



“Whose Bargain is this for?”

Feminist perspectives on strengthening national civil society engagement with the Grand Bargain

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Feminist perspectives on strengthening national civil society engagement with the Grand Bargain

1. Introduction

The Grand Bargain was launched during the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, as a unique agreement between humanitarian agencies and donors to reform and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of international humanitarian action.

With only partial progress achieved within the original five year timeframe, in 2021 signatories signed up to the Grand Bargain 2.0 which focused on two mutually reinforcing ‘enabling priorities’: 1) quality funding, with the aim to increase quality funding in order to achieve an effective and efficient response, ensuring visibility and accountability; and 2) localisation, with the aim of proving greater support for the leadership, delivery and capacity of local responders and the participation of affected communities in addressing humanitarian needs.¹

Much more progress is needed in both these priority areas to meet the commitments made under Grand Bargain 2.0. The humanitarian system remains skewed towards top-down approaches, with limited engagement with national and local civil society groups. More needs to be done to challenge and enable a global humanitarian system that is responsive, accountable and accessible to Women’s Rights Organisations (WROs), Women-Led Organisations (WLOs) and Youth-Led Organisations (YLOs).

As the Grand Bargain 2.0 comes to a close and signatories take stock of next steps, this policy brief draws on relevant literature, survey data and focus group discussions with 32 of ActionAid’s WLO, WRO and YLO partners in 14 countries² to provide an update on the engagement of ActionAid’s partners with the Grand Bargain to date.³

The focal group discussions were conducted over a 4-day workshop on the Grand Bargain 2.0 structure, specifically with an outlook on localisation and the participation of national

and local civil society. It brought together WROs, WLOs and YLOs to discuss the barriers and opportunities in these spaces. The paper summarises relevant recommendations made by the ActionAid’s WRO, WLO and YLO partners, specifically around the need for flexible and long-term funding streams, capacity training and information sharing on the Grand Bargain structures.

These findings have been corroborated by colleagues working in global women’s rights networks as resonating with experience of others and pulled together a qualitative survey (1 response per organisation) to form the data gathered within this brief.

ActionAid has adopted a set of intersectional feminist principles as part of its transformative vision of a just world free from poverty, oppression and patriarchy. ActionAid’s Humanitarian Signature is rooted in these principles and informed by our understanding and experience of shifting power to crisis-affected communities and enabling WROs, WLOs and YLOs to lead.⁴ This approach has enabled ActionAid to meaningfully deliver on its Grand Bargain commitments to women’s leadership and localisation.⁵ This includes its membership in the Charter for Change and eight individual commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit, specifically advocating for meaningful participation and information sharing with our WLO, WRO and YLO partners.

2. Background & Context to Date:

The Grand Bargain remains the most critical collective initiative that brings together humanitarian actors, INGOs, governments, UN agencies and donors to discuss the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action. It has led to important progress on issues such as impartial needs assessments and reporting requirements and has strengthened steps towards supporting and funding local and national responders. With the new iteration of the Grand Bargain 2.0 in 2021, a positive step was taken to refocus collective efforts in just two priorities: 1) increase of quality funding and 2) the greater support for the leadership, delivery and participation of local responders and affected communities in addressing humanitarian needs.⁶ The past two years have seen progress in those two areas thanks to elevating signatories' collective progress to the political level to address bottlenecks to change. This has been done by convening four "caucuses" that are serving to overcome political barriers and set roadmaps for change on Cash Coordination, Localisation, the Role of Intermediaries and Quality Funding.

Yet, despite gains around the Grand Bargain to make the humanitarian system more efficient and effective for crisis-affected communities, gaps and missed opportunities remain if it is to be truly transformational.

2.1 Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG) within the Grand Bargain

Over the years, there has been little mention of the specific needs of women and girls, gender equality and women's leadership in emergencies.⁷ Commitments around GEEWG, including quality reporting on outcomes related to the meaningful engagement of women and girls in humanitarian leadership and programming have not been achieved. This is in part because GEEWG does not feature as an enabling priority and is therefore often excluded from humanitarian programming.



A meeting of women leaders in Gaibandha, Bangladesh, trained on emergency response by ActionAid. (2019, Fabeha Monir/ Actionaid)

Following lobbying by the Friends of Gender Group, signatories committed to advance GEEWG in the latest version of the Grand Bargain 3.0 proposal spanning 2023-2026. This proposal adopts two progressive outcomes, namely: (i) Engaging and partnering with diverse women-led and women rights' organisations and organisations that prioritise GEEWG targeted interventions (Sexual Reproductive Health, Gender-Based Violence, girls' education in emergencies, women's economic empowerment and livelihood, etc.) at global and country levels; and (ii) Enhancing accountability as Signatories by reporting against GEEWG commitments, including on funding to women-led organisations and funding for GEEWG targeted interventions.

The Friends of Gender Group is not directly or formally represented in the Grand Bargain and still finds the Grand Bargain missing an opportunity to be transformative by not making GEEWG a priority for signatories. To this end, it calls on Grand Bargain signatories to recommit explicitly to and invest in GEEWG, in light of the rapidly growing intersecting forms of inequalities and injustices, including gender inequality, experienced by groups at risk of marginalisation in humanitarian contexts and in accordance with the agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals to "leave no one behind".

In fact, there is no accountability framework to track collective progress towards GEEWG beyond the achievements of individual signatories.⁸ This has implications for women's rights. Firstly, when gendered impacts of crises and humanitarian emergencies go unnoticed, women and girls' needs are not responded to adequately which can have long-lasting and detrimental impacts on their rights. This has implications for women's rights. Firstly, when the gendered impacts of crises and humanitarian emergencies go unnoticed, women and girls' needs are not responded to adequately which can have detrimental impacts on their rights.⁹ Secondly, when data is not collected on the role and contribution of women and their organisations, it can have long-lasting impacts on the humanitarian system's ability to effectively engage with and respond to their needs.¹⁰ By not analysing structural and patriarchal inequalities, as well as not valuing the role WROs, WLOs and YLOs play in emergencies, international actors miss important opportunities for change.

2.2 Progress on Localisation

The first seven years of the Grand Bargain made important progress on identifying and addressing technical barriers to localisation. Within discussions of the Grand Bargain 2.0 it was understood that the process needed to be led by local actors with the engagement of crisis-affected communities, holding international actors and signatories accountable. To date, however, not enough has been done to fully engage local and national organisations in a process they themselves should be at the centre of shaping and leading. This is evident from both the limited progress made on increasing the provision and quality of funding to local and national actors (particularly directly) and on increasing the engagement and participation of local actors in the Grand Bargain at the national level, despite the inclusion of National Reference Groups (NRGs) in the Grand Bargain 2.0. Data from the Financial Tracking Service shows that in 2022 the volume of funding to local and national actors actually decreased in percentage terms to 1.8% of global funds, from 2.3% in 2021 and 3.4% in 2020.¹¹

Despite this, 82% of the WLOs, WROs and YLOs surveyed by ActionAid reported wanting to participate in the Grand Bargain after learning more about it. There was a sense that being part of this process would provide the opportunity to engage with donors on the international stage and to share and represent the voices of the communities they work with directly. A WRO from Kenya stated: 'I want to be in the spaces where my issues are being discussed rather than have someone else speaking on my behalf.' Other reasons for wanting to engage include the Grand Bargain being an important forum for promoting women's leadership and increasing awareness of localisation at the community level; a useful network for connecting with other local and national actors globally; and a key mechanism for ensuring community level issues are heard in international policy spaces. It was also seen as a space which would allow WLOs, WROs and YLOs to be part of longer term and more sustainable engagement on key humanitarian issues.

Yet, despite interest and willingness to engage, only 16% of those surveyed had engaged in the Grand Bargain at all before, and of those just one partner (or 3% of those surveyed) reported feeling their voice was heard or that engagement felt meaningful.



Violet, a partner organisation of ActionAid, which has been responding to the earthquake in northern Syria. (2023, Sonya Al Ali Maara / ActionAid)

Partners shared that a lack of clear and accessible information on the Grand Bargain and how it might benefit local and national civil society organisations made understanding and engaging in the process challenging. Partners reported not being invited to participate in relevant conversations and lacking access to simple and translated materials aimed at community level action. Barriers to localisation raised by participants included existing leadership spaces not allowing ‘new’ actors to come into them, making it difficult for a shift from global to national and local level action to happen.

For those partners who are engaged in the Grand Bargain, 60% reported finding it an unwelcoming and isolating space for civil society; 60% felt that the meetings were not held at convenient times or considerate of different time zones; and 40% found the meetings inaccessible and complex to understand.

Local and national organisations which participated in this report, shared that they are being treated unfairly within a system which

fails to recognise their expertise, rooted in a perception that they are not able to engage or lack ‘capacity’ to do so. As such, the formalised structure of the humanitarian system fails to engage them by perpetuating a culture which itself operates to create barriers to meaningful participation. These considerations are crucial to embed the key principles of the Grand Bargain framework in country-level responses and have the NRGs or similar country mechanisms led by local and national actors.

ActionAid’s WLO, WRO and YLO partners have come together to outline three target areas for the international community to address in order to make the Grand Bargain a more participatory and effective framework for local and national civil society:

1. Simplify and streamline the Grand Bargain and National Reference Group process to allow for **meaningful engagement** with national and local civil society.
2. Engage in **equitable partnerships** which uphold the principles of accountability and transparency in the humanitarian system.
3. Re-evaluate the Grand Bargain **funding streams** to provide long-term multi-year and flexible funding.

Each of these elements is a key driver of change, both in themselves and collectively, and will be further unpacked in this brief.

3. Key Thematic Areas

3.1 Meaningful engagement with the National Reference Groups

The establishment of the NRGs was agreed at the High-Level Segment of the Grand Bargain Annual Meeting in 2021 as a key step towards localisation.¹² This decision was rooted in the understanding that stronger engagement at national, regional and local levels was needed to support the meaningful participation of local and national actors and crisis-affected communities. The establishment of the NRGs was intended to provide a mechanism for meaningful engagement by all actors within the Grand Bargain, translating the global commitments to national, regional and local contexts.

Despite initial enthusiasm for the NRGs as a theoretical framework and much-needed vehicle for localisation at the country level, in practice their roll out has been very limited. Conversations around the NRGs remain uncertain, with unclear coordination mechanisms, disagreements over their aim and purpose and insufficient clarity on how they should practically work at country level. By early 2023 only one NRG was functioning (in Turkey), though discussions have been or are continuing to be held with local and national actors in ten other contexts.¹³ In reality, confusion remains around the role of the NRGs and how these function alongside other in-country mechanisms, such as Humanitarian Country Teams groups and other civil society movements, without creating duplication.

Despite having the capacity to mobilise and engage meaningfully, for example through their access to strong and inclusive youth and women's movements and networks in-country, 72% of ActionAid's partners reported that a lack of certainty on flexible, long-term funding was preventing them from being able to participate in the NRG structure. In reality, the limited funding available means that national and local organisations are only able to engage if they have their own funds, which inherently discriminates against smaller organisations and does not allow for inclusive and intersectional conversations within the NRG space.

Furthermore, 66% of ActionAid's WRO, WLO and YLO partners which participated in the survey highlighted the limited coordination or accountability provided by the Grand Bargain secretariat for the NRGs as a barrier to engagement, with a WRO from Kenya questioning: 'This 'power and autonomy' that you have given to me to set up a National Reference Group, what

does this mean in practice? How do I have the knowledge or expertise to engage if you haven't given me further information or any resources? You are just throwing us in the deep end.' **Over 80% of WROs, WLOs and YLOs we spoke to reported the unclear structure and limited information available on the NRGs as key barriers to engagement. The Grand Bargain system was described as inefficient, confusing and 'mindboggling', with layers of unnecessary bureaucracy and hierarchy creating obstacles for participation.**

Partners reported feeling that the NRGs could provide an opportunity for international actors to use their power in an 'exploitative' or 'fake' way by providing a 'tick box' for localisation without meaningfully engaging partners.

A YLO from Uganda shared: 'It feels almost that [the Grand Bargain Signatories] had to find a mechanism that would tick-off the box for localisation, and so they went for the NRGs [...] without really caring who it actually works for, and without preparing us to engage'.

Similarly, a partner from Nepal stated: 'Often participation is made just as a formality. So including youth and young women just to tick the box. Are we the right people to participate? I feel that they often do not understand our organisation and the context in which we work.'

Even where conversations on the NRGs have started at country level, questions on coordination and accountability were raised, such as concerns around an increase in workload for local and national actors, with implications for existing programmes, as well as duplication with other in country forums. WROs and WLOs in Myanmar reflected on the pressure to engage from INGOs, even if it didn't seem like a priority to them and took up additional financial and staff resources. This was further unpacked by a WRO from the Philippines who spoke of the limited consultations held on the NRGs: 'The decisions being taken around the National Reference Groups showcase an unequal and unaccountable structure [...] that has been set up from the top with limited consultation from civil society as to what can

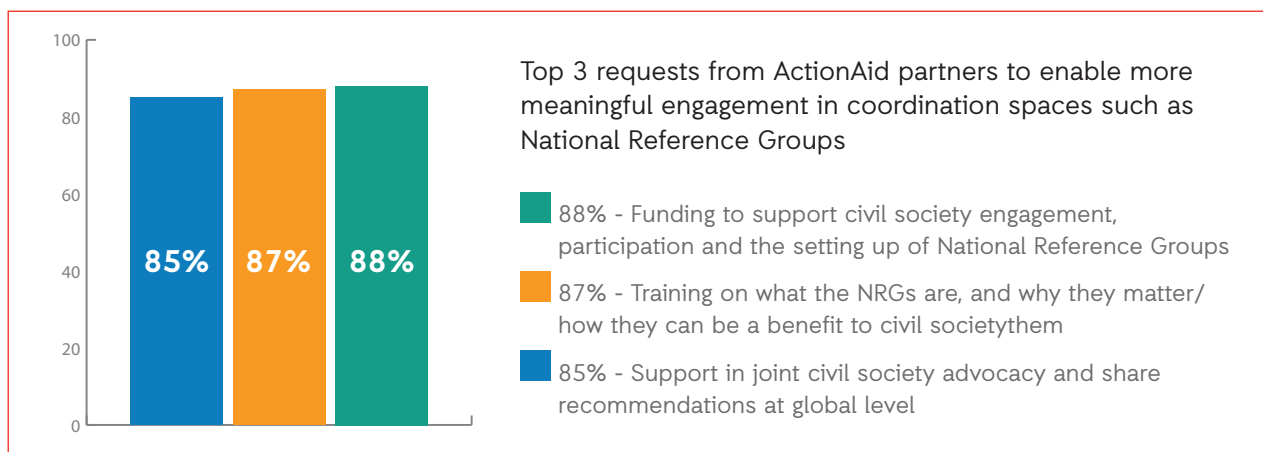


Figure 1

actually work. How many of us have been meaningfully consulted that this is the best process for us?' For the NRGs to be an initiative which will constitute a meaningful mechanism to progress localisation dialogues, greater coordination is needed amongst all humanitarian actors to assess and systematise the current humanitarian structures, without producing new siloes and increased ways of working.

Partners shared that for engagement to be meaningful, it is not sufficient simply to have a seat around the table but rather about having the opportunity to make a significant contribution which is listened to and acted upon. It was described as having responsibility, trust and ownership of the process, with everyone able to deliver their position on a basis on equality. A partner from Indonesia described the need to 'have the same space to speak and share our achievements as international organisations' in order for there to truly be meaningful engagement and inclusion of national and local civil society in the Grand Bargain.

Questions were also raised on the mutual accountability and transparency of the NRG mechanism, with uncertainty on how conversations from each NRG, in each country context, would be fed back to the Grand Bargain Annual Meeting. A YLO from Uganda shared:

'If there are 30 NRGs in 30 different countries- who will say whose point is most important? Who will choose whose key finding will be shared at the annual meeting? How does it make sense to have only a few civil society voices speak to the mass of all? It makes you beg the question, whose bargain is this for?'

Despite these challenges, 94% of the WROs, WLOs and YLOs we spoke to agreed that if they had adequate support to engage, the NRGs would provide a useful space for their organisation to influence the Grand Bargain commitments on quality funding and localisation, however they stated that the mechanism in place at the moment was not fit for purpose and therefore unlikely to succeed.

Although the WROs, WLOs and YLOs we spoke to have the willingness, capacity and knowledge to contribute to the Grand Bargain process, they have not been given the opportunity to meaningfully engage in the NRGs by Grand Bargain signatories. Despite being the main mechanism to bridge the gap between country level engagement and global commitments, the NRGs are currently not an accessible entry point to the Grand Bargain process for local and national organisations. All humanitarian actors in have a role to play in transforming the humanitarian system to make it truly accountable to all.¹⁴

3.2 Equitable Partnerships

Despite commitments made on equitable partnerships as part of the localisation agenda, insufficient adaptations have been made by international actors in their ways of working to fully enable local actor engagement, such as not taking into consideration different working patterns and time zones or the competing commitments of local and national actors.¹⁵

There is a need for more equitable partnerships between international actors and local and national civil society organisations to ensure more effective, quality, localised humanitarian responses that better meet the needs of crisis-affected communities. Such partnerships must be mutual, meaningful and respectful across the humanitarian programme cycle, from preparedness through to response and recovery.

Partners we spoke to described equitable partnerships as based on shared objectives to support the delivery of rights-based, long-term and transformative humanitarian action to crisis-affected communities. A partner from Uganda explained, ‘an equitable partnership is when we have the same mission – shared objectives, shared goals and shared commitments.’

As well as creating space for the participation of local and national actors, international actors must allocate sufficient resources to ensure regular reflection and learning around the ways in which partnerships work as part of collective accountability.

These partnerships should include supporting the leadership of WROs, WLOs and YLOs within the formal humanitarian system, such as in humanitarian clusters, co-ordination structures and working groups. Once in leadership positions, if properly resourced, local and national organisations should have the opportunity to connect with different civil society constituency groups and networks to better facilitate the formation and development of networks such as NRGs.

One of the main barriers cited by WROs, WLOs and YLOs to equitable partnerships was unequal power dynamics within partnership agreements. Partners shared that decisions are often made on the terms of intermediaries, with a lack of notice given to partner organisations who aren’t properly consulted or involved in decision-making processes. A partner from Nepal explained, ‘We are provided short notice to participate and poor

communication. We aren’t included in the initial part of the plan – we are just an afterthought. It is a power play and makes us feel as though we can’t say no.’ In these situations, the women and young people we spoke to shared that they felt more like contracted implementers than partners, a feeling compounded by a lack of proper complaints mechanisms or accountability for improper staff conduct within partnership arrangements.

In addition to this, partners experienced a lack of trust by donors and agencies, with unrealistic reporting standards feeling like audits with an aim to find faults rather than build transparency within partnership agreements. Partners shared their experience of intermediaries distancing themselves from partnerships when discussions on capacity strengthening arose and reported a lack of follow-up or consultation with crisis-affected communities after the completion of projects. This lack of shared approach to humanitarian action within partnerships, with the perception that INGOs favour short-term interventions not linked to longer term recovery programmes, was felt by partners to undermine the transformative and rights-based programmes they lead. A partner from Kenya stated: ‘Don’t just separate from us when we have invested in systems strengthening and policy development. Now is the time to work together to position jointly for leadership and resourcing of women’s organisations.’ Further, the WROs, WLOs and YLOs reported finding partnerships tokenistic, citing the use of their logos to promote ‘localisation’ despite a lack of meaningful consultation as an example.

Transparency: good partnership practice

ActionAid has been actively promoting transparency within its Federation and contributes to external fora, consultations and events such as the Grand Bargain Annual Meeting, International Transparency Initiative (IATI) Members’ Assembly and others. Transparent data is essential to accurately monitor and track the progress of funding directed to WROs, WLOs and YLOs. OCHA must therefore ensure that information on funding to such organisations at the national and global level is systematically tracked and regularly published in IATI and OCHA’s Financial Tracking System (FTS). To do this, clear guidance and definitions are needed around what constitutes

a WRO, WLO or YLO. In 2022, the Interagency Standing Committee Gender Reference Group prepared a WLO definition which is under review and waiting for final IASC endorsement. The official IASC-endorsed definition will lend legitimacy and cohesive terminology across the humanitarian space which will in turn improve funding flows to women and girls. Currently, conversations within the Grand Bargain caucus on localisation recognise the need to better track the funding streams reaching national actors, specifically to WROs and WLOs which is not currently systematically tracked across all Grand Bargain signatories.



A group of women first responders preparing dignity kits in response to the 7.2 magnitude Earthquake in Haiti (2021, (Fabienne Douce/ActionAid)

3.3 Quality Funding

The number of people in need continues to rise at an alarming rate, with an estimated 339 million people projected to need humanitarian assistance and protection at the beginning of 2023.¹⁶ Though humanitarian funding has increased over recent years, the funding gap between humanitarian needs and funding has never been greater.¹⁷ Funding remains largely inaccessible to local and national actors, despite the vast amount of unpaid and unrecognised labour they provide in crisis responses. Instead, WROs, WLOs and YLOs face barriers navigating a system that is donor-driven and has in place a multitude of requirements that, too often, local actors cannot reasonably meet.¹⁸ To target this, quality funding – which is multi-year, flexible, and predictable – is increasingly being acknowledged as a critical step to improve the humanitarian system and stands as one of the two ‘enabling priorities’ of the Grand Bargain 2.0 iteration.¹⁹

Despite this increasing acknowledgement, the partners involved in ActionAid’s research reported that current humanitarian funding practices force them into a cycle of unpredictable, short-term, project-based funding, which makes it difficult for them to meet their strategic organisational objectives, provide quality responses and support and retain staff. There is a lack of data on how much quality funding is passed down from larger international

aid organisations to local and national partners. According to ODI, only six aid organisation signatories reported quantitative data on onward allocation of multi-year and/or flexible funding to downstream partners.²⁰

In reality, progress on meeting the Grand Bargain targets on quality funding that is as ‘direct as possible’ has been slow. The lack of reliable publicly available data means that tracking funding flows to local actors is nearly impossible without directly collecting data from individual organisations. In 2022, the majority of the humanitarian signatories were not reporting against the 25% commitment – with only 13 stating they have met the commitment.²¹ Only four signatories reported data on the percentage of funding that they passed down to local or national WROs and WLOs. In 2021, seven of the 11 top humanitarian donor countries allocated less than 1% of their funding directly to women-led organizations and institutions in fragile states.²²

Country-based pooled funds and initiatives such as the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) are recognised as important spaces for local actors to access international humanitarian funding at the national level and provide an alternative to receiving funding via intermediaries. In spite of this, according to ActionAid’s research, 91% of partners currently use funding sources financed by international organisations as

intermediaries and only 19% of partners have been able to access funding through country-based pooled funds or the WPHF. When funding partnerships do exist, donors tend to go via INGOs as sub-grantees for specific time-bound projects rather than directly to WLOs, WROs and YLOs.

This creates a lack of trust and accountability, as a WRO from Indonesia explained: 'Donors are used to working with INGOs and the UN and they do not trust smaller NGOs they have not met. They consider we do not have capacity but in reality this blocks funding.' Partners stressed the importance of being transparent on who gets funding and making sure that decisions around how funds are used are as close to crisis affected communities as possible.

ActionAid's partner in Bangladesh elaborated: 'What constitutes quality funding is also the accountability and responsibility by donors on who they are engaging. Donors should be listening to and trusting what crisis affected communities and the organisations working closely with them have to say in terms of needs and priorities'.

Dedicated core funding to support overhead costs and invest in capacity strengthening and organisational sustainability is practically impossible for local and national organisations to access.²³ Despite an increase in multi-year flexible funding being a key Grand Bargain commitment, 88% of ActionAid's partners who participated in this research stated they do not typically receive long-term grants of more than three years with good flexibility to allocate to programmes and core operations as needed. This, alongside technocratic funding proposals that use jargonistic language and complex log frames, and overly stringent due diligence, audit and registration requirements, leave quality multi-year funding almost completely inaccessible to WLOs, WROs and YLOs. As a youth leader from Uganda stated, 'the requirements from donors are set in a manner for making national and local actors to fail.'

Practical steps to meet funding commitments

The WROs, WLOs and YLOs we spoke to provided the following practical steps for INGOs, donors and UN agencies to take forward as part of their commitment multi-year and quality funding:

- ✓ Consider whether funding could be flexible and multi-year. Instead of an earmarked short-term funding, negotiate funding streams which could be allocated over a minimum of one or two years. This will allow organisations to fund short, medium, and long term activities, as well as cover capacity strengthening, organisational, institutional and core overhead costs.
- ✓ Simplify proposals, reporting and due diligence requirements for local and national organisations, according to organisational and institutional capacity. Formal requirements such as organisational registration or having a bank account should be contextualised and not be prerequisites for funding, similar to the stringent requirements for due diligence and demand of past records. These should be altered depending on the context, size of organisation and amount of funding.
- ✓ Consider funding civil society organisations directly, instead of through intermediaries, and be open to new partnership agreements. For funds channelled through UN agencies and INGOs, require intermediary agencies to report on the timeliness and quality of funds reaching these groups
- ✓ Inform national and civil society of funding opportunities, consortia development and bid development by ensuring opportunities are translated and accessible.
- ✓ Tailor how funding streams are monitored, ensuring clear, transparent indicators are in place which indicate how much each funding stream is contributing and to whom.
- ✓ Ensure funds are based on needs assessments and respond to the real needs of the community.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The future of the Grand Bargain needs to build on the strength and capacities of local actors as well as on more progressive monitoring and accountability indicators which will allow for a vast range of agencies to be better represented as a first step to address underlying power inequalities. All actors in the humanitarian system – regardless of service sector or geography – have a role to play in reforming and transforming it through the Grand Bargain. A positive step has been to have the two Global Southern NGO network signatories – A4EP and NEAR – assuming rotational representation and engaging in the Facilitation Group. But more needs to be done. WROs, WLOs and YLOs cannot be excluded from this process any longer.

The following recommendations have been made by ActionAid's WRO, WLO and YLO partners, specifically around the need for flexible and long-term funding streams, capacity training and information sharing on the Grand Bargain structures. They build on the need to shift power in the Grand Bargain to allow for greater participation, more efficient funding streams and an effective national platform – one which doesn't work as a tick box exercise to please international accountability mechanisms, but which meaningfully engages in change.

Recommendations to Grand Bargain Signatories

Equitable partnerships

1. **Base partnerships on mutual trust, joint strategies, risk-sharing and accountability.** Demonstrate trust in WLOs, WROs and YLOs as technical experts in joint programming and strategy development and ensure their knowledge, skills and expertise are attributed. This includes listening to and acting upon the recommendations proposed by partners and effectively consulting communities in the design of humanitarian responses, as well as supporting their institutional growth, resource mobilisation and programme quality.
2. **Allocate adequate resources to partnership agreements.** Provide sufficient funding, time and staffing to ensure continuous learning and reflection as part of accountability within partnerships. In turn, this will allow partnerships to be longer lasting and move away from short-term, periodic programming, which can often be tokenistic fail to effectively meet communities' needs.
3. **Advocate for the responsible use of power in international spaces.** Allow for the leadership of partner organisations in humanitarian structures, including supporting their direct engagement with donors and UN agencies. Meaningful partnerships must amplify the voices of WROs, WLOs and YLOs and engage them in spaces which often feel restricted.

Meaningful engagement & NRG development

1. **Ensure that information, training and guidance on the Grand Bargain, its aims, objectives and structure are accessible and translated.** Provide training on changes to the Grand Bargain structure, commitments and policies.
2. **Provide a well budgeted agenda for the National Reference Groups.** Ensure that WROs, WLOs and YLOs are resourced appropriately to meaningfully engage and hold leadership roles in the National Reference Groups.
3. **Increase the representation of national and local WROs, WLOs and YLOs within all formal structures of the Grand Bargain groups.** Ensure WROs, WLOs and YLOs represent at least 50% of the membership represented in the proposed Grand Bargain National Reference Groups, and that at least one local WRO or WLO (are represented within the new proposed Facilitation Group (amongst other local actors).



Woman leader conducting a Rapid Gender Assessment for ActionAid's 2022 earthquake response in West Java, Indonesia. (2022, Felix Jody / ActionAid).

Funding Modalities

1. **Cascade multi-year, flexible and quality funding to national and local civil society**, specifically to WLOs, WROs and YLOs. Ensure funding is adaptable to changing contexts and supports the core mission of local and national organisations by allowing them to maintain key staff and capacities, contributing to a wide and inclusive “nexus” approach.
2. **Use existing or develop new mechanisms to track the percentage of funding that goes directly to national and local civil society**, disaggregated by type and size of organisation. Calculate and monitor the percentage of multi-year funding provided, beyond humanitarian assistance, that is dedicated to institutional and capacity strengthening initiatives led by local actors in humanitarian settings.
3. **Simplify funding requirements**, particularly in the financing of emergency responses, to provide WROs, WLOs and YLOs at the frontlines of crisis and disasters with simpler and more accessible application routes. This will allow funding streams to be more easily and quickly accessible to WROs, WLOs and YLOs directly, rather than working through intermediaries.
4. **Proactively inform WROs, WLOs and YLOs about funding opportunities** and support - where mutually agreed upon - self-organised networking and mobilisation efforts across WROs, WLOs and YLOs for collective funding applications .

Acknowledgements

We want to extend our thanks and gratitude to the many WROs, WLOs and YLOs who gave their time, insights and expertise to bring this report together. Without their reflections and ongoing work, it would not have been possible. It is our hope that with this brief, we will ultimately improve the ability of civil society to meaningfully engage in humanitarian action with the communities they serve.

This research has engaged 32 WRO, WLO and YLO organisations across 14 countries, including:

- PRERONA – Bangladesh
- Service for Human Being Organization (SHBO) – Bangladesh
- Women Watch – Ethiopia
- OFPW – Haiti
- Women’s Resource Development Center Pasoendan Digdaya – Indonesia
- POWEO – Kenya
- Womankind Kenya – Kenya
- Nepal Mahila Ekata Samaj – Nepal
- Yuwa Bakheri – Nepal
- President of PKKK Negros Occidental – Philippines
- Women in Emergencies Network (WENet) – Philippines
- COTA – Uganda
- Vijana – Uganda

This policy brief was written by Niki Ignatiou and Alice Ramsay (ActionAid UK), in collaboration with Jessica Haskins (ActionAid UK), Grace Ireri and Francisco Yermo (ActionAid International).

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Graphic design by Katy Abbott Design.

Endnotes

1. Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Grand Bargain 2.0 Structure. (2021). Retrieved from: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2022-01/GB2.0%20structure%20-%20Dec%202021_0.pdf
2. Research was undertaken with women's rights, women-led and youth-led organisations from the following countries: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Haiti, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nepal, Palestine, Philippines, Syria, Turkey, and Uganda.
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23. ActionAid is currently mapping organisational overhead costs policies in place with its members and assessing best practices across the federation of availing core and administrative costs national and subnational partners.

ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

This policy brief was conducted in collaboration with WRO, WLO and YLO organisations in 14 countries. The following have endorsed this brief:



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