilised and advanced through the suggested National Reference Groups. This should also be an opportunity to engage affected people. While as a community, we have learned to listen to affected people, there is still no collective system in place to systematically adapt our responses to their feedback and needs. It was also suggested that moving forward, engagement between the Grand Bargain and affected governments should be strengthened, wherever relevant.

QUALITY FUNDING

Following the introductory remarks by the workstream 7&8 Co-convenors, many Signatories echoed their recommendations, including that future efforts should build on existing progress, and that the agenda on quality funding should be owned, shared and promoted across all constituencies. Priorities expressed by different constituencies varied, with donors emphasising the need for more visibility of the quality funds provided to ensure accountability to taxpayers and to increase transparency, providing funds to frontline responders, and ensuring intersectoral needs assessment. Aid agencies called for increasing the provision of quality funding to reach 30% and beyond and proposed scaling up alternative modalities to quality funding, such as the Programme Based Approach.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

The Netherlands and ICRC shared a statement on risk sharing that was supported by several Signatories, in particular emphasising the importance of trust. It was proposed that a coalition of the willing should work on setting up a framework of risk acceptance.

With regard to gender, country-level operationalisation was highlighted as a priority, accompanied by a robust monitoring framework to be developed by the Friends of Gender and reviewed by the Signatories.

STRUCTURES

The Signatories were overwhelmingly supportive of the introduction of **political caucuses** but cautioned that several elements have to be in place in order for them to be effective. They stressed that caucuses should focus on unlocking collective challenges, where political support is needed. Caucuses should be strategic, involve high-level participation, including from the most influential stakeholders. Discussions within caucuses should be transparent and inclusive. This could be done by making caucuses time-bound and tied to specific objectives, identifying key issues that should be elevated, and avoiding proliferation and duplication of groups, as well as through keeping the Facilitation Group, Signatories, and the Secretariat informed.

To be effective, the caucuses will need strong leadership and engagement, particularly by the Eminent Person.

Caucuses should be complementary to the **workstreams**, to avoid any risk of duplication. Several Signatories indicated that relevant workstreams should continue, including as

communities of practice that can be referred to when technical advice or discussions are needed to support the political level. Complementarity with other fora should be ensured, including with IASC, building on the strengths of the different mechanisms.

Several Signatories proposed caucuses on a range of issues, such as the role of intermediaries, engagement with Global South governments, risk sharing, and quality funding. Considering that the caucuses should be focused, strategic, and time-bound, the Eminent Person and the Facilitation Group will discuss and propose how to proceed with the initial caucuses.

Taking into account the inputs received through consultations that have already been included in the annexes, the Facilitation Group will propose criteria to ensure that the caucuses have a clear objective that they can measure success against and demonstrably communicate delivery to the Eminent Person, the Facilitation Group, and the Signatories through the Secretariat.

Day 2 – part 2: How to ensure that the Grand Bargain 2.0 as a whole is relevant at country level, focusing on local actor engagement (at all levels), accountability to affected populations

The second part of the day focused on how to ensure that the Grand Bargain 2.0 is operationalised at the country level, with a specific focus on how to include local actors at all levels to ensure the solutions fit their needs. The Facilitation Group made some proposals which generally received support: a local actor representative joining the Facilitation Group, more local and national networks as Signatories, ensuring that country-level dialogues feed into global dialogues, meaningful involvement of recipient governments, including through the G77 Secretariat, and looking at how local actors can participate as protagonists in coordination structures and mechanisms. Work on the latter element is already being done by IASC with the issuance of the IASC guidelines, while the Grand Bargain 2.0 will create National Reference Groups to interface with the Country Directors of donors, INGOs and UN agencies, Humanitarian Country Teams and Humanitarian Coordinators. Moving forward it will be important to ensure the National Reference Groups are able to genuinely engage with and influence these mechanisms.

Speakers stressed that National Reference Groups should be flexible based on the context, and able to draw upon all Grand Bargain structures through the local actor representative in the Facilitation Group.

It was noted that partnerships with local actors must build on complementarity among partners. In addition, as relates to the role of intermediaries, aid agencies called for donors to create a common set of expectations for intermediaries.

To put the suggestions made into practice, one proposal was to start with pilot countries to test the approach, tweak and scale up as appropriate.

Closing the meeting, Eminent Person Mr Egeland said that as a Grand Bargain family, we have a common goal to work towards and called the Signatories to act. *"The talking phase is over, there is a million pages explaining what we need to do, workstreams led to great plans of action, we need to make progress now,"* he concluded.