Executive summary

Grand Bargain annual independent report 2018

Victoria Metcalfe-Hough and Lydia Poole with Sarah Bailey and Julie Belanger

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About the authors

Victoria Metcalfe-Hough is an independent consultant and Research Associate with ODI.

Lydia Poole is an independent consultant and Research Associate with ODI.

Sarah Bailey is an independent consultant and Research Associate with ODI.

Julie Belanger is an independent consultant.

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Humanitarian Policy Group Overseas Development Institute 203 Blackfriars Road London SE1 8NJ United Kingdom

Tel. +44 (0) 20 7922 0300 Fax. +44 (0) 20 7922 0399 Email: hpgadmin@odi.org Website: www.odi.org/hpg

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Executive summary

In May 2016, 18 donor countries and 16 aid organisations (including UN entities, INGOs and the Red Cross Movement) signed a 'Grand Bargain' outlining 51 mutual commitments across ten thematic workstreams – all aimed at improving the overall efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

Signatories to the Grand Bargain agreed to undertake an annual independent review of progress made against the commitments. Issued in June 2017, the first annual independent report noted that, on average, signatories reported action against 40% of the commitments, with more focus and progress in some workstreams than others; that the Grand Bargain had a light bureaucratic footprint; and that its design – a unique collaboration between donors, the UN, INGOs and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Secretariat - had strengthened buy-in from stakeholders. The report also highlighted decreasing political momentum and growing frustration at a perceived lack of impact and action at country level.

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) was commissioned by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) on behalf of the Facilitation Group to produce the second annual independent report. ODI was tasked to provide an impartial overview of collective progress made during the period January-December 2017, based on an assessment of actions and activities undertaken by the then 56 signatories. Building on and consistent with the methodology developed for the first annual report, ODI analysed actions taken by signatories and the challenges they faced in moving towards the achievement of all the commitments across all ten workstreams, both in respect of HQ-level actions and actions at country level. ODI also assessed the extent to which gender has been considered by Grand Bargain workstreams. Analysis was based primarily on the 46 self-reports submitted by and interviews with signatories, as well as a review of other available documentation and consultations with external stakeholders.

Key areas of progress

The quantitative and qualitative research collated indicates that there was important progress in 2017 in a number of workstreams, against specific commitments, and some progress in integrating gender as a cross-cutting issue. The majority of signatories reported actions against a broad spread of commitments - signatories reported actions at an average rate of 52% across the commitments.¹Three of the workstreams made substantive progress overall - workstreams 3 (cash programming), 6 (participation revolution) and 7 (multi-year planning and financing). Workstream 3 made particularly good progress, including in respect of the joint commitment to increase collaboration, including sharing capacities, knowledge, guidance and standards on cash programming, and through high levels of individual actions: 89% of signatories reported increased routine use of cash (commitment 3.1) for example the highest rate of reporting against any individual commitment. Overall, this workstream illustrates how the Grand Bargain can bring the three groups of actors together to tackle technical and political differences, and make tangible progress towards more efficient and effective aid responses.

In workstream 7 (multi-year planning and financing), aid organisations have fulfilled their role under commitment 7.2 with the development of multi-year plans in seven countries in 2017. The majority of donors (58%) reported an increase in their provision of multi-year funding, which, together with actions taken by a smaller number of donors to reduce earmarking, reflects important progress towards achieving the systemic shift in humanitarian financing that has long been called for. In workstream 6 (participation revolution), actions taken by signatories against joint commitments indicated good progress, including on improving coordination of and common standards for approaches to community engagement and participation (commitment 6.2).

¹ Due to an overlap in reporting periods for the first and second annual reports, this figure is not directly comparable.

Analysis of the three better-performing workstreams indicates several common enabling factors: the commitments under these workstreams are generally clear and actionable; there are fewer pre-existing policy differences between signatories in these areas; the workstreams, through co-conveners and participating signatories, have agreed priorities and/ or a common approach or strategy; the workstreams have forged strategic links with pre-existing or new processes outside the Grand Bargain; there has been good collaboration between and investment from the co-convening organisations; and, critically, there has been relatively strong political investment from the different signatory groups (donors, UN agencies, NGOs, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement).

Actions have also been taken at country level in line with specific commitments. More HCTs now include national NGOs; multi-year plans, based on risk and vulnerability analysis conducted jointly with development actors, and which outline collective outcomes, have been developed in a number of countries; and several workstreams are planning or undertaking pilots or engagement at country level, including the harmonised donor reporting pilot being rolled out by workstream 9. Many signatories reported specific examples of how their implementation of the commitments is translating into improved countrylevel operations. Country- and regionally-based NGO consortia, such as Sphere India, are also starting to use the Grand Bargain framework to hold donors and international aid organisations to account.

For the 2017 annual report process, the Facilitation Group requested signatories detail any efforts to integrate gender in their implementation of the commitments. A majority of signatories (31 out of 46) reported some effort in this regard. Most made reference to basic actions, such as disaggregating data based on gender, but several signatories – including Canada, the UK, the World Food Programme (WFP), the ICRC, Care International and UN Women outlined a strategic approach that aimed to embed gender throughout the full scope of their commitments. Actions taken by the workstreams also varied significantly. Both workstreams 6 (participation revolution) and 9 (harmonised reporting) reported specific actions to integrate gender in their activities, but the remaining workstreams paid little or no attention to gender in their work in 2017. Affording gender greater prominence at the political level would likely encourage signatories to increase their efforts

to integrate it in their actions against commitments, and to report on these efforts in a more consistent and measurable way.

Crucially, the research indicates that there remains strong consensus among signatories, and to some degree external stakeholders, that the Grand Bargain is acting as a catalyst for institutional and systemwide change. Signatories reported that the Grand Bargain had generated momentum internally to push for changes in policy and operational practice, particularly greater use of cash programming, more transparent reporting and increased support for local actors. In most cases these priorities already existed at institutional level, but the Grand Bargain has provided a vehicle to galvanise institution-wide efforts to take, or speed up, action.

Remaining challenges and their impact on collective progress

Progress against individual commitments and across and within the workstreams remained uneven throughout 2017. To a degree, uneven progress is inevitable given the breadth of commitments and the broad range of signatories. But it is also related to a number of underlying practical and political challenges, as illustrated most starkly in respect of workstreams 5 (needs assessments) and 10 (the humanitarian–development nexus). Addressing these challenges will be critical to ensuring that the signatories can make speedier and more consistent progress across the full set of commitments.

Key challenges or factors inhibiting progress in 2017 included the lack of a clear, common understanding of the end goal that the signatories are collectively working towards, both in terms of the Grand Bargain overall and in some workstreams; the sheer breadth and scope of the 51 commitments; tensions between some commitments and a lack of guidance on how to mitigate these; differing views on how the Grand Bargain should relate to country-level operations; a lack of consistent and practical methodologies for measuring progress; an increasingly complex and heavy bureaucracy; a lack of clarity on how the Grand Bargain relates to or could complement other multilateral processes; and, related to all of these, a lack of adequately visible leadership and engagement at the political level.

There is currently no consistent or common understanding of what changes the Grand Bargain aims to bring about, or what actions are necessary to deliver them. The desired end-state and the target date for achieving it are also both unclear. As the number of signatories has increased, so differences in expectations, interpretations and understanding of both specific commitments and the Grand Bargain's overall goals have grown, as evidenced in the significant inconsistencies in information presented in the self-reports, and the differing opinions expressed during interviews for this report.

In 2017, signatories continued to struggle with the sheer breadth and scope of the 51 commitments. Many are vaguely worded, with little clarity on what actions signatories are expected to take. As work to clarify language, objectives and actions progressed in 2017, the tensions, overlaps and synergies between commitments have become more obvious. But there is as yet no overarching strategy on how to mitigate the tensions, consolidate the overlaps and fully exploit the synergies. While actions are being taken at country level, there remains no clear or common vision of how the Grand Bargain should relate to country-level operations. Some signatories pointed out that it was intended as and should thus remain an HQ-focused policy change process that will eventually result in more efficient and effective country-level operations. Others (particularly international NGOs) felt that it should be rolled out as quickly as possible at country level, with the language of the Grand Bargain clearly evident in common plans, strategies and tools.

Current approaches to measuring progress are inconsistent and complex. Some commitments include quantitative targets or specific target dates for achievement, but it is not clear how these figures were set, or how data that some workstreams have requested from signatories can be used to measure progress against aggregate targets. The annual report process was designed as the principal means for measuring collective progress, but the significant inconsistencies in the information reported and the lateness of submissions indicate that this is not currently an adequate tool for monitoring and measuring collective progress. More broadly, the signatories need to find a way to assess their collective progress (against both individual commitments and the whole set) without instituting a heavy process of monitoring and evaluation.

The Grand Bargain brought together a number of long-standing commitments made through other processes or fora into one consolidated mechanism. However, it is unclear how the Grand Bargain relates to pre-existing mechanisms working on very similar themes. It is also perceived as exclusive, with non-OECD-DAC governments considering it a Western initiative that has no real relevance for them. There is still no clear vision on whether or how to expand membership.

Widening the group to include non-DAC donor states and national or local aid organisations may help to increase the donor base, ensure that actions are grounded in needs at regional or country level and lead to a more coherent and holistic aid system.

But as the group of signatories, and in consequence the 'democratic' nature of the Grand Bargain, grows, so does the likelihood of differing interpretations, priorities and actions undermining or stalling collective progress.

The research for this report indicates that the Grand Bargain has become both under-governed and overstructured. Its bureaucratic footprint can no longer be considered particularly 'light'. With ten workstreams and multiple sub-working groups, even the largest signatories highlighted during interviews that they struggled to follow what was going on in all of these fora in any meaningful way. The high number of late submissions and the varying quality of information presented in this year's self-reports may also suggest, as noted by some signatories during interviews, that the annual reporting process is more burdensome than intended. In terms of governance, signatories indicated that a lack of authoritative leadership at working level, including a lack of empowerment by signatories of the Facilitation Group, has meant that some of the key policy differences that are stalling progress in and between workstreams remain unresolved. There were clear calls for more visible high-level political leadership from the group of Sherpas and the Eminent Person, as well as from the wider group of signatories themselves. The governance arrangements of the Grand Bargain should reflect the fact that the signatories are voluntarily committing themselves to a set of actions, but should also be robust enough to hold them to account for these commitments and to take the decisions necessary to resolve differences and clarify what should be achieved and by when.

Implementing the 'quid pro quo'

The Grand Bargain was predicated on a 'quid pro quo' arrangement in which the constituent groups would each deliver on a set of actions that, taken together, would bring about substantial gains in efficiency and effectiveness across the humanitarian system.

Evidence gathered for this report indicates that there remains positive collaboration between constituent groups, but that signatories are concerned that the quid pro quo arrangement is not working effectively. While the evidence available bears these concerns out, this view is also in part related to differing expectations and interpretations of what exactly was meant by the concept, and how it should work in practice. There is limited understanding between the constituent groups of the progress each is making, the challenges and risks they face and the limits to what each can reasonably achieve. The idealistic approach to the commitments that some signatories have adopted fails to take account of the very real political, legal and practical constraints that others face in trying to implement the commitments as they are currently worded. The research for this report shows that, where the signatories are able to come together to understand and share risks, they can achieve important progress. But they are still failing to fully exploit the opportunity that this forum presents.

Recommendations

To stay on track to achieve its commitments, the authors suggest that the Grand Bargain needs to become more nimble, more focused, more pragmatic and more responsive to the wider aid environment in which it is operating. In achieving this, the signatories should empower the Eminent Person, the group of Sherpas and, crucially, the Facilitation Group to undertake the series of actions listed below.

1. Rationalise, prioritise and target efforts towards those commitments where reasonable progress can be achieved:

ACTION: Based on the findings of this report, the Facilitation Group should commission an independent body to conduct a light 'audit' of the existing commitments to identify (where feasible) which have been achieved in whole or in part, which may be or are being addressed more effectively by mechanisms outside the Grand Bargain, and which could be realistically achieved if signatories were able to sequence and target their efforts accordingly. The audit should not consider amending or deleting the original commitments, but instead should help signatories identify where they should prioritise and refocus their efforts in order to make more substantial collective progress across the breadth of commitments. Adapting the approach taken by some workstreams, including workstreams 1 (transparency) and 9 (harmonised reporting), and recognising the importance of sequencing, other workstreams should also identify those commitments against which they should prioritise collective efforts.

ACTION: The co-conveners of workstream 10 (humanitarian-development nexus), with engagement from participating signatories and with the support and guidance of the Facilitation Group, should undertake a similar or linked process of auditing to determine where and exactly how enhanced engagement between humanitarian and development actors should be integrated in the actions and strategies adopted under other workstreams. Given the critical nature of this workstream to the overall Grand Bargain framework, this exercise should be undertaken with some urgency.

2. Lighten the bureaucratic burden on signatories in order to better support institutional-level implementation:

ACTION: The Facilitation Group, in consultation with the co-conveners, should propose (and signatories should endorse) a rationalisation of the workstream structure with a view to consolidating efforts and eliminating duplication. Based on the findings of this report, this may include merging workstreams 7 (multi-year planning and financing) and 8 (reduce earmarking) given the substantive overlap between them around more predictable and flexible funding, and amalgamating commitments that are duplicative, such as commitments 7.3 and 10.4, which both require joint assessments of risk and vulnerabilities; 7.1.a and 10.4, which both require joint multi-year planning; and 2.3 and 10.3, which both require investment in the capacities of local and national coordination structures.

ACTION: With the assistance of the co-conveners, the informal friends of gender group and the Secretariat, the Facilitation Group should revise the self-reporting

template and process to reflect a rationalised and prioritised approach to the commitments (based on the audit recommended above), and develop more detailed guidance on the level and quality of information that should be included (including in relation to integration of gender-responsive actions), thereby reducing the administrative burden and developing more consistent information to assess progress through the annual report. Providing examples of the information required (collated from previous years' self-reports) may also assist some signatories (particularly those with less capacity) to understand what is required.

ACTION: The capacity of the Secretariat should be increased to better support the work of the Facilitation Group and co-conveners. This could include collating and presenting illustrative examples of actions required or taken by signatories; elaborating (under the guidance of the Facilitation Group and in collaboration with the co-conveners) a body of practical guidance on how to embed the commitments at institutional level; increasing communication across the workstreams and helping the Facilitation Group to trouble-shoot problems; ensuring greater sharing of information among the signatories and between them and governance and leadership structures; and facilitating increased communication and outreach with non-signatory stakeholders through updating the existing website, including ensuring timely uploading of workstream documents and updated points of contact.

3. Find pragmatic and creative ways to achieve desired outcomes:

ACTION: Based on an increased understanding of the political and technical limitations to achieving some specific commitments, the workstreams should, with support from the Facilitation Group, define creative and pragmatic ways to achieve the same intended outcomes. For example, recognising the limitations that many donors face in providing funding directly to local organisations, it may be more useful to focus on 1) reducing overheads among intermediary organisations and mechanisms, including pooled funds, to ensure that a larger proportion of funding reaches local organisations; and 2) strengthening the capacities of local organisations to enable them to absorb this increased funding. Where donors cannot provide softly earmarked funding at the global level, they could explore pragmatic alternatives, such as supporting flexible funding to country programmes.

4. Define a practical and consistent methodology for making a reasonable assessment of progress:

ACTION: Notwithstanding the importance of generating rigorous evidence, signatories should identify a handful of simple and pragmatic benchmarks or indicators to enable them to reasonably assess what progress has been achieved across the Grand Bargain framework. This task should be overseen by the group of Sherpas and led by the Facilitation Group, with inputs from co-conveners. It may need to be outsourced to an independent body/consultant given limited availability/capacities within the Facilitation Group members and among co-conveners.

The OECD/GTS perception surveys could serve as benchmarks with regard to whether participatory approaches are resulting in more demand-driven programming (workstream 6), on whether cash programming is achieving better outcomes (workstream 3), and whether support to local actors is improving (workstream 2). Along with other indicators, the surveys may also be helpful in assessing the overall effectiveness of the humanitarian system. Quantitative aggregate targets for funding to local organisations and for earmarking funds should be revised to include actual figures, rather than percentage increases, as well as overall volumes of funding. In terms of the overall impact of the Grand Bargain, pursuing an iterative change process should help focus efforts on assessing progress towards the changes that the Grand Bargain has identified are needed to improve the humanitarian system. With this approach, a small set of critical questions should be agreed that outline what changes in policy and practice are intended, and a pragmatic method should be developed to help answer these questions.

5. Get the 'bargain' back on track:

ACTION: The signatories, through the Facilitation Group and co-conveners, should collectively undertake a 'light' risk management exercise to consider the commitments through a risk lens, thereby identifying how risks should best be managed. This should help clarify the risks different constituencies face in taking actions (or not taking action) towards their commitments, and how their respective risk mitigation efforts may impact – positively or negatively – on other groups. Considering the commitments through a risk lens should build stronger arguments for increased risk tolerance and risk sharing, and reduced risk transferring. Cognisant that this should be a 'light' process, this exercise could involve co-conveners bringing forward the outcomes of discussions on risk held at the workstream level to a cross-workstream discussion led by the Facilitation Group that identifies key common or priority risks across the Grand Bargain framework and makes proposals for collective mitigation strategies. This analysis could then be shared with the group of Sherpas for senior-level discussion and decision-making.

ACTION: With the support of the Facilitation Group, a small group of the largest, or at least likeminded, signatories should come together informally to galvanise their collective efforts with a view to demonstrating (on a smaller scale) what can be achieved through the quid pro quo approach. Referencing the original 5+6 concept, and with due regard to transparency, this could encourage other signatories to take the necessary steps in their key areas of commitments.

6. Strengthened political leadership is needed to help signatories overcome political obstacles and steer them towards a clarified end goal:

ACTION: Building on her successes thus far, and with increased support from the Facilitation Group (and by extension the Secretariat), the Eminent Person should maintain her focus on high-level political engagement across the group of signatories; on maintaining appropriate political links with other multilateral mechanisms, including the UN reform process; and on addressing the high-level political challenges that are stalling greater and more consistent progress - for example the lack of political will among key signatories to make a step-change in the collective approach to needs assessments. Given her leadership role at the World Bank, the Eminent Person is also very well placed to champion forthcoming efforts by signatories to integrate the humanitarian-development nexus across the breadth of the commitments and workstreams.

ACTION: The group of Sherpas should be revitalised and more consistently engaged, working in support of the Eminent Person and in collaboration with the Facilitation Group. The nature and size of the group is best determined by the signatories themselves, but the authors recommend a small group of the most active/engaged signatories – akin to the original group of 20 or a group of six that is aligned to the rotating institutional membership of the Facilitation Group. Crucially, the membership of this group, as well as its role and function as an interim leadership mechanism, must be endorsed by the wider group of signatories. In close collaboration with the Facilitation Group, these Sherpas should actively oversee setting of strategic priorities across workstreams, provide political guidance on integration of key cross-cutting issues, including the humanitarian-development nexus and gender-responsive approaches, and the development of a practical and pragmatic methodology for measuring collective progress. They should also act as a senior-level arbitrator for resolving challenges or disagreements arising from within or across workstreams, as referred to them by the Facilitation Group. The group should also advise the Eminent Person on where her intervention is necessary to resolve challenges or to spur collective progress.

ACTION: Building on its achievements thus far, the Facilitation Group should be reinforced through more sustained membership, with representatives appointed at least biennially rather than annually; with a clearer focus on identifying and suggesting ways to address the uneven progress across workstreams; and acting as the arbitrator at working level for resolving challenges or disagreements from within or across workstreams – raising these up to the Sherpa group as needed. In collaboration with the Sherpas, the Facilitation Group (supported by the Secretariat) should also provide advice to the Eminent Person on where her intervention is required to resolve challenges or spur progress on specific issues.

ACTION: This report identifies that strong leadership and a focus on coordinating rather than simply 'convening' are key to ensuring greater progress within workstreams. As such, the nature of the co-conveners' role should be adjusted to reflect the need for more active coordination and, with that, the provision of more sustained capacity from signatories who have taken on these roles.

ACTION: Noting the importance of the annual meeting, the signatories (through the Facilitation Group and workstream co-conveners) should undertake adequate advance preparations to make full use of this opportunity to convene substantive discussions and agree clear actions on specific issues that are currently holding back collective progress. Issues for discussion and decision in 2018 may include whether or how to expand membership, how the Grand Bargain should relate to field-level operations, how to streamline the structure of the Grand Bargain to enable more focused efforts to achieve the commitments and, crucially, what the exact end goal should be and how signatories will measure progress against it. The signatories should utilise the present report to inform their deliberations of and decisions on these issues.

The Grand Bargain in 2017

Signatories reported actions at an average rate of 52% against the commitments...



...and three workstreams are performing relatively well...

Workstream 3: Increase the use and coordination of cash

Workstream 6: A participation revolution

Workstream 7: Increase collaborative humanitarian multi-year planning and funding







June 2018

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...but there are concerns that the quid pro quo is not functioning



Consensus that the Grand Bargain is a catalyst for systemic change...



Recommendations

- **1.** Rationalise, prioritise and target efforts to commitments
- 2. Lighten the bureaucratic burden on signatories
- **3.** Find pragmatic and creative ways to achieve the same outcomes
- 4. Define a practical and consistent methodology for assessing progress
- 5. Get the 'bargain' back on track
- 6. Strengthen political leadership

Progress made per workstream

This table illustrates the scores assigned to each workstream against five assessment criteria. Overall assessments of each workstream can be found in section 2.

효율효율 No significant progress ★요효율 Little progress ★★효율 Some progress ★★★효 Good progress

**** Excellent progress

Workstream	Donor activity	Aid organisation activity	Activity on joint commitments	Links to other workstreams	Links to other existing processes
Greater transparency	★★ ☆☆	☆☆ ☆☆	☆☆☆ ☆	☆☆ ☆☆	★★★ ☆
More support and funding for local and national responders	★★ ☆☆	☆☆ ☆☆	☆☆ ☆☆	☆☆☆☆	★★ ☆☆
Increase the use and coordination of cash	★★★ ☆	☆☆☆ ☆	☆☆☆ ☆	☆☆ ☆☆	****
Reduce duplication and management costs with periodic functional review	★★ ☆☆	☆☆ ☆☆	☆☆ ☆☆	☆☆☆☆	★★★ ☆
Improve joint and impartial needs assessments	★☆☆☆	合合☆☆	☆☆ ☆☆	☆☆ ☆☆	★★ ☆☆
A participation revolution	★★ ☆☆	☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆ ☆	☆☆ ☆☆	★★★ ☆
Increase collaborative humanitarian multi-year planning and funding	★★★ ☆	☆☆ ☆☆	☆☆☆ ☆	☆☆ ☆☆	★★★ ☆
Reduce the earmarking of donor contributions	★★ ☆☆	✿☆☆☆	☆☆ ☆☆	☆☆ ☆☆	★★★ ☆
Harmonise and simplify reporting requirements	★★ ☆☆	合合 公公	含含☆☆	含含 ☆☆	★★☆☆
Enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors	★★ ☆☆	☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆	☆☆ ☆☆	★★ ☆☆

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Humanitarian Policy Group Overseas Development Institute 203 Blackfriars Road London SE1 8NJ United Kingdom

Tel. +44 (0) 20 7922 0300 Fax. +44 (0) 20 7922 0399 Email: hpgadmin@odi.org Website: www.odi.org//hpg

Cover photo: Luscie and her eight children arrived at Lusenda refugee camp in Democratic Republic of Congo after fleeing Bujumbura province in Burundi during the 2015 political crisis. © UN Women/Catianne Tijerina

