



VOICE  
GRAND BARGAIN  
project

## **Towards a more inclusive and contextualized implementation of the Grand Bargain:**

Main findings and recommendations from the VOICE project funded by the Belgium Ministry of Foreign Affairs

From December 2017 to May 2019, the VOICE network implemented a project funded by the Belgium Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which aimed to contribute to a more inclusive and possibly a more contextualized implementation of the Grand Bargain (GB), by fostering NGOs' and frontline responders' engagement in the Grand Bargain.

In the framework of this project, several workshops and events were organised at EU and at field level. This report summarizes the main findings and recommendations of these events.

## Perspectives from the field:

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon and Somalia, the VOICE network has organized workshops on the Grand Bargain, together with NGO platforms in those countries. In total, 195 individuals participated, representing national and international NGOs, UN agencies and diplomatic missions.

### Common findings

- In those three countries, NGOs (local, national and international) were very positive about the workshops and the opportunity given to deepen their knowledge on the Grand Bargain, understand its rationale and objectives, and its progress to date at global level.
- In the three countries, NGOs representatives expressed a high degree of interest to engage more on the Grand Bargain – particularly at field level; and noted that no (or very little) discussion had taken place about it.
- There was a common consensus on the relevance of the Grand Bargain at field level: throughout the different workshops, participants captured several experiences and good practices related to many workstreams - but not necessarily labelled as 'Grand Bargain'; a finding that shows the disconnection between the global discussion and the field.
- NGOs see the value of having such workshops at field level bringing together humanitarian actors (including donors and UN agencies). The multi-stakeholder dimension of the GB with its unique set-up giving an equal weight to the different actors to work together towards a more efficient humanitarian aid delivery provides a strong basis for fruitful discussions. Organizing Grand Bargain workshops in this spirit at field level is new but is promising as it offers the opportunity for all actors to discuss how best to foster implementation of the GB in specific contexts.

## A contextualized approach is needed:

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In each of the three countries, the degree of engagement of NGOs in the Grand Bargain and in the overall humanitarian architecture is very different.

From an NGO perspective, the progress made in relation to the different workstreams of the Grand Bargain is quite varied from one country to another (in Lebanon for example cash was mentioned as a key area of progress while in Somalia, NGOs noticed great progress linked to the localization agenda).

When asked about their recommendations and which commitments to prioritize in order to make a difference in the efficiency of the humanitarian delivery, NGOs would not choose the same from country to country. Indeed their respective contexts and the progresses made so far would make their sense of priorities quite different.

## Ways forward:

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NGOs who participated in the workshops and NGO fora representing them at field level, all agreed that these workshops were a first step to initiate or strengthen the dialogue with other humanitarian actors in country: including UN agencies, donors' representatives and Red Cross Red Crescent family.

They valued the opportunities to establish this dialogue and would like to maintain it and deepen further the recommendations that have been discussed in order to translate these into concrete actions in the coming months.

They also called for having the possibility to be better connected and engaged in the Grand Bargain debate at global level. For NGOs operating in country bringing this field perspective to the international discussions is a necessity to ensure the GB meets its overarching objective.

# Main findings and recommendations per country

## Somalia

Organised in partnership with ICVA and the Somalia NGO consortium, this first workshop took place in Mogadishu in July 2018. It was very successful and generated fruitful conversations on the Grand Bargain and beyond.

NGOs operating in Somalia prioritised the following workstreams : the localization workstream, the participation revolution, as well as workstreams linked to donors' conditionality which ultimately influence their access to funding and revisiting the partnership modalities (multiyear planning and funding, reducing management costs).

Local NGO representatives insisted on the importance of mainstreaming the issue of trust in all the workstreams and implementation plans, as well as the Principles of Partnership. From an operational point of view, they also shared that gender and protection are key issues to keep high on the GB agenda.

[Read the full report](#)

## Lebanon

Participation from local, national and international NGOs was made possible in the two workshops organised in Beirut thanks to the support of Caritas Lebanon and the two NGO platforms (LHIF – Lebanon Humanitarian INGO forum, and LHDF – Lebanese Humanitarian and Development Forum). – This provided a comprehensive engagement from the NGO community operating in the country and reflected its diversity.

In the first workshop, NGOs operating in Lebanon welcomed the opportunity to learn and deepen their knowledge on the Grand Bargain and its implementation. Through open and constructive discussions, participants shared their operational perspectives and exchanged on relevant experiences linked to the Grand Bargain and the humanitarian financing architecture in Lebanon.

The workshop enabled participants to explore the relevance of the Grand Bargain in relation to their daily work. By exploring workstream by workstream the commitments made and how they resonate in Lebanon; participants noted the relevance of the Grand Bargain in its entirety and its potential for field operations.

Building on this first workshop, the second one gathered NGOs and other humanitarian actors present in Lebanon – including UN agencies, OCHA and donor representatives. Working collectively, in the spirit of the Grand Bargain, the second workshop allowed in-depth brainstorming sessions. Good practices and experiences were captured for most of the workstreams.

At the end of this second workshop, participants had collectively developed a series of recommendations to foster the implementation of the GB and its nine workstreams in the Lebanese context.

[Read the full report](#)

## Democratic Republic of Congo

In Kinshasa, VOICE and the INGO forum organised a two-day workshop. The first day convened local and international NGOs from all over the country. It provided an open space for discussion among NGOs and the identification of priority areas NGOs wanted to discuss more in-depth with donor and UN agency representatives on the second day.

NGOs particularly welcomed the opportunity to understand better what the Grand Bargain is and how they can engage in the initiative. They appreciated the format of the workshop and the constructive spirit of the discussion – particularly during the second day when donor and implementing agencies discussed the aid system in DRC. It was said to be the first time these stakeholders had come together and got the opportunity to exchange on an equal footing.

The discussions took place in French – and participants and organizers noted the limited number of resources linked to the Grand Bargain in French: a key barrier for local actors to be able to engage.

In terms of recommendations, the NGOs identified three areas of work and commitments they would like to focus on in the DRC context. They believe implementing those commitments would be a critical step forward to increase the efficiency of humanitarian aid delivery in the country;

- More funding and support to local and national actors – and particularly the forum and networks representing them throughout the country.
- From multi-year planning to multi-year financing: in DRC the HRP is now based on a 3 year perspective but this collective effort towards multi-year planning has not led to a substantial increase in multi-year funding opportunities – preventing NGOs from planning long term and engaging in LRRD / recovery frameworks.
- Harmonize and simplify reporting requirements: NGOs stressed the heavy administrative and reporting requirements they are dealing with. Simplification and harmonization would lead to significant efficiency gains. NGOs recommended donors to get involved in the harmonized reporting piloting exercise and to look into other harmonization possibilities – e.g. on partners' capacity assessments and due diligence processes.

[Read the report – in French](#)



*Somalia workshop*



*Lebanon workshop*



*DRC workshop*

# NGOs' Perspectives at European Level

The VOICE network has expertise in convening European NGOs and developing collective positions on European humanitarian affairs. In the framework of this 18-month project, the network fostered the engagement of its members on the Grand Bargain at EU level. Three workshops and an event were organised in Brussels, Paris and London. Each one focused on a specific issue of interest to the NGO community in the context of the Grand Bargain and ongoing discussions at EU level.

Bringing together experts from relevant stakeholders ( EU member states, NGO networks, Red Cross / ICRC representative, DG ECHO, academia, etc.), the workshops provided spaces to exchange good practices and deepen the knowledge of participants on specific topics. Workshops were also designed in order to inform and strengthen the collective positioning of NGOs and provide a forum to exchange with others stakeholders.

For each of the three workshops and the localization event, the main recommendations are captured below.

## Cash workshop

### Exploring and fostering space for NGOs to add value in large scale operational models for humanitarian cash transfer programme

*March 2018, Brussels*

Gathering an evidence base in cash programming is key to allow humanitarian actors to find the best way to use the Multi-purpose cash transfer modality through specific lessons-learned.

While the added value of coordination in the framework of cash programming was unanimously recognised, NGOs' collaboration is not feasible without the buy-in of donors and UN agencies.

NGOs highlighted that cost-efficiency should be better balanced with risk management and accountability. The delivery of cash should not be reduced to a simple financial operation. The role of the private sector should be further discussed and analysed to ensure it aligns with the sector principles.

The pursuit of more efficiency should not come at the cost of effectiveness and quality. Strategic, technical and operational coordination requires different actors, competencies and activities. Remote contexts requiring small cash assistance should not be dismissed. Recognition of partners' diversity and specific expertise is crucial to maintain a needs- based approach when delivering cash.

Cash should be seen as an opportunity, where with a commitment to collaborate it encourages a broader analysis of the needs and the involvement of a wider range of actors. However, NGOs underline that achieving cash outcomes should not hamper achieving broader sector outcomes.

[Read the full report](#)

## Simplification workshop

### The Grand Bargain: A vehicle for simplification? *November 2018, Paris*

The Grand Bargain opened the door for simplification via its reporting workstream. NGOs welcomed this step but working on narrative reporting is not enough. There is a need to expand this work not only by advocating for other donors to join the pilot (and expand the pilot further) but also by expanding to other elements like partners' assessment, financial reporting, etc. Simplification of the administrative and contractual management is a necessary step towards localisation. It may also contribute to more transparency.

Donors expect NGOs to support them in tracking what is happening in the field and monitoring whether the benefits of the Grand Bargain trickle down to field operations and to keep on advocating for maintaining efforts to implement the Grand Bargain. NGOs are also essential in raising further awareness at the field level on the Grand Bargain initiative.

The initiative 'Money where it counts' initiated by NRC in partnership with Humentum, aims at launching through a pilot exercise, a harmonised financial reporting template based on a common cost classification. There's a strong consensus around the benefit of working with a harmonised template and the time and resources this would save in NGOs. Using a similar cost classification would also strengthen transparency and data sharing / management and would provide a solid basis for NGOs to claim a fair share of direct and indirect costs while helping donors to strengthen collaboration.

[Read the full report](#)

## Risk workshop

### Risk Sharing to reach the 'Grand Bargain?', *March 2019, London*

Risk is broad, complex and changing and "if the ambition of the Grand Bargain is to be realised, we must address the nature of risk in its many manifestations". Participants at the workshop highlighted the importance of collecting and gathering evidence from practitioners.

The NGO community plays an important role and engagement on the Grand Bargain and has experiences to share in relation to risk management and risk sharing. Participants called on the GB signatories to provide clear and actionable recommendations linked to this issue at the annual GB meeting.

The [report](#) produced by InterAction and Humanitarian Outcomes, 'NGOs and Risk: Managing Uncertainty in Local-International Partnerships' examines how risk is perceived and managed in partnerships between international and national NGOs working in humanitarian response. It provides concrete recommendations to shift from risk transfer to risk sharing.

Participants also called for reviving the workstream on the nexus to create a space for discussing risks linked to a nexus approach. NGOs working in humanitarian assistance would welcome having a definition of the third pillar of a triple nexus and called for clarity on the roles and mandates of the different stakeholders engaged in the nexus.

[Read the full report](#)

# Localization workshop

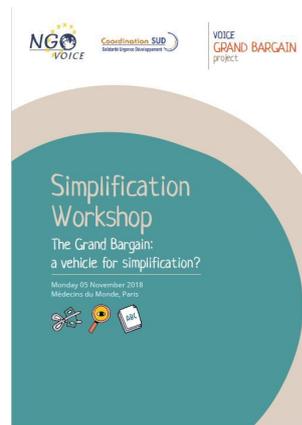
## Unpacking the localization agenda: What do we mean by 'as local as possible', May 2019, Brussels

The Grand Bargain created a momentum for the whole humanitarian community to think about the localization agenda. It forced donors and humanitarian organisations to think about it in a structured way. Since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the process of localization has been slow but the involvement of local and national actors in humanitarian responses certainly increased.

Although the humanitarian community is willing to move forward on the localization agenda, there remain obstacles. In that respect, many donors face legal and administrative constraints impeding them to directly fund local and national organisations.

Furthermore, the increase in counter-terrorism measures and impact of sanctions regimes tend to limit further the risk appetite for donors, challenging their ability to foster the localization agenda. In the face of these challenges, the need for strengthening trust between the different stakeholders has been highlighted as essential to move forward, as much as investing collectively in national and local leadership. The panel recognized the new dimensions and understanding of the added value of local actors and agreed that capacity assessment and capacity building of local actors should go beyond the review or support linked to the ability to comply with donors' requirement. A wider interpretation of what 'capacity' is should be explored.

[Read the full report](#)



Reports of the workshops at EU level



# Key position papers and statements developed in the framework of this project

In addition to the workshops organised at field and EU level and the dissemination of their reports to relevant stakeholders, the VOICE Grand Bargain Task Force shared key recommendations ahead of each annual meeting and in the preparation of the annual independent reports.

## *March 2018, VOICE Grand Bargain Task Force & ICVA Humanitarian Financing Working Group Collected Feedback and Recommendations for ODI's annual report on the Grand Bargain*

This [collective statement](#) highlighted the NGOs' perspective two years after the launch of the Grand Bargain. It captured its main progress and challenges as experienced by NGOs and proposed recommendations in relation to the structure and process of the Grand Bargain. To foster the implementation of the Grand Bargain, the paper suggested the following:

- The issue of risk management is increasingly emerging as a key factor in establishing the basis for how levels of trust can be increased. Further discussions should be embedded in relevant workstreams on the issue of risk management and risk sharing.
- The original timeframes envisioned for fulfillment of commitments appear to have been optimistic. A more realistic approach to implementation should be developed, taking into account that several project cycles at the field level are often required to fully implement changes in tools and systems. While it is important to develop a clearer process for understanding when it is appropriate to transition or mainstream workstreams, we are still in the early stages of implementation.

Conclusion: A Year for Action! In the first year of implementation the Grand Bargain community mainly organised itself around the need to develop workstreams and launch discussions. The second year was increasingly dedicated to defining work plans and launching the first activities within workstreams. As we move into the third year of implementation, the focus should be on practical action in the field. Building from the experience of the 8+3 template pilot, NGOs encourage workstreams to initiate pilots and continue the development of meaningful tools for field staff.

## June 2018, NGO Consortia Statement for the Grand Bargain Second Annual Meeting

NGOs still believe that the Grand Bargain is a unique process to improve humanitarian action, but we are concerned by the absence of significant efforts dedicated to risk transfer and risk sharing.

We're limited by the lack of clarity on the quid pro quo and future potential efficiency savings: Some NGOs are actively resourcing change, but the costs associated with, for example, the integration of IATI into internal management systems can act as a disincentive to adoption. We know it's likely these costs will be offset in the future, provided the integration of IATI leads to a reduction in reporting requirements for example, but further clarity is needed on how related Grand Bargain commitments will come together.

Many of the changes required to meet the commitments of the Grand Bargain take time, because technical changes in projects frequently take more than one project cycle, and because culture changes require proper change management processes. This needs to be factored into the timeframe and monitoring mechanisms. We also should not arbitrarily choose a "sunset" date for the GB or its workstreams, without tying such decisions to significant measurable progress.

The Grand Bargain requires sustained political engagement both within institutions and across signatories, to identify and progress collaborative actions that will result in the greatest potential gains. We need to come together to prioritise the key commitments which will trigger transformative results which reach beyond the signatories alone.

Over the past year, attention has increasingly shifted towards the relevance of Grand Bargain commitments to field operations. We welcome and will support our members to engage in country level dialogues on what the Grand Bargain means for affected people, and providers of humanitarian assistance and protection, and efforts in support of country-level funding decisions and modalities which advance Grand Bargain commitments.

## June 2019, VOICE Grand Bargain Task Force statement for the annual meeting:

[The statement](#) shares the following recommendations:

- Keep the Grand Bargain alive!

Political leadership and support for sustained work at technical level are essential. The GB calls for change management, for which leadership and strategic guidance are a precondition. Regular updates to signatories and the wider humanitarian community can help maintain the agenda on top of our priorities.

- Bring the Grand Bargain to the field!

At workstream level, lots of work has been done: pilots, surveys, consultation etc. have helped the co-conveners and engaged signatories to develop tools, guidance, and proposals for concrete implementation of the GB commitments. Collectively we need to make sure those tools reach the field and that field practitioners see change happening for the benefit of aid on the ground.

- Unpack the issue of legal constraint and risk management!

Many of the workstreams see their progress being restricted due to legal and administrative barriers. If we want to achieve the collective vision of the Grand Bargain where affected people would be put at center of an efficient, timely and predictable humanitarian response we need to work collectively to address these barriers wherever they are. The Grand Bargain aims to restore trust in the system – implicitly calling for an increased appetite for risk sharing throughout the transaction chain. Limited progress is being seen on that front (on the contrary) and without addressing this fundamental question now, we will not see the foreseen benefits of the GB materialize in the next 2-3 years. We thus call for advanced discussions and concrete actions to be taken at highest level in order to clarify where barriers are and act on those for comprehensive implementation of the GB.

# The website "Grand Bargain for NGOs"

The VOICE Grand Bargain website was developed in the framework of the GB project with the objective to contribute to raising awareness and facilitating access to relevant GB information for NGOs and frontline responders.

The GrandBargain4NGOs website gathers information on:

- Ongoing field initiatives all over the world (interactive map)
- Information on each workstream (why and how to engage)
- Relevant resources, reports and studies clustered by workstream
- Information on upcoming events, workshops and working groups

[www.grandbargain4ngos.org](http://www.grandbargain4ngos.org)



Interactive map of initiatives



Workstream pages



Useful resources



Upcoming events



VOICE (Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies) is a network representing 85 European NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main interlocutor with the EU on emergency aid and disaster risk reduction



**Belgium**

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