

# Annual Meeting Grand Bargain 2021 Debriefing

Tuesday June 29<sup>th</sup> 2021, 15:30 – 17:00 CEST (ZOOM-webinar). /53 attendees/

Speakers: Mariëlle van Miltenburg, Björn Hofmann, Smruti Patel, Sudhanshu S. Singh & Howard Mollett.

Moderated by Paul van den Berg (DRA, Cordaid) & Peter Heintze (KUNO).

## Introduction event

The Annual Meeting of the Grand Bargain (AM-GB) 15-17 June 2021 marked the five-year anniversary of an international process to reform humanitarian action: the Grand Bargain. It is based on a number of commitments towards greater efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. The Bargain was presented in the margins of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.

At the 2021 Annual Meeting, the Grand Bargain 2.0 Framework was agreed as an evolvement from the 2016 Grand Bargain and Jan Egeland, Secretary-General of NRC, took over the role as Eminent Person of the Grand Bargain from Minister Kaag, who was in this role since 2019.

On 29 June the Dutch Relief Alliance and KUNO (Platform for Humanitarian Knowledge Exchange in the Netherlands) organized a debriefing of the AM-GB for humanitarian professionals. Five speakers shared their views of the Grand Bargain process and the Annual Meeting with attendees:

- Mariëlle van Miltenburg, Head Humanitarian Aid at the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Björn Hofmann, Humanitarian Advisor the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Smruti Patel, Alliance 4 Empowering Partnership (A4EP).
- Sudhanshu S. Singh, CEO Humanitarian Aid International (HAI, India).
- Howard Mollett, Head of Humanitarian Policy at CAFOD.

This report is an effort to summarize the variety of topics addressed by the speakers and the participants of the debrief session.

## Introductions

Mariëlle van Miltenburg - Head Humanitarian Aid at the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Sherpa in the Grand Bargain: Last year – with huge challenges for the humanitarian sector (Covid and others) - showed that humanitarian aid is desperately needed and works well; yet there is still progress to make. Sigrid Kaag handed over her position as Eminent Person to Jan Egeland (secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council) – and confirmed that *political will is needed* to implement the Grand Bargain.

Important element of the Grand Bargain 2.0 is to bring more focus: *multi-annual and flexible funding* and *localisation* will be main priorities, with *risk sharing* and *gender* as important and cross-cutting elements. An important lesson of recent years is that *flexible financing* and localisation need to go hand in hand. The Netherlands and ICRC proposed new steps to manage risks (as a joint effort of donors, international NGOs and local NGOs) and the Netherlands stressed the need to make financial means available for risk management: 'Not dealing with risks, is also a risk'.

Björn Hofmann - Humanitarian Advisor the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: The Grand Bargain Signatories in recent years worked towards concrete targets and results to achieve the commitments. A Roadmap 2019-2021 captured these targets. Moving forward in the Grand Bargain 2.0 it is important to also *identify results and targets for the next two years* to guide the discussions. The enabling priorities in the GB2.0 of flexible financing and localisation need to be high on the political agenda.

Important questions remain how we can achieve *inclusion of affected people* in humanitarian action, and organize stronger connections to the local level and stronger representation of local representatives in the Grand Bargain mechanisms.

Smruti Patel - Sherpa of the Grand Bargain as representative of the Alliance 4 Empowering Partnership (A4EP): This is the first time representatives of A4EP were actually taking part in the GB-AM. Now we are able to increase the voices of local actors, nine A4EP *local leaders* joined the discussions as focal points and Sherpas which included WLO is a great start. The GB 2.0 is only a 2-year framework, we have learned in the last five years that that systemic change takes longer, it is a missed opportunity not to have a longer-term framework in line with SDG and other frameworks. In the last few years we have seen it leads to ad hoc and siloed approaches and short-term thinking.

Smruti Patel was happy with the robust statements on localisation, the quality of funding, and accountability: *risk sharing* was an important topic and mentioned many times. What needs further discussion though, is accountability and how local actors can participate in the GB mechanisms. Now there is a seat for local actors in the facilitation group, but international actors are overrepresented. Unclear is how decision-making takes place. Structures within the GB are too hierarchical. The key challenge is to organize GB 2.0 in an inclusive and democratic (accountable and transparent) way.

There has been a lot more of focus on broadening the financial resource base but the issue of reducing needs has not been addressed. More attention needs to be focused on tackling this issue and building the political will to address this in next two years.

Final important notion of Smruti Patel: nobody mentioned / mentions *power*. This is however the main topic we should talk about. Power-sharing is what equitable partnerships are all about. The current discussions on attitudes, behaviours, racism should be discussed and tackled!

Sudhanshu S. Singh - Sherpa of the Grand Bargain, CEO Humanitarian Aid International (HAI, India): Singh plead for more *long term approaches* in planning and implementing humanitarian action. You can't work in an ad-hoc approach if disasters and crises are becoming increasingly complex. You need a longer time frame to bring commitments into practice. The nexus, for instance, was diluted. Even with the pandemic which shows the long-term influence of a crisis, we still don't see the nexus brought into practice.

Other important notions Sudhanshu Singh presented, were: the need to listen to local actors (it will improve humanitarian action); the *reporting of the GB* (which is subjective and ad-hoc; it should be more evidence based); the need to make GB commitments binding ('If we don't fix that, nothing will change'); and the need to *strengthen the capacities of donors*.

Furthermore, the need to revisit the IASC definition on localization was discussed, as well as the relevance of a localisation marker to move the discussion on localization forward in a practical way.

Howard Mollett - Head of Humanitarian Policy at CAFOD: Achievements of the Annual Meeting were high level political participation. It was also good that all contributors acknowledge local leadership as a priority and that broad consensus that not enough has been achieved in the last 5 years. While last year there was some GB fatigue, *energy revived* this year.

One concern is that the Meeting focused mainly on the ways of working off the global process, and there needs to be more focus on how the GB-commitments connect from the international level to *country levels*. There will be national NGO representation in the GB – and some have lobbied for more national actors to join that, yet much more practical insights and solutions can come from engaging diverse local actors at the country level. Another concern is that many international signatories want to restrict efforts to technocratic ‘localisation’ changes in the margins of what international agencies do, rather than more transformative changes to support local leadership remained rather technical.

One practical and transformative way forward, which could be formulated into a ‘Caucus’ within the new Grand Bargain process, could be to explore learning and scale-up support to *new funding mechanisms, consortia and platforms on the country level* to prioritise capacity-strengthening, preparedness and anticipatory action and which model local leadership. Perhaps DRA, with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs as donor, could contribute to such a caucus and ensure the next phase of DRA models best practice on this on country level.

### **Some reflections from the discussion**

The funding for risk-sharing needs more discussion and exploration. Practical options could include looking at a fair and consistent approach to supporting overheads costs of local actors.

Opportunities for dialogue, partnership and funding modalities which can build trust, respect and understanding of risks faced by local actors should also be looked at.

Discussion in the chat about how to build more of a shared, mutual accountability between donors, intermediary agencies and local actors. The current approach to accountability is very top-down and often premised on mistrust of local actors. Howard Mollett: ‘Donors should align their requirements for due diligence and reporting, the current proliferation of which and inconsistencies are currently a nightmare for local NGOs.’ CHS was raised as an opportunity to foster more mutual accountability between international and national actors, grounded in a holistic quality and accountability framework. But Smruti Patel raised the concern that CHS certification is not currently accessible or feasible for many local actors, and another participant raised that CHS does not address financial risk/accountability. So more effort required to work through these issues linked to the risk sharing agenda in the GB and wider discussions.

More evidence-based reporting on the GB might be a challenge. Björn Hofmann: ‘The methodology to report on the Grand Bargain progress has improved in the last 5 years. There is at least some accountability for this process.’

### **Finally - personal reflections for the new Eminent Person, Jan Egeland:**

Paul van den Berg: Use the help of the humanitarian sector to mobilise donors – organise political clout.

Howard Mollett: Join and support engagement by all signatories in the current GB Country Level Dialogues on Localisation with national NGOs in Nigeria, South Sudan, N.W.Syria and Philippines, listen to the challenges and great innovative ideas arising from these, and build on them.

Sudhanshu Singh: Reach out to the Global South to make the system truly global and less Eurocentric.

Smruti Patel: Discuss power with the GB signatories and discuss how we can increase the voice of local organisations by making practical changes.

Björn Hofmann: Continue in the next two years in the same spirit with which he started two weeks ago: being ambitious and staying positive.

Mariëlle van Miltenburg: I wish him patience and most of all a continued support of all of us, because that is what he really needs.