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# Bargaining for Better

Bringing a Feminist Lens to the  
Grand Bargain 2.0

ActionAid Policy Brief

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# Bargaining for Better: Bringing a Feminist Lens to the Grand Bargain 2.0

## 1. Introduction

The Grand Bargain<sup>1</sup> 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 aid.

2021 marks the fifth year of the Grand Bargain. Signatories have agreed to endorse a new iteration of the agreement – the Grand Bargain 2.0 – which will examine how to best advance quality financing and localisation. Despite this commitment, the current iteration of the Grand Bargain is still failing to meaningfully shift power, resource, and decision-making power to local actors – including women's rights organisations (WROs) and women-led organisations (WLOs)<sup>2</sup> – as leading actors, across all stages of the humanitarian cycle.<sup>3</sup>

**Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (GEEWG) are not effectively reflected within the current Grand Bargain 2.0 proposition.**<sup>4</sup> This is problematic and concerning on many levels: when women and their organisations' contributions are undervalued,<sup>5</sup> it can have long-lasting and detrimental impacts on both their rights as well as the humanitarian system's capacity to effectively respond to their needs and that of their communities.

At ActionAid we adopted a set of intersectional feminist principles as part of our transformative vision towards of a just world free from poverty, oppression, and patriarchy.<sup>6</sup> Our embrace of transformative feminist leadership arises from our wider commitment to intersectional feminism as an ideology, an analytical framework and a social change strategy. ActionAid's Humanitarian Signature<sup>7</sup> is therefore inspired by these feminist principles and informed by our understanding and experience of shifting power to local communities, specifically WROs and WLOs. This is done by promoting the leadership of women

who are affected by crisis, and being accountable to affected communities, as a vital step to understand the local context, needs and realities of women, girls and the community at whole, with a commitment to longer-term sustainability and resilience by empowering women leaders to address underlying causes of inequality.<sup>8</sup> This has enabled ActionAid to meaningfully follow-through with its Grand Bargain commitments to women's leadership and localisation under the Grand Bargain. This includes its membership in Charter for Change and eight individual commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit,<sup>9</sup> specifically advocating for meaningful participation and information sharing with its WLO and WRO partners.<sup>10</sup> These ideals underline Action Aid's engagement as an actor in the humanitarian system – including in the upcoming Grand Bargain 2.0.

**Drawing on relevant literature on the Grand Bargain and GEEWG commitments to date, as well as qualitative survey data with ActionAid's WRO and WLO partners and ActionAid staff in 10 countries,<sup>11</sup> this Policy Brief provides key recommendations for shaping and implementing the Grand Bargain 2.0 so that it is more effective for women and girls.** The brief focuses on the importance of investing in local women's leadership and GEEWG considerations within all humanitarian action as well as in the new Grand Bargain operational framework as a means to achieve effective localisation that works for, and empowers, women and girls affected by crisis.

## 2. Findings – How to Build Meaningful Change for GEEWG in the Grand Bargain

### 2.1 The Context to Date: GEEWG and the Grand Bargain

Five years since the World Humanitarian Summit, there has been important progress towards achieving the Grand Bargain's ambitious objectives, especially under Workstream Two on Localisation,<sup>12</sup> with efforts to garner more support and funding for local and national responders. In addition, signatories have continued their investments in capacity strengthening with local actors. This includes reporting from some organisations who do not traditionally work with local partners which shows they are making a more concerted shift in this respect, including by instituting multi-year partnership agreements.<sup>13</sup>

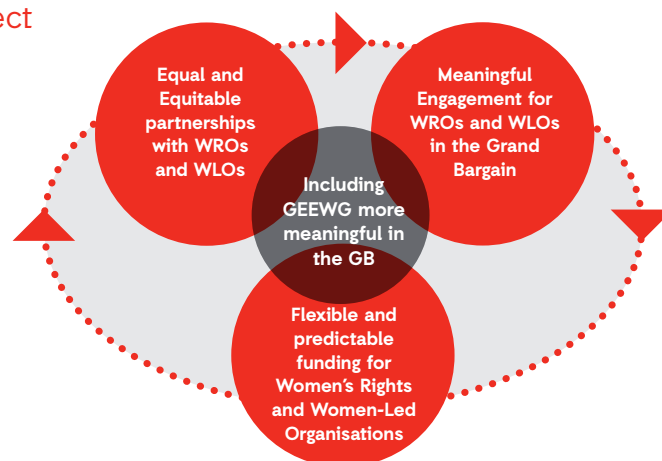
The Overseas Development Institute 2020 review of Grand Bargain implementation evidences a range of positive practices that can be built on to bring about a similar shift in system-wide practice as it highlights that 'that the Grand Bargain is having a wider impact in terms of a more cohesive, collaborative approach'.<sup>14</sup> Many smaller signatories asserted that their participation in the Grand Bargain has afforded them opportunities to contribute to and/or influence system-wide discussions on key issues in a way they had not been able to in the past.

**Despite this progress, our findings highlight that the Grand Bargain remains gender-blind, with limited progress on GEEWG commitments in the Grand Bargain to date.** While 97% of signatories reported that they are integrating gender equality and women's empowerment in their activities,<sup>15</sup> global GEEWG advocates note the absence of a strong accountability framework to track collective progress towards GEEWG beyond the achievements of individual signatories.<sup>16</sup> For example, the Eminent Person and the Facilitation Group Ministers and Principals in February 2021 endorsed a general direction on the future of the Grand Bargain in which GEEWG was not mentioned or identified as one of the transformational enabling factors.<sup>17</sup> In the same proposal, the Friends of Gender Group<sup>18</sup> were not directly or formally represented in the Facilitation Group. This amounts to an overall lack of accountability to GEEWG despite the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls Policy Framework<sup>19</sup> calling on all humanitarian bodies to integrate GEEWG into all aspects of humanitarian preparedness, response, and recovery work. It also represents a failure to center gender and power analysis in the Grand Bargain, which stalls progress in multiple areas of the agreement. The future Grand Bargain should gather the political momentum that key international actors and governments showed at the World Humanitarian Summit five years ago, recuperating the strategic initiatives agreed to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment in humanitarian crises.<sup>20</sup>

### Transparency

ActionAid has been actively promoting transparency amongst Federation members and contributing to external fora, consultations and events such as the Grand Bargain Annual Meeting, International Transparency Initiative (IATI) Members' Assembly and others. The internal workshops led by the IATI specialist helped increase IATI literacy among the ActionAid staff and enabled them to report activities with greater confidence which led to an increase in transparency in relation to the projects and financial flows. Transparent data is essential to accurately monitor and track progress of the funding directed to WROs and WLOs. OCHA must ensure that this information on funding to WROs and WLOs at national and global levels is systematically tracked and regularly published in IATI and OCHA's Financial Tracking System.

## How findings connect to each other



To build meaningful change for women and girls affected by crisis, the Grand Bargain 2.0 must ensure three things:

1. WROs and WLOs can meaningfully engage at all levels of the Humanitarian System and in the Grand Bargain.
2. WROs and WLOs can access sufficient and consistent funding as a key component of localisation.
3. WROs and WLOs can join equal and equitable partnerships with international humanitarian actors.

Each of these elements is a key driver of change, both alone and as interdependent with others.

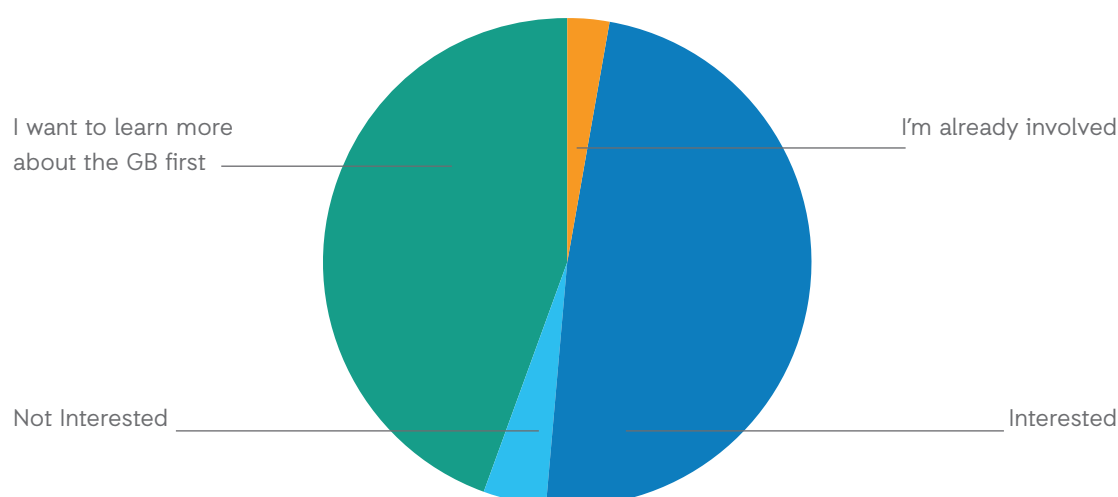
## 2.2 Meaningful Engagement for WROs and WLOs in the Grand Bargain

To date, the Grand Bargain has failed to meaningfully engage WROs and WLOs.<sup>21</sup> To ensure meaningful progress towards the vision of the Grand Bargain, international humanitarian actors

must rely on local knowledge and the leadership of crisis-affected populations. The governance structure and implementation of the Grand Bargain continues to marginalise crisis-affected women and girls as well as the WROs and WLOs who serve them. The humanitarian system must engage with WROs and WLOs in order to build a more inclusive and locally led humanitarian ecosystem that is fit for purpose to confront the unprecedented humanitarian challenges.<sup>22</sup>

The WROs and WLOs surveyed by ActionAid reported being aware of the Grand Bargain as well as being interested in participating more deeply. Figure 1 shows that the majority of survey participants are either already engaged or interested to engage in the Grand Bargain. Only 4% of survey participants responded that they did not have interest in engaging with the Grand Bargain. This demonstrates that most WROs and WLOs are ready, willing, and eager to engage in the Grand Bargain if given the opportunity.

Figure 1: WRO and WLO Interest in Engaging in the Grand Bargain







Food Distribution in Nepal as part of ActionAid's Covid-19 response (Sabin Shrestha).

However, as seen in the figure above, despite willingness, availability, and interest, only three percent of WRO and WLO survey participants directly engaged in any Grand Bargain meetings or events. Indeed, few of the WROs and WLOs surveyed fully understand what the Grand Bargain is, how they can contribute to it, or what benefits they might receive from these contributions. This lack of robust engagement from WROs and WLOs is a missed opportunity for the Grand Bargain; without the ideas, perspectives, and solutions from these first-hand responders, the Grand Bargain's localisation objectives will remain out of reach.

When asked if they feel their voice and opinion are heard and/or acted upon in the Grand Bargain, the majority, 64%, answered, "I don't know". This response demonstrates a troubling lack of accountability to WROs and WLOs in the Grand Bargain. If the Facilitation Group seeks to include local actors in Grand Bargain processes, they must create a viable system for WROs and WLOs to meaningfully engage, share their perspectives, and contribute to seeing their ideas through to fruition. At this stage, few opportunities exist for WROs and WLOs to shape policy agendas, priorities, or influence decision-making forums like the Grand Bargain. For those WROs and WLOs representatives that are invited to speak at major global events and conferences, they are too often asked to only share their personal experiences of tragedy and loss, rather than their expertise, policy

solutions, and recommendations. Localisation efforts must move beyond tokenistic inclusion on WROs and WLOs in spaces occupied by donors, UN agencies, and international NGOs, and take on collective power to transform exclusionary structures with more inclusive and collaborative consultations.

**64% of survey respondents do not know if their voices and opinions are heard or acted upon in the Grand Bargain**

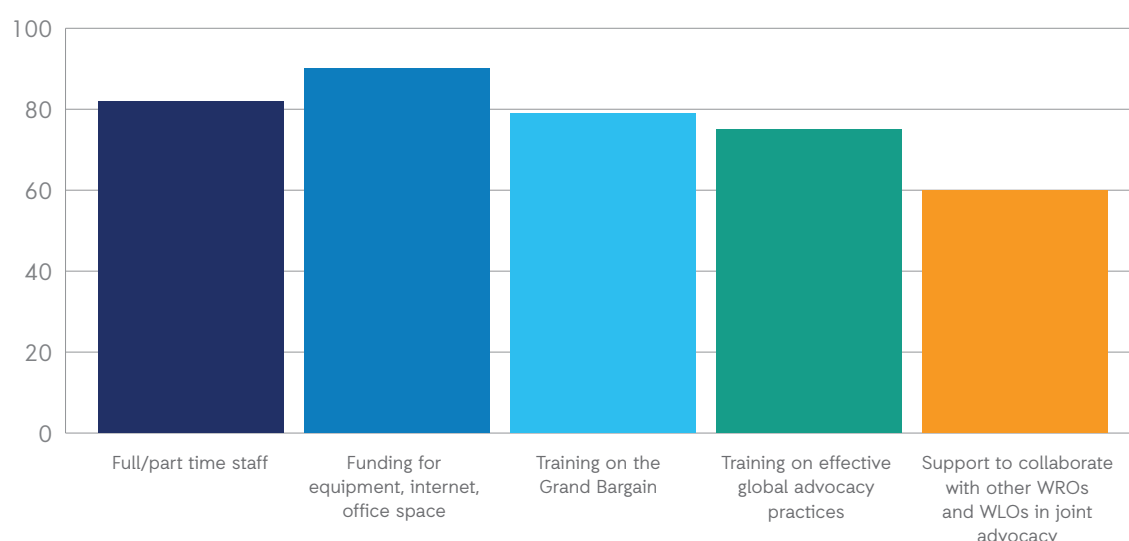
WROs and WLOs surveyed also noted that their engagement (or potential future engagement) in the Grand Bargain enables them to increase their understanding of the agenda and hopefully influence future humanitarian funding priorities. Others noted that they hope to advocate for increased attention and support for GEEWG in humanitarian action. Participants also highlighted that WROs and WLOs work with and represent marginalised communities, including persons with disabilities, adolescents, and the elderly, and as such, WROs and WLOs would be well placed to represent the concerns of these hard-to-reach populations at the global level.

**Give us space to speak out on the issues that affect our community!**  
– A WRO leader from Liberia

Finally, survey participants highlighted that, if given the opportunity to engage more meaningfully with the Grand Bargain 2.0, WROs and WLOs would need key inputs of staffing, training, funding, and support in order to participate effectively. As WROs and WLOs generally operate with limited resources, this support (identified in Figure 2 below) would enable WRO and WLO participation in global efforts, without sacrificing the continuation of the lifesaving work they already do in the communities they serve and/or their staff and participants' health and well-being.

I think it is useful to share grassroots women's experiences to influence giant, global humanitarian initiatives!  
– A WRO leader in Ethiopia

Figure 2: Support WROs and WLOs Require to Participate in the Grand Bargain



Just as international organisations hire dedicated staff to engage and lead in humanitarian coordination, WROs and WLOs should be resourced to do the same. As noted in Figure 2, 80% of WROs and WLOs hope that their international partners will enable them to hire either

full or part-time staff to attend Grand Bargain and national-level coordination meetings and represent their interests there. 75% of those surveyed also requested training on effective advocacy techniques to sharpen their skills and ability to participate in international coordination spaces.



Women's leadership training, conducted prior to Hurricane Matthew in Haiti in 2016 (ActionAid).





A woman leader, member and coordinator of a women's group in Haiti that supports activities on violence against women, family planning, and economic activities (Fabienne Douche/ ActionAid).

## The Grand Bargain 2.0 is an opportunity for progress on GEEWG

The current proposed vision for the Grand Bargain 2.0 represents some initial positive thinking towards the inclusion of local actors,<sup>23</sup> but more specific attention is needed on how the Grand Bargain will function and how local women and their organisations will sit within the governance structure to allow for an inclusive, accountable, meaningful process and result. This must go beyond the current proposition of the Grand Bargain 2.0 framework, which lacks specific mention of representation for WROs and WLOs in both the Facilitation Group and the proposed 'National Reference Groups'. To create a more representative political space, that is intersectional and inclusive, we must move beyond 'sharing' these new structures 'with local actors' but specifically target long-term investments for women and their organisations, and include women affected by crisis and WROs and WLOs need to be recognised and acknowledged. Specific measures, resources and political willingness are needed at global and national levels to ensure that the voices of the most marginalised are not again excluded from the future of the Grand Bargain, and from the decision and coordination making spaces that take decisions on their lives.<sup>24</sup>

It is encouraging that the Grand Bargain 2.0 has a commitment to ensure local and national signatories in its governance structure, however, the inclusion of only one local actor in the Facilitation Group is insufficient to represent the diverse and intersectional views of a vast number of organisations and networks across the globe. While we welcome the idea of this seat to represent a 'local actor consortia', representing a variety of local actors, this structure should not dilute from the

importance of including a variety of diverse voices of local actors within these conversations. The Grand Bargain Facilitation Group composition must be re-balanced to support greater diversity by including a greater number of seats for local responders, ensuring at least one seat is prioritised for a WRO or WLO. The current recommendation that the Friends of Gender Group, will have a designated Facilitation group 'focal point' is a promising step to the right direction, however this commitment falls short, as it does not provide the Friends of Gender Group a formal seat at the table, but merely a point of liaison in order to 'engage and access' the Facilitation group. Gender should not be seen as an extra responsibility of a representative, or 'focal point' who may be 'double-hatting' priorities in global coordination. Specific provisions at both the Facilitation Group and Workstream level for the engagement of WROs and WLOs, including the formal inclusion of the Friends of Gender Group, is needed to support a gender-transformative Grand Bargain, and ultimately, an inclusive humanitarian system.

Only with the addition of GEEWG and the meaningful engagement of WROs and WLOs can the Grand Bargain 2.0 be the inclusive space needed to change to the humanitarian system. WROs and WLOs are eager to contribute to the Grand Bargain and have expressed that, with basic support from their partners, they can ground the Grand Bargain in the realities of marginalised communities living in crises. For the Grand Bargain to be as effective as possible and accountable to those in most need, a new, transformative platform must include a wider range of signatories, including local and national actors, specifically WROs and WLOs, and ensure their meaningful engagement and representation in all governance structures of the Grand Bargain.



## Recommendations to improve the meaningful engagement of WROs and WLOs in the Grand Bargain Structure:

*The Grand Bargain Facilitation Group Principals and the Eminent Person should:*

1. **Include GEEWG as an essential political goal within the Grand Bargain.** GEEWG is currently not reflected at the political or enabling priority levels, nor is it significantly reflected across each of the outcome pillars. To ensure transformative humanitarian response, the inclusion of GEEWG is needed within all levels of the Grand Bargain structure. This includes creating a monitoring mechanism to track progress against GEEWG-focused commitments to ensure accountability to crisis-affected women, girls, and their organisations.
2. **Increase the representation of local WROs and WLOs within the formal structures of the Grand Bargain Facilitation Group.** This includes ensuring WROs and WLOs and other groups

working with and for marginalised populations (e.g., women with disabilities, adolescents), represent at least 50% of the membership represented in the proposed Grand Bargain National Reference Group; and that at least one local WRO and WLO (amongst other local actors) should be represented within the new proposed Facilitation Group.

3. **Grant the Friends of Gender Group a formal seat in the Facilitation Group** to increase the voices of local WROs and WLOs, and members of the group working to prioritise GEEWG commitments throughout the Grand Bargain.

*To Grand Bargain Signatories:*

4. **Donors, UN agencies, and international NGOs must support their WRO and WLO partners to become full signatories of the Grand Bargain** and enable their meaningful engagement by providing resources to cover staffing, capacity strengthening, and other inputs as requested by WROs and WLOs.



A woman leader taking part in mask-making activities as part of the Covid-19 response led by ActionAid in Bangladesh (Fabeha Monir/ActionAid).

## 2.3 Flexible and predictable funding for Women's Rights and Women-Led Organisations

### Inaccessible funding for WROs and WLOs

Though humanitarian funding has increased over recent years – in parallel with needs in crisis-affected settings – funding is still largely inaccessible for WROs and WLOs despite the vast amount of free, unpaid labour they provide in crisis response. Funding to frontline WROs and WLOs in crises remains at a paltry 0.2% of total bilateral aid.<sup>26</sup> Seven of 11 top humanitarian donors allocated less than 1% of aid to fragile states and directly to WROs and WLOs.<sup>27</sup> WROs and WLOs face barriers navigating a system that is donor-driven, project-based, favors international actors, and has in place a multitude of requirements that, too often, local actors cannot reasonably meet, let alone those who are underfunded and pressured to provide the humanitarian system with unpaid work in the midst of crisis.

WROs and WLOs consulted for this brief perceive 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 response, and support and retain staff.

Dedicated core funding to support overhead costs, staff salaries and invest capacity strengthening, and organisational sustainability is practically impossible to find. Generally, WROs and WLOs can only access project funding as a sub-grantee to international NGOs for specific, time-bound projects. For WROs and WLOs, this limits their ability to provide sustainable employment, parental leave, and other important benefits that workforces require. In turn, staff retention can be a real challenge when local staff are hired into more stable positions with international organisations, rather than local ones.



Preparing food items for Covid-19 distribution in the Gaza Strip (Rushdi Saraj/ActionAid)

### A Message from a WRO in Jordan: Funders, please stop

“Most funders maintain a top down type of relationship with local and national organisations and consider these organisations weak, fraudulent, and low capacity. Some funders identify the target groups’ needs and design the interventions without working in partnership with the local organisations. This leads to designing inappropriate activities that fail to serve the actual needs of the target groups. Local and national organisations have the knowledge of the communities’ needs and the context of the areas they work at, so funders should trust this knowledge and experience when designing their programs.”

**Stop writing beautiful proposals and budgets, which might look very logical and compelling, but are created without listening to or verifying with the local community!**

**– A WRO leader in Myanmar**

Significant advocacy and improved gender marker tools have helped raise profile of the need for gender equality-focused programming in all humanitarian responses. Sadly, most donors and UN agencies still fall significantly short of ensuring that their funding for programs have gender equality as a principal goal.<sup>28</sup> Seven of 11 recently reviewed government donors allocate just 2% of funds to targeted gender equality programming in humanitarian settings.<sup>29</sup>

Country-based pooled funds and initiatives like the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund are recognised as important spaces for local actors to access international humanitarian funding at the national level. Despite this, according to the survey, 42% of ActionAid’s WRO and WLO partners have not been able to access funding in this way. To improve WROs and WLOs’ access to information about these funds and ensure their meaningful engagement, every fund’s advisory committee should include local WRO and WLO members to inform decisions on resource allocation strategy, allocation criteria, and endorsement of strategic priorities at country level.



## Covid-19 has intensified resource constraints while demand for services increases

The Covid-19 pandemic has only intensified these challenges for WROs and WLOs and gender equality-focused programming. Women are experiencing increased exposure to violence, increased responsibility for others, and lack of, or reduced access to the gender-specific health services they require.<sup>30</sup> Despite this, just 0.48% of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan's funding for the pandemic response focused on interventions offering protection from gender-based violence (GBV).<sup>31</sup> As the pandemic strains public services and creates significant economic hardship, WROs and WLOs are stepping up to fill gaps in state service provision, often with little recognition and at significant cost.<sup>32</sup> Those working to support women and girls find themselves having to do more with less, effectively working harder than ever, for free, without the resources to change the modes of delivery in the context of social distancing.<sup>33</sup> And despite the intensity of these efforts, WROs and WLOs are fighting for the survival of their organisations and themselves.

### Case study: Effectively supporting a WRO and the community they serve

One WRO described a UK Government funded project that was developed following the expressed demands of the local affected population. The donor ensured that the WRO had sufficient staff on board to implement the project, which was a multi-year initiative. The budget included organisational capacity sharing as well as coverage for overhead costs and contingencies. The WRO described this as a good and replicable donor practice because they felt the administration of the project demonstrated the donor's genuine concern for project participants and the WRO, since the project was able to fully respond to the needs of both the crisis-affected population and those on the frontlines responding.

Joint-agency research during the first wave of the pandemic (2020) found that only 3 out of 18 interviewed WROs and WLOs were receiving new funding for the Covid-19 response through the UN system. The research further found that the funding available was inadequate to properly cover overhead costs, staff, and office related expenses; especially during pandemic-required adaptations and increased costs.<sup>34</sup> Current data from survey respondents reinforces this earlier

finding, as 57% of current respondents reported receiving the majority of their funding through short-term grants to support programmatic work, with limited flexibility. 82% of the overall funding that WRO and WLO respondents receive is dedicated exclusively to programmatic costs and cannot be applied to overhead or core expenses. It is also noteworthy that such programmatic funding often fails to support WRO and WLO engagement in global advocacy initiatives, such as participation in the Grand Bargain, so any staffing resources allocated to such efforts are unpaid labour.

## The Grand Bargain 2.0 is a strategic opportunity to improve WRO access to funding

The number of Grand Bargain signatories meeting the 25% target of funding local actors as directly as possible has increased slightly, from seven in 2018 to 10 in 2019.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, this progress remains slow, representing only 15% of all 63 Grand Bargain signatories.<sup>36</sup> Many signatories are still unable to report on the percentage of funding provided to local actors. For example, 84% of donors reported in 2020 being unable to measure how much of their funding reached local actors.<sup>37</sup> Specific progress on funding and capacity strengthening with WROs and WLOs is even more difficult to assess due to limited data collection. In 2019, only 2% of Grand Bargain signatories reported against the core commitment indicator on capacity-building support for local WROs and WLOs. Similarly, tracking of the volume of funds directed to these organisations remains very limited; only 4% of signatories reported against this indicator, and efforts to institute more detailed tracking of funding for local women's organisations have failed across the system.<sup>38</sup>

The creation of the Grand Bargain 2.0 represents an ideal opportunity to make long-awaited progress on the obstacles WROs and WLOs face in accessing international humanitarian funding. Five years ago, the creation of the 25% target that all signatories must share funds with local actors represented an ambitious and visible priority. This next iteration must maintain this important momentum as a minimum, with an increased aspiration that 25% is ring-fenced to WROs and WLOs, with an aspiration to increase the total percent of funding to 30% by 2030.

ActionAid welcomes the proposed prioritisation of 'quality funding' within the Grand Bargain 2.0. There is a need to embrace a new structure that channels resources based on the needs of

crisis-affected communities. To do this, specific language is needed to both understand what ‘quality funding’ encompasses and how this can be monitored and ensured. To reflect the ambition of our high-level political goal that includes mutual, greater accountability, we must move from voluntary reporting on selective commitments (as is current practice) to mandatory reporting against enabling priorities and collective outcomes, including on gender-specific indicators. The Grand Bargain 2.0 must reinvigorate its commitments of providing more donor funding to local actors – specifically to WROs and WLOs – by holding signatories to account through transparent reporting. At this stage, only 15% of activities reported through the International Transparency Initiative (IATI)<sup>39</sup> are currently flagged with a ‘gender marker’, with this marker being used inconsistently, depending on who is reporting.<sup>40</sup> To reflect real progress in achieving the Grand Bargain commitments, signatories need to track and report funding flow transfers to local WROs and WLOs, ensuring such funds comprise of all costs, direct and indirect.



Since Cyclone Pam in 2015, ActionAid Vanuatu has been working to support women to lead resilience and preparedness initiatives, to respond to humanitarian crises, and to undertake lobbying and advocacy with decision makers at local and national levels, (Solaye Snider, ActionAid Australia).

## Recommendations to improve WRO and WLO access to funding

WROs and WLOs must be able to access funding that enables them to address the urgent humanitarian needs in their communities and sustain core operations so they can serve throughout a humanitarian response, including recovery and rebuilding. *To the Grand Bargain Facilitation Group Principals and Eminent Person:*

### 1. The Grand Bargain 2.0 must set a target and specific indicators for cascading quality funding to WROs and WLOs.

Indicators should include:

- The number of Grand Bargain Signatories that establish existing mechanisms or systems to track funding in support of GEEWG interventions.
- The number of signatories that provide funding directly to WLOs and WROs.
- The number of signatories that contribute to multi-year funding mechanisms, beyond humanitarian assistance, that is dedicated to both institutional and capacity-strengthening initiatives led by local WROs and WLOs in humanitarian settings.

### 2. The Grand Bargain 2.0 must continue to hold its signatories to account on the amount of funding that will reach local actors (25% of local funding) and move beyond this setting a new target for 2030 to at least 30%, while ring-fencing 25% of funds for WROs and WLOs.

*To the Grand Bargain Signatories:*

- All donors, UN agencies, and international NGOs who directly partners with WROs and WLOs must **increase the amount and quality of humanitarian funding that goes to WROs and WLOs**, ensuring access to flexible, predictable, multi-year funding that supports core operational and technical costs.
- Allow for meaningful WRO and WLO engagement in all program development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of initiatives in their communities.**
- OCHA must **include WRO and WLO representatives on all advisory committees for United Nations country-based pooled funds** to inform decisions on resource allocation strategy, allocation criteria and endorsement of strategic priorities at country level.



## 2.4 Equal and equitable partnerships with WROs and WLOs

There is a need for improved partnerships between international actors and WROs and WLOs to ensure more effective, quality, localised humanitarian responses that better meet communities' needs. Partnerships with WROs and WLOs must be mutual, equitable, respectful, and effective across the humanitarian program cycle – from preparedness, through to response and recovery efforts. This affects coordination in times of crisis, as the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) usually consists of exclusively international actors and the cluster system can be difficult for WROs and WLOs to navigate and access.

**Stop asking for information from us without concretely supporting us!**

**- Humanitarian Actor, Ethiopia**

When local actors are not empowered to meaningfully engage in these essential coordination forums, they are excluded from key planning, strategy, and response moments – such as the development of the Humanitarian Needs Overview – as well as key decision-making spaces where humanitarian funding allocations are determined. This impacts not only design and quality of response, but also high-level priorities, programmatic approaches, population targeting, and other key elements of effective humanitarian response.

### **There is a dearth of data on international organisations' partnerships with WROs and WLOs**

UN agencies and humanitarian coordination clusters do not systematically track which of their partners are WROs and WLOs. This lack of information makes it impossible to understand the degree to which humanitarian partnerships currently engage WROs and WLOs.<sup>41</sup>

The Grand Bargain 2.0 is an opportunity to dignify partnerships with WROs and WLOs. In the Grand Bargain 2.0, signatories must support the meaningful engagement of WROs and WLOs in the implementation of the political priorities.

The survey of ActionAid's WRO and WLO partners noted several consistent challenges and inequities in their partnerships with international organisations:

- 79% of respondents noted that financial and legal requirements and processes instituted by international organisations are too difficult for WROs and WLOs to meet, thereby effectively excluding them from accessing funding or support.

- 65% of respondents also noted that international organisations' processes are too slow and bureaucratic to be fit for purpose in humanitarian response partnerships, especially when WROs and WLOs are community-facing and lose credibility – and/or access – if they can't respond or deliver quickly.
- 65% also noted that language barriers often impede WROs and WLOs from participating in coordination meetings at national and global levels, as well as access funding, since proposals often need to be written in English instead of being flexible enough for them to access in local or national languages.

**INGOs, in general, do not work with local organisations as partners, but as implementers. This leads local organisations having no actual role in their communities. INGOs do not build or improve the staff capacities. This leads to limiting the local actor's abilities to contribute in the community.**

**- A WRO leader in Palestine**

Ultimately, in partnerships between WROs and WLOs and international agencies and organisations, local partners are too often considered exclusively as service delivery leads, missing an opportunity to engage their expertise and knowledge. In fact, WROs and WLOs<sup>41</sup> are best placed to reach marginalised groups and design programs that will respond to their needs in crisis settings. This is evident through common partnership practices that continue to lack transparency, accountability, power sharing and recognition of local capacities. This affects trust between international actors and WROs and WLOs as well as effectiveness of response. This transactional relationship is often based in the transference of risks from international to national partners, but without also transferring the means and resources to mitigate and respond to those risks. Grand Bargain 2.0 should support efforts to provide a more realistic balance between risk-sharing and compliance, through more meaningful partnerships and representation of local actors within these discussions.

The survey of ActionAid's WRO and WLO partners reveals a helpful checklist of Dos and Don'ts for international partners to follow to ensure fair and equitable partnerships with WROs and WLOs. Upholding these ideals will ensure the respect, dignity, and leadership of these frontline actors in humanitarian action.

## Partnership Dos and Don'ts when working with WROs and WLOs



### Do

- Provide flexible, core funding for WROs and WLOs
- Make the cluster system accessible to WROs and WLOs
- Reserve at least one seat in the HCT for a WRO and WLO
- Allow the submission of funding proposals in local languages
- Earmark funds for capacity strengthening and/or organisational development
- Consult with WROs and WLOs on their capacity strengthening and organisational development priorities
- Expand coaching and mentoring services to be accessible to WROs and WLOs
- Provide opportunities for WROs and WLOs to shape meeting agendas and engage meaningfully
- Mandate WLO and WRO participation in every decision-making forum that affects them, including speaking roles



### Don't

- Offer short-term, inflexible project-based funding
- Conduct cluster meetings in non-local languages without local actors
- Fill the HCT exclusively with international actors
- Require funding proposals be submitted in English
- Have limited time and funding available for capacity strengthening
- Assume that all WROs and WLOs require capacity strengthening instead of just untied, flexible, core funding
- Dictate what capacities and/or priorities WROs and WLOs should have without assessment and understanding their priorities
- Invite WROs and WLOs to join meetings in a tokenistic fashion
- Fail to offer speaking opportunities or meaningful engagement to WROs and WLOs, citing logistical issues or security concerns
- Use humanitarian jargon

Given these survey results and strong calls from WROs and WLOs to improve the safety and dignity of partnerships with international humanitarian actors, urgent action must be taken. The Grand Bargain 2.0 is an ideal opportunity to scrutinise

current failings in partnership practices with WROs and WLOs to create new global standards that will ensure international actors support and respect their local actors in a consistent manner.

### Recommendations to improve partnerships with WROs and WLOs

*To the Grand Bargain Facilitation Group  
Principals and Eminent Person:*

1. **Create and enforce global standards for improved partnerships with local actors**, including WROs and WLOs. This must include guidance on providing flexible and predictable funding to local partners; investing in mechanisms for improved accountability; and the increased leadership of WROs and WLOs within the humanitarian programme cycle.

*To Grand Bargain Signatories:*

2. **All Donors, UN agencies and International NGOs' partnering with WROs and WLOs should review their risk mitigation policies** as part of the Grand Bargain 2.0 approach to

equitable and principled partnerships, and to ensure accountability for all risks. This seeks to ensure that fiduciary, political, operational, legal, security, ethical and reputational risks are shared fairly by all actors.

3. **UN agencies and international NGOs must ensure that WROs and WLOs are resourced appropriately to meaningfully engage and hold leadership roles** in the Grand Bargain, Humanitarian Country Team, clusters, and other relevant advocacy and coordination spaces.
4. **Donors, UN agencies, and international NGOs that fund WLOs and WLOs should review their approach to partnering with local actors** and make amendments to their practices as needed to ensure dignity, respect, and safety for all local actors.



# 3. Conclusion

All actors in the humanitarian system – regardless of service sector or geography – have a role to play in reforming the humanitarian system through the Grand Bargain if it is to be truly transformational for the humanitarian system. WROs and WLOs cannot be excluded from this process any longer. Humanitarian policy, including the Grand Bargain, cannot continue to make decisions about how to serve crisis-affected women and girls without the direct input of the WROs and WLOs who serve them.

As one of ActionAid’s WRO partners stated: “Our message is: donors... and international organisations need the knowledge, experience and the analysis of the local and national WROs and WLOs... include us in the design of your policies and programs.”

The first four years of the Grand Bargain made important progress on identifying and addressing technical barriers to localisation. As the Grand Bargain 2.0 approaches, it is imperative that this pushes further, recognising that blockages to progress on GEEWG and localisation are political. The creation of the Grand Bargain 2.0 therefore

provides an invaluable opportunity to reform the structures and practices that keep GEEWG on the margins of humanitarian responses and to center approaches on women, girls, and the WROs and WLOs that serve them. This includes investing more resource and funding to WROs and WLOs and shift power of decision-making and accountable partnerships to WROs and WLOs to deliver system-wide changes.

The next level of discussion on women’s leadership and localisation needs to be led by local actors, holding international actors and GB signatories accountable, and must have meaningful engagement with crisis affected communities, particularly women and young people. ActionAid’s continued engagement with Grand Bargain and pledges towards the realisation of the Grand Bargain 2.0, will include joining and supporting WLO and WROs to build a humanitarian system driven by feminist values and where power and leadership are used in an accountable, transparent and inclusive manner and where women have equitable opportunities to lead preparedness and responses.



A woman leader in emergency, raising awareness on mask-wearing during a sensitisation day against Covid-19 (Fabienne Douce/ActionAid).

## 4. Recommendations

### To the Grand Bargain Facilitation Group Principles and Eminent Person:

1. Include GEEWG as an essential political goal within the Grand Bargain. GEEWG is currently not reflected at the political or enabling priority levels, nor is it significantly reflected across each of the outcome pillars. In order to ensure transformative humanitarian response, the inclusion of GEEWG is needed within all levels of the Grand Bargain structure. This includes creating a monitoring mechanism to track progress against GEEWG-focused commitments to ensure accountability to crisis-affected women, girls, and their organisations.
2. The Grand Bargain 2.0 must set a target and specific indicators for cascading quality funding to WROs and WLOs. Indicators should include:
  - i. The number of Grand Bargain Signatories that establish existing mechanisms or systems to track funding in support of GEEWG interventions.
  - ii. The number of signatories that provide funding directly to WLOs and WROs
  - iii. The number of signatories that contribute to multi-year funding mechanisms, beyond humanitarian assistance, that is dedicated to both institutional and capacity-strengthening initiatives led by local WLOs/ WROs in humanitarian settings.
3. The Grand Bargain 2.0 must continue to hold its signatories to account on the amount of funding that will reach local actors (25% of local funding), and move beyond this setting a new target for 2030 to at least 30%, while ring-fencing 25% of funds for WROs and WLOs.
4. Increase the representation of local WROs and WLOs within the formal structures of the Grand Bargain Facilitation Group. This includes ensuring WROs and WLOs and other groups working with and for marginalised populations (e.g. women with disabilities, adolescents), represent at least 50% of the membership represented in the proposed Grand Bargain National Reference Group; and that at least one local WRO and WLO (amongst other local actors) should be represented within the new proposed Facilitation Group.

5. Grant the Friends of Gender Group a formal seat in the Facilitation Group to increase the voices of local WROs and WLOs, and members of the group working to prioritise GEEWG commitments throughout the Grand Bargain.
6. Create and enforce global standards for improved partnerships with local actors, including WROs and WLOs. This must include guidance on providing flexible and predictable funding to local partners; investing in mechanisms for improved accountability; and the increased leadership of WROs and WLOs within the humanitarian programme cycle.

### To Grand Bargain Signatories:

7. Donors, UN agencies, and international NGOs must support their WRO and WLO partners to become full signatories of the Grand Bargain and enable their meaningful engagement by providing resources to cover staffing, capacity strengthening, and other inputs as requested by WROs and WLOs.
8. All donors, UN agencies, and international NGOs who directly partners with WROs and WLOs must increase the amount and quality of humanitarian funding that goes to WROs and WLOs, ensuring access to flexible, predictable, multi-year funding that supports core operational and technical costs.
  - a. Allow for meaningful WRO and WLO engagement in all program development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of initiatives in their communities.
  - b. OCHA must include WRO and WLO representatives on all advisory committees for United Nations country-based pooled funds in order to inform decisions on resource allocation strategy, allocation criteria and endorsement of strategic priorities at country level.



9. Donors, UN agencies and international NGOs partnering with WROs and WLOs should review their risk mitigation policies as part of the Grand Bargain 2.0 approach to equitable and principled partnerships, and to ensure accountability for all risks. This seeks to ensure that fiduciary, political, operational, legal, security, ethical and reputational risks are shared fairly by all actors.
10. UN agencies and international NGOs must ensure that WROs and WLOs are resourced appropriately to meaningfully engage and hold leadership roles in the Grand Bargain, Humanitarian Country Team, clusters, and other relevant advocacy and coordination spaces.
11. Donors, UN agencies, and international NGOs that fund WLOs and WLOs should review their approach to partnering with local actors and make amendments to their practices as needed to ensure dignity, respect, and safety for all local actors.



Women leading soap making activities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (ActionAid)



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- Arab Women Organisation of Jordan (AWO), Jordan
- African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), Ethiopia
- Hulango Land Development Organisation (HLDO), Myanmar
- Jireh Doo Foundation, Nigeria
- Lebanese Democratic Women Gathering (RDFL), Lebanon
- Liberia Feminist Forum, Liberia
- Liberia National Rural Women, Liberia
- Mejegejeje Loca, Ethiopia
- National Congress of Papaye Peasnat Movement (MPNKP), Haiti
- Nari Maitree, Bangladesh
- Nakshikantha, Bangladesh
- Organisation des Femmes Solidaires (OFASO), Haiti
- Papaye Peasant Movement (MPP), Haiti
- Rift Valley Children and Women Development Organisation, Ethiopia
- Samaritan Care and Support Initiative (SACSUI), Nigeria
- The Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA), Palestine
- The Palestinian Development Women Studies Association (PDWSA), Palestine
- Union of Ethiopian Women and Children's Association (UEWCA), Ethiopia
- Wefaq Society for Women and Child Care (WEFAQ), Palestine
- Women and Children's Right and Peace Building Awareness (WACRIPA), Nigeria
- Women in New Nigeria and Youth Empowerment Initiative (WINN), Nigeria

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Graphic design by Katy Abbott Design.

The thoughts, ideas, and suggestions reflected in this brief will serve to make the Grand Bargain better, and it is our hope, that it will ultimately improve WROs and WLOs ability to meaningfully engage in humanitarian solutions for the communities they serve. We must all bargain better for them.

# Endnotes

1. More information on the Grand Bargain can be found here: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/about-the-grand-bargain#:~:text=The%20Grand%20Bargain%2C%20launched%20during,efficiency%20of%20the%20humanitarian%20action.>
2. For ActionAid, the terms 'women-led organisations' (WLOs) and 'women's rights organisations' (WROs) refer to organisations that are led or predominantly composed of women in leadership positions, and who work towards advancing gender equality and supporting the needs of women and girls. The Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream defines an WRO as an organisation that self-identifies as a women's organisation with primary focus on advancing gender equality, women's empowerment and human rights; or (2) an organisation that has, as part of its mission statement, the advancement of women/girls' interests and rights; or (3) an organisation that has as part of its mission statement or objectives, to challenge and transform gender inequalities, unequal power relations and promoting positive social norms. The lack of agreed-upon definitions of "women's rights organisations" and "women-led organisations" is one of the challenges to consistently tracking progress on meaningful engagement, funding and partnerships with such groups. UN agencies and humanitarian coordination clusters do not systematically track which of their partners are women's rights or women-led. There is no reporting on funding to women's organisations to IATI and the Financial Tracking System (FTS).
3. See: Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Willitts-King, B., et al. (2020). Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report. Overseas Development Institute. Retrieved from: <https://odi.org/en/publications/grand-bargain-annual-independent-report-2020/>
4. Abby Maxman is the Chair of SCHR and the only women in the Facilitation Group Principals. The Eminent Person is a currently a women (Sigrid Kaag), but will be replaced by a man (Jan Egeland) from the Annual Meeting in June 2021.
5. For example, women may be more likely to experience the secondary impacts of the coronavirus, including its psychosocial effects, increased levels of GBV, and economic insecurity due to a higher likelihood of working in the informal sector. See: GAPS. Now and the Future – Pandemics and Crisis: Gender Equality, Peace and Security in a Covid-19 World and Beyond. (Jan, 2021) Retrieved from: <https://gaps-uk.org/resources/now-and-the-future-pandemics-and-crisis-gender-equality-peace-and-security-in-a-covid-19-world-and-beyond/>
6. At ActionAid, we define feminist leadership as positive and inclusive use of power to build an organisation that is capable of changing the world. See more: <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/about-us/people-and-culture/how-we-practise-feminism-at-work>
7. ActionAid's emergency responses are guided by our Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) as well as our Humanitarian Signature. The signature focuses on promoting women-led preparedness and response in humanitarian emergencies, occupation and conflicts to strengthen their power and agency to transform the humanitarian system to be more locally led and accountable to affected communities. Underlying the Humanitarian Signature, it is crucial to link emergency response to resilience building and longer term sustainable change, including empowering individuals and addressing underlying inequalities through all our development programming.
8. See Parke et al (2019) 'Leading the Way: Women-Led Localisation in Central Sulawesi: Towards Gender Transformative Action', ActionAid; FletcherWood and Mutandwa, (2019) 'Funding a localised, women-led approach to protection from Gender Based Violence: What is the data telling us?' ActionAid; Barclay et al (2017) 'On the frontline: catalysing women's leadership in humanitarian action', ActionAid; Lindley-Jones, H. (2018) 'Women responders: Placing local action at the centre of humanitarian protection programming', Care International UK; Lambert, Rhodes and Zaaroura (2018) 'A Feminist Approach to Localization: How Canada Can Support the Leadership of Women's Rights Actors in Humanitarian Action'. Oxfam Canada.
9. More information on ActionAid's commitments on the Grand Bargain can be found here: <https://agendaforhumanity.org/stakeholder/114.html>
10. ActionAid has been a Grand Bargain signatory since 2018, and an active member of the Grand Bargain Friends of Gender group.
11. Countries surveyed include Bangladesh, Colombia, Ethiopia, Haiti, Jordan, Lebanon, Liberia, Nigeria, Palestine, and Myanmar. 68% of the participants work for a national, local, or grassroots WRO and WLO while the remainder were ActionAid country office staff.
12. Although there is no single definition of localisation, the signatories under the Grand Bargain have committed to 'making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary', while continuing to recognise the vital role of international actors. For ActionAid, localising humanitarian action involves shifting power and agency, as well as financial and technical capacity, to local and national responders. The shift must have women and women-led organisations, and women's rights organisations, at its forefront, bringing their invaluable contextual knowledge, skills and resources to emergency preparedness, response and resilience-building. ActionAid understands localisation as a transformative process which puts local women from affected communities at the centre and forefront of humanitarian preparedness and response, as part of a feminist approach to humanitarian action.
13. Overseas Development Institute. Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report (2020). Retrieved from: <https://odi.org/en/publications/grand-bargain-annual-independent-report-2020/>
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Friends of Gender Group (FoGG), Engendering Transformative Change Beyond 2021: Grand Bargain 2.0 (2020).
17. On 1 February 2020, the GB Eminent Person, Sigrid Kaag, the GB Facilitation Group Ministers (currently EU, IFRC, OCHA, SCHR, UK, WFP) and IASC Principals endorsed a general direction on the future of the Grand Bargain, the so-called 'GB 2.0', which responds to the ongoing challenges the GB faces in realising its potential.
18. The Friends of Gender Group (FoGG) was formed in 2017 in response to the lack of action on gender during the early stages of the Grand Bargain.
19. IASC Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls Policy Framework. (2017). Retrieved from: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-gender-and-humanitarian-action/iasc-policy-and-accountability-framework-gender-equality-and-empowerment-women-and-girls>
20. CARE. Time for a Better Bargain: How the Aid System Shortchanges Women and Girls in Crisis. (2021). Retrieved from: [https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/She-Leads-in-Crisis-Report\\_4.7.21\\_updated.pdf](https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/She-Leads-in-Crisis-Report_4.7.21_updated.pdf)
21. CARE, 'She leads in Crisis Report Card' (2021) <https://www.care.org/our-work/reports-and-resources/she-leads-in-crisis-report-card/>
22. See: Oxfam, CARE, Save the Children, Danish Church Aid, ActionAid, NEAR, Christian Aid, Nexus and IRC Joint Agency Position on the Future of The Grand Bargain (2021) Retrieved from: [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-05/Updated\\_25%20May\\_Final%20Position%2C%20Joint%20Agency\\_Future%20of%20the%20GB.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-05/Updated_25%20May_Final%20Position%2C%20Joint%20Agency_Future%20of%20the%20GB.pdf)
23. The Grand Bargain 2.0 proposition states that it will maintain current support structures, including the Facilitation Group, to support the process, a high-profile Eminent Person to ensure regular follow-up at Principals level throughout the process, a Sherpa group with sufficient seniority and power to both drive change within the humanitarian ecosystem and influence decisions outside it, and a Secretariat to support the coordination and communication function to these structures. In line with the inclusion of a local actor, the recommendation is that '1 local actor representative to be a part of the Facilitation Group of the Grand Bargain 2.0' with the recognition that 'effective local actor engagement requires dedicated resources and intentionality'.
24. CARE and ActionAid. Gender Based Violence Localisation: Humanitarian Transformation or Maintaining the Status Quo. (2019). Retrieved from: <https://careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/GBV-Localization-Mapping-Study-Full-Report-FINAL.pdf>
25. The Grand Bargain 2.0, Framework and Addendums, Revised proposal by the Grand Bargain Facilitation Group, 1 June 2021



Covid-19 Awareness Raising in Cambodia (Sar Pisey).

26. CARE. Time for a Better Bargain: How the Aid System Short-changes Women and Girls in Crisis. (February 2021). Retrieved from: [https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/She-Leads-in-Crisis-Report\\_4.7.21\\_updated.pdf](https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/She-Leads-in-Crisis-Report_4.7.21_updated.pdf)
27. Ibid.
28. CARE. Time for a Better Bargain: How the Aid System Short-changes Women and Girls in Crisis. (February 2021). Retrieved from: [https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/She-Leads-in-Crisis-Report\\_4.7.21\\_updated.pdf](https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/She-Leads-in-Crisis-Report_4.7.21_updated.pdf)
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31. Ibid.
32. UN Women. COVID-19 and women's rights organisations: Bridging response gaps and demanding a more just future. (2021). Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/03/policy-brief-covid-19-and-womens-rights-organisations>
33. Voice Amplified. We must do Better: A feminist assessment of the Humanitarian Aid System's support of the Women- and Girl-led Organisations during the Covid-19 pandemic. (2021)
34. ActionAid et al. Joint agency report: Humanitarian Funding, Partnerships and Coordination in the COVID-19 crisis. (July 2020). Retrieved from: <https://actionaid.org/publications/2020/joint-agency-report-humanitarian-funding-partnerships-and-coordination-covid-19>
35. Overseas Development Institute. Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report (2020). Retrieved from: <https://odi.org/en/publications/grand-bargain-annual-independent-report-2020/>
36. There are currently 63 Signatories (25 Member States, 22 NGOs, 12 UN agencies, two Red Cross movements, and two inter-governmental organisations) working across nine workstreams to implement the Grand Bargain commitments.
37. Charter for Change (C4C). Joint analysis and Recommendations for the Grand Bargain Annual Meeting (2021). Retrieved from: <https://charter4change.files.wordpress.com/2021/06/c4c-joint-analysis-and-recommendations-for-the-gb-annual-meeting-2021.pdf>
38. ODI. Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report. (2019). Retrieved from: <https://odi.org/en/publications/grand-bargain-annual-independent-report-2019/>
39. IATI is a global initiative to improve the transparency of development and humanitarian resources and their results for addressing poverty and crisis. IATI brings together government, multilateral institutions, private sector and civil society organisations and others to increase the transparency of resources flowing into developing countries." Retrieved from: <https://iatistandard.org/en/>
40. Center for Global Development. Making Gender Data Count: Can IATI Help? (2016). Retrieved from: <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/making-gender-data-count-can-iat-ati-help>
41. CARE 'Time for a Better Bargain: How the Aid System Short-changes Women and Girls in Crisis' (February 2021) [https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/She-Leads-in-Crisis-Report\\_4.7.21\\_updated.pdf](https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/She-Leads-in-Crisis-Report_4.7.21_updated.pdf)
42. See: Accelerating Localisation Through Partnerships