



Rohingya community in refugee camp in Bangladesh, COAST Trust

Position paper - Grand Bargain

Equal partners not only passengers

We need more political engagement in the Grand Bargain to get it on track. Making real – and swift - progress will require stronger leadership from UN agencies, NGOs and donors. The success of the Grand Bargain will inform the future of our humanitarian financing system and each of us here today has the power to contribute to its success”.

Under-Secretary Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock

“Only through collective efforts we will be able to bring about the changes that are necessary if we are to reach all those in need”.

Grand Bargain Eminent Person Kristalina Georgieva

The two statements above were made at the Grand Bargain (GB) Second Annual meeting held in New York on 18 June 2018. They reflect widespread concern about the lack of sufficient progress towards the GB commitments, two years after they were made during the World Humanitarian Summit.

The second Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report¹ also reports scant progress against the ten workstreams. In 2018, the GB Facilitation Group tasked Overseas Development Institute (ODI), based in London, to develop recommendations that would prioritise core commitments under each workstream to help focus efforts. ODI developed a set of recommendations, which were discussed at the co-conveners meeting on 14 September 2018.

The A4EP, which is a network of organisations committed to strengthen the humanitarian architecture, has produced this advocacy position paper, which aims to positively influence the debate towards transformation of the humanitarian system.



The Grand Bargain has been too top-down. It continues to be a discourse among international actors. National and local actors from aid receiving countries, that were intended to benefit from the process, were scantily involved during the finalisation of the GB workstreams and commitments, kept at bay during the unfolding of the process, and continue to be out of the revision process discussions. A process that aims at strengthening inclusion of southern actors in the humanitarian architecture cannot succeed if it excludes their effective participation in the process, or feels content with merely token participation.

The conveners of A4EP believe that the GB revision process is yet another symptomatic treatment, overlooking the fundamental problems. The GB process shouldn't be an academic exercise: it impacts the lives of people in need of humanitarian assistance. So far, the actors involved in the GB processes, have developed the right diagnosis and come up with good recommendations to address the underlying issues. However, there are problem in the approach, and that has hindered making substantial progress.



An inclusive and a participatory process is needed, especially including participation from global south. All the 59 signatories, the Sherpas, the Eminent Person, the Facilitation Group and the GB secretariat are dominated by international actors from OECD-DAC countries.

There is a lack of transparency about decision-making on how and which national and local actors are chosen to take part in the workstreams. The workstreams suffer from token participation of national and local actors. Localisation doesn't mean only passing on a few more resources to southern actors, but it should also mean equal ownership of the frameworks and the decision-making processes. As long as international actors keep patronising southern actors in decision-making, the humanitarian architecture will continue to fail, despite good intentions. Given that, it is highly important to reform structures at all levels to have at least 50% participation of southern actors. The southern networks – rather than the northern actors - should identify participants from the global South. More meetings in 'southern' countries will greatly facilitate greater participation and contributions from southern actors



Wider dissemination and roll out of an action plan on GB commitments is required. Many of the Grand Bargain commitments aim at strengthening local responders and affected populations. However, most local actors remain oblivious of the process, and there have been few proactive efforts to inform them about the commitments. To address this, each GB signatory should commit to organise at least one workshop with local responders for wider dissemination

on the GB commitments and the localisation process. The action plan developed in September 2018 should be revised with inputs from local responders and shared widely for the sake of accountability.

Almost all the signatories of Grand Bargain are global actors with headquarters in the global North and country offices in the global South. More than two years after the WHS, little has been done to institutionalise the GB commitments across the structure of these organisations. The country offices of global organisations keep shuffling between being national and international organisations, per their convenience, to retain control over financial resources, and to access more. The GB signatories need to come clear on this, and fast-track institutionalisation of the commitments. Under no circumstances should their country offices be considered a national outfit within the localisation process.

A great deal of resources are being invested in visits to the demonstrator countries, and these visits are also being dominated by international actors with little representation from local actors. The written reports that are produced do not accurately represent the outcomes of the visits and risk losing their value to bring real change and deliver on GB commitments. Some donor countries have brought about policy-level or legislative changes which favour working with local responders. All the donor governments who are signatory of the Grand Bargain should do this. This policy changes should be shared with a wider audience, especially at national levels.



There is insufficient transparency or accountability to local level actors. At present International agencies do not publish their aid data in a way that is accessible at a local level, so that aid receiving public cannot participate or comment on how to minimize transaction costs and raise the level of aid effectiveness.

ODI has suggested, *“Enabling local responders to access and publish their own financial data to a standard accepted by international partners – UN, INGOs, donors – would allow them greater access to international funding, enable more accurate tracking of humanitarian funding right down the chain to recipient communities...”*

A4EP is concerned with this suggestion as it is most likely going to become another barrier and a burden to local responders accessing funding. Today, not even all GB signatories and their country offices are using the IATI dashboard, which is quite sophisticated. There is no evidence that the data available on the IATI dashboard is being used for decision-making. It is impractical to think that local responders, who continue to struggle to retain core staff in absence of regular and predictable funding, and higher salaries offered by international agencies, would be able to report to such sophisticated dashboard after receiving training. This suggestion reflects a Northern perspective, and overlooks practical constraints. It also consolidates a top down approach, while overlooking the option of national level reporting mechanisms, which could be accessed by the GB signatories.

A4EP recommends the co-conveners rethink this recommendation. A lack of reporting was not the reason behind poor funding to local actors. The GB signatories need to simplify their requirements (commitment 9) instead of expecting local responders to meet higher levels without sufficient funding. There needs to be clearer reporting and accountability of the GB commitments for progress to be made. Being a signatory

of the Grand Bargain is voluntary but delivering on the commitments afterwards should not be voluntary. A compliance mechanism for signatories could assist in delivering on commitments.



GB signatories should start planning on how to deliver on the commitments beyond 2020.

There has been slow progress so far, it is unlikely that all the commitments will be achieved by 2020. The GB Secretariat has not yet started thinking about the future of the Grand Bargain. A4EP suggests that planning for the future of the Grand Bargain should start as early as possible, with equal inclusion of Southern actors. The future plan should align with other global processes, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and Paris Declaration on Climate Change, etc.

A4EP urges the GB signatories and the secretariat to work in a more open and transparent manner, and in the spirit of equitable partnership, which is espoused in the GB. We urge the localisation workstream co-conveners to be more transparent in their decision-making and embrace more local actors to make it truly representative. Most of its meetings should be held in aid-recipient countries, not in Western capitals. The members of A4EP are ready to take their responsibility and work with the GB secretariat and the localisation workstream to achieve this.

International Conveners of Alliance 4 Empowering Partnerships



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