



# GRAND BARGAIN: 10 YEARS ON

Protecting Quality under Scarcity

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**Abstract**

The Grand Bargain reaches its 10-year mark in 2026 at a moment of acute funding cuts, hyper-prioritization and rising pressure to prioritize quantity over quality. The Facilitation Group are now leading consultations to inform negotiations on how the Grand Bargain evolves beyond 2026. This paper argues that progress since 2016 is real but fragile, and that the next phase must learn from what has enabled and hindered delivery. Oxfam calls for a focused forum that protects hard-won gains, proves progress credibly, accelerates practical change on the ground, and keeps quality and legitimacy non-negotiable under scarcity.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email [advocacy@oxfaminternational.org](mailto:advocacy@oxfaminternational.org)

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# Summary

Ten years on from the World Humanitarian Summit, the Grand Bargain is at a crossroads. Signatories must decide whether to end it, fold it into other processes, or carry forward its most valuable work in a redesigned and clearly refreshed form. Oxfam submits this paper to help frame that choice. Our argument is not for the preservation of the Grand Bargain in its current form, but for continuity of what has worked – an independent multi-constituency space that can accelerate practical change and hold signatories accountable – rebuilt with a new operating model (and if needed, a new name) so it can protect quality, legitimacy and real-world results as resources contract and the operating environment becomes increasingly harsh.

## Why this matters

This is not a routine refresh. As the Grand Bargain reaches its ten-year mark in 2026, signatories face a defining decision at a moment of acute strain. The humanitarian system is being forced into hard, visible choices – about who is reached, what is cut, and what standards hold when money and capacity collapse.

The wider reform landscape has also moved on in the last decade. The old model of donor- and UN-led, top-down reform is increasingly challenged, and local and national actors are shaping new spaces and expectations around power and partnership. The choice now is whether the Grand Bargain remains a credible, independent, multi-stakeholder forum that can protect response quality and legitimacy under scarcity - or whether it becomes irrelevant as decisions shift elsewhere.

## Progress since 2016: Real, but fragile

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016 helped shift what 'success' is meant to look like in humanitarian action: judged not only by counting outputs, but asking whether a response was relevant, accountable and of real quality for people living through crisis. Was it the right response, and did it work? Much of the broader WHS follow-up architecture has since faded, leaving the Grand Bargain as the only remaining, multi-constituency reform platform that links directly back to that agenda.

There has been real progress. Cash and voucher assistance is no longer an innovation but a mainstream tool. Local humanitarian leadership has shifted from a contested proposition to an accepted reform norm. And accountability to affected people (AAP) has moved from the margins towards being the expectation, with more policies and tools and some

stronger collective practice in-country. But these gains are fragile and uneven. On foundational issues – including protection of civilians, respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and humanitarian access - progress has been limited and in some contexts is clearly being undermined. Inclusion and women's leadership remain too easy to park as 'nice to have' when resources tighten. Under today's funding cuts, the risk is not simply slower progress – it is rollback.

## Lessons from the Grand Bargain process

A decade of experience is clear: the Grand Bargain can enable change, but its design has also repeatedly limited delivery.

**What it has done well:** The Grand Bargain keeps reform alive, provides a rare multi-constituency space, and through caucuses has created trusted settings where practical deals can be negotiated. It has also helped institutionalize reform norms - without claiming ownership of them - by giving donors and large agencies a shared reference point they feel pressure to demonstrate.

**What has held it back:** Too often there is no shared definition of the problem and the choices to be made, and no political will to deliver change in practice, so energy goes into process and wording rather than shifting incentives and behaviour. Accountability remains weak and contested because it relies heavily on self-reporting and metrics that are unevenly measured. Progress frequently stays inside organizations – in the form of policies, guidance and pilots - without becoming shared standards across responses, in part because reforms are written as if the same tools can be applied by everyone, everywhere, in the same way. Meanwhile, many decision levers sit outside the room (with boards, finance ministries, senior leadership), while local and national actors and crisis-affected communities still lack real decision-making power even when they are 'included.' The result is diminishing returns: activity continues, but confidence erodes.

## A new operating reality: Scarce resources, higher-stakes decisions

Today's operating environment is fundamentally different from that of 2016. Conflict levels are at their highest since the Second World War,<sup>1</sup> humanitarian space is shrinking, and around 239 million people are estimated to need assistance going into 2026.<sup>2</sup> Severe funding cuts – which sharply intensified in 2025 - have forced hyper-prioritization and a retreat toward the narrowest 'life-saving' definitions of aid. Trust deficits are widening, and reform fatigue is deepening.

In this environment, 'efficiency' becomes a high-stakes governance question. Speed and scale matter, and often they save lives. But without explicit quality guardrails, the system will drift towards what is easiest to count, fund and deliver. That brings predictable risks: quality and accountability treated as optional extras; localization squeezed by 'scale-and-speed' incentives; humanitarian principles and IHL further eroded; and critical decisions concentrated in narrower arenas where local voices are missing. Under scarcity, these are not technical trade-offs - they shape legitimacy and who is left behind.

## Oxfam's ask

Oxfam rejects ending the Grand Bargain space altogether or subsuming it under the OCHA-led Humanitarian Reset. At a time when power is concentrating and trade-offs are being made behind closed doors, the system needs an independent, multi-stakeholder counterbalance to an increasingly UN-centred architecture - one where local and national actors have real voice and influence, not tokenistic participation.

Instead, Oxfam supports carrying forward the Grand Bargain's most valuable functions in a redesigned and clearly refreshed platform – potentially under a new name and narrative – that delivers stronger accountability for the quality, effectiveness and equity of response, and acceleration of system reforms, focused on localization, quality guardrails and efficiency gains, through practical collaboration. To be credible, the next phase must also revisit the operating model. It must simplify and prioritize; learn hard lessons from what enabled delivery and what blocked it; and put in place the enablers - governance, incentives, senior-level ownership, and meaningful links to country mechanisms - so that commitments translate into consistent change on the ground, rather than more process.

## Bottom line

The Grand Bargain clearly cannot continue as it is. And yet, given the current landscape, its founding purpose - better, more efficient and accountable humanitarian action - is not a luxury; it is the difference between a response that works and one that merely counts. Without a platform that can deliver better quality humanitarian response, we resign ourselves to a humanitarian system defined by cuts, institutional survival and job protection - where hard-won gains on quality, accountability and locally led action quietly unwind, and where the response becomes whatever can be sustained organizationally rather than the best we can deliver for the people who need it most.

# Introduction

The Grand Bargain was launched alongside the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) as a political package to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of humanitarian action. In 2026 it reaches its 10-year mark - and the end of its current (third) iteration - at a moment of serious political instability, acute resource scarcity and rising needs.

Over the past decade, the humanitarian reform landscape has changed. The old model of donor- and UN-led, top-down reform is increasingly challenged, and new spaces have emerged to push for power shifts and better partnership, including movements led by local and national actors, and INGO commitments such as the Charter for Change and the Pledge for Change. In response, the Grand Bargain has adapted - for example through caucuses and National Reference Groups (NRGs) intended to connect global commitments to country realities - but these mechanisms remain uneven in reach and influence. Any next phase of the Grand Bargain will only be credible if it connects to, and helps align with, these more decentralized reform initiatives, rather than operating on a parallel track.

With the Grand Bargain mandate ending in 2026, signatories are at a crossroads – and have until the next Grand Bargain Annual Meeting to decide whether the Grand Bargain should continue, and if so, how a future iteration should be designed.

An Independent Review of the Grand Bargain is underway, and the Facilitation Group - acting on behalf of the wider signatory base - has been tasked with deciding the way forward. The Group brings together EU/DG ECHO and Switzerland (donors), OCHA and UNICEF (UN system), IFRC (Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement), and ICVA and NEAR (international and local civil society/NGOs). It is considering two core functions for an evolved Grand Bargain: stronger accountability to improve the quality, effectiveness and equity of response; and accelerated system transformation through collaboration across constituencies and sectors. Facilitation Group members will also consult their constituencies via a set of guiding questions and an NRG workshop taking place in March 2026.

These decisions are being taken in an operating environment that is fundamentally different from 2016. Humanitarian need was already outstripping resources a decade ago, but the pressure has intensified sharply. The world is experiencing the highest number of conflicts since the end of the Second World War,<sup>3</sup> with rising violence against civilians and shrinking humanitarian space in many contexts. Aid is increasingly framed as a tool of national strategy rather than an expression of global humanity. At the same time, the scale of need is unprecedented: around 239 million people are estimated to require humanitarian assistance going into 2026.

*Oxfam offers this paper as a contribution to good governance under scarcity, and to support a decision that protects hard-won gains and keeps crisis-affected people and response quality at the centre of humanitarian reform.*

Severe funding cuts – which sharply intensified in 2025 with the abrupt closure of USAID - have forced the system into 'doing less with less,' including hyper-prioritization and a retreat towards the narrowest 'life-saving' definitions of aid. The sector is also operating under a growing trust deficit, and a widening fatigue with reform narratives that have promised change but delivered too little on shifting power, incentives and accountability. In this context, the OCHA-led Humanitarian Reset is less a transformative reform initiative than a crisis response to scarcity. It signals a forced scaling-back of ambition, with real risks for principles, coverage, quality and accountability.

Against this backdrop, the Grand Bargain Facilitation Group's task is not a routine refresh. It is a strategic choice about whether - and how - the Grand Bargain should evolve beyond 2026 to protect response quality and real-world results, strengthen legitimacy, ensure all constituencies - including local and national actors - have real voice and influence, and provide an independent counterbalance to narrower Reset-driven decisions.

Oxfam offers this paper as a contribution to good governance under scarcity, and to support a decision that protects hard-won gains and keeps crisis-affected people and response quality at the centre of humanitarian reform.

## Methodology

This paper was developed through a focused review of evidence from the past decade and targeted consultation with Grand Bargain constituencies. We undertook a document review covering key materials from the period leading into, during and after the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, including Grand Bargain agreements, workstream outputs, annual reporting, independent reviews, and meeting minutes. This was complemented by focus groups and semi-structured interviews with a cross-section of stakeholders, including selected Grand Bargain signatories, the Secretariat and Facilitation Group, and selected National Reference Groups, alongside other informed observers of wider humanitarian reform. The findings were triangulated across sources to identify areas of sustained progress, persistent gaps, and practical options for the Grand Bargain beyond 2026.

# Progress since the WHS: Real, but fragile

## What the WHS set in motion

The World Humanitarian Summit (Box 1) was not just a moment in 2016 – it was a forum that helped shift the humanitarian system into its next phase. It pushed humanitarian action to be judged less by the *quantity* of inputs and outputs, and more by whether the response is *relevant, accountable and of real quality for people living through crisis*. In other words, the question became not only 'how many were reached', but 'was the response the right one, and did it work for people?'

### Box 1: What was the World Humanitarian Summit?

The World Humanitarian Summit was convened by the UN Secretary-General and hosted by the Government of Türkiye in Istanbul on 23-24 May 2016. It followed a multi-year global consultation process that engaged more than 23,000 people across 153 countries, intended to bring crisis-affected people's perspectives and a wide range of stakeholders into the Summit agenda.

The WHS brought together around 9,000 participants, including representatives from 180 member states (many at ministerial level or above, including dozens of heads of state/government), alongside UN agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, the private sector, think tanks, and others.

Key outputs included the UN Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity and over 3,000 stakeholder commitments and initiatives launched or strengthened at the Summit. One of the most prominent reform initiatives associated with the WHS was the Grand Bargain, which built on recommendations from the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing to address an estimated funding gap (often cited at the time as around US\$15bn) and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian financing and delivery.

The WHS also produced a wide reform package. Two headline outputs were the UN Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity (with five 'core responsibilities') and the Grand Bargain, a donor–operating agency deal intended to improve humanitarian financing and delivery. These were accompanied by a large number of thematic initiatives and communities of practice. Over time, however, the follow-up architecture has thinned out. The Agenda for Humanity follow-up process ran as a time-bound reporting cycle and concluded in 2020, with no further reporting expected and the commitment platform becoming an archive.

The Grand Bargain is therefore the only overarching, multi-constituency

reform platform that links directly back to the WHS. It has provided continuity (meetings, reviews, reporting and, more recently, caucuses and in-country reference groups) even as other WHS-era initiatives have either ended, merged into wider processes, or continued in more fragmented thematic spaces.

## What the WHS changed - and what endures

Ten years on from the WHS, progress on its reform agenda has been real, but uneven. Some changes have taken root in practice (especially where they translated into day-to-day operational shifts), while others have remained rhetorical or have stalled in the face of political barriers, institutional inertia and shrinking resources. Across the WHS themes, there has been movement on cash transfers and some elements of funding quality, and a wider acceptance of localization and accountability as mainstream reform norms. Financial reforms have improved some processes (including multi-year and more flexible funding by some donors), even while the system remains constrained by short timeframes, earmarking, and a persistent gap between needs and resources.

However, there has been far less progress – and in some areas clear backsliding – on the system's political foundations: protection of civilians, respect for IHL, and humanitarian access. Attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure continue, and restrictions on aid – including constraints on women aid workers in some contexts – have narrowed humanitarian space.

Similarly, the WHS raised the profile of issues affecting women and girls and prompted practical initiatives in some settings – for example, many organizations now target support to women-led organizations – but leadership and decision-making have remained heavily male-dominated, and funding for gender-based violence (GBV) response is still widely described as chronically insufficient. Gender equality is often still treated as a specialist 'lane', rather than a non-negotiable part of humanitarian effectiveness.

# The Grand Bargain: A major driver of change

Many factors have shaped progress since 2016. But the Grand Bargain was a major driver of some of the most significant shifts, because it translated reform ambitions into shared commitments and practical implementation across all signatories: donors and operational actors. Three of these shifts stand out:

First, **cash and voucher assistance** has become a widely used tool rather than an innovation, with the Grand Bargain helping to cement both the modality and the coordination around it, though some stakeholders caution that recent funding pressures may be leading to some backsliding. Cash/voucher provision rose from a share of around 10% of international humanitarian assistance in 2016 to a peak of around 24% in 2022 (US\$10.6bn), but was projected to drop to US\$5.6bn in 2025.<sup>4</sup>

Second, **localization/local humanitarian leadership** has shifted from being a contested proposition to a mainstream reform norm. The centre of gravity has moved from *whether* localization matters towards how to advance it. This has influenced organizational policies and increased the visibility and participation of local and national actors in some contexts, but it has not yet resulted in a consistent transfer of decision-making power. By 2024, 7.5% of total humanitarian funding (US\$2.5bn) was directly or indirectly allocated to local and national actors – more than double the amount allocated in 2019.<sup>5</sup>

Third, there has been some movement on participation and **accountability to affected people** (AAP) – which the Grand Bargain has advanced alongside work by other actors such as the CHS Alliance. More organizations report AAP policies, tools and feedback mechanisms, and there are examples of stronger country-level practice. These include Syria's cross-border's 'Safeline', which expanded from a sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) reporting hotline into a broader collective feedback mechanism used by agencies to identify and address misconduct or dissatisfaction; the 'Community Voices Platform' in Afghanistan, which consolidates partner feedback (including from the inter-agency Awaaz hotline) and links it with coordination structures; and in Venezuela, a harmonized inter-agency contact line (a UN call centre) under a collective AAP framework endorsed by the humanitarian country team (HCT).<sup>6</sup>

Beyond these headline areas, there have been partial enabling gains including more **multi-year funding and flexibility measures** (albeit uneven), and some progress in how the system approaches **displacement**, for example through the Global Compact on Refugees and the Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, both of which emphasize more predictable responsibility-sharing and stronger pathways to solutions. There have also been advances in how the

system applies more coherent humanitarian, development and peace approaches to address **fragility**. However, significant challenges remain; for example, respect for IHL, human rights and refugee law is eroding rapidly.

Across the WHS agenda more broadly, the reform discourse remains strikingly relevant; most of its themes are still live, and some have advanced at least institutionally.

## The Grand Bargain: Fragile gains, clear limits

**Despite clear gains, progress has often been stronger in rhetoric and organizational positioning than in sustained, system-wide change.**

Demonstrated impact and power shifts remain patchy and hard to evidence - and even where progress has occurred, perceptions of limited delivery can undermine confidence in the Grand Bargain and its reforms.

**One of the main barriers to progress is that political will for meaningful reform has weakened.** In many donor countries, aid is no longer treated as discretionary solidarity spending; it is increasingly contested, explicitly tied to national interest, and squeezed by domestic pressures. Defence and migration politics now dominate the agenda, and the fiscal room for aid has narrowed sharply. Polling commissioned by NATO ahead of its 2024 summit found that large majorities across Allied countries supported maintaining or increasing defence spending, including a substantial share preferring increases.<sup>7</sup> This shift is showing up in decisions, not just rhetoric. Several major donors have made dramatic reductions to aid budgets, and the 2025 shock from the abrupt termination of USAID programming accelerated a wider aid recession. For operating agencies, the incentives are equally distorting: under mass budget contraction, attention shifts from long-term reform to organizational and personal survival - protecting core income, managing job cuts, and narrowing programmes to what can be most easily defended as strictly 'life-saving'. In this landscape, the political space for real reform - taking risks, shifting power, and protecting quality - has shrunk to the margins.

**Another central constraint is that many gains have been individual and institutional rather than collective.** Organizations can point to strategies, guidance and pilots, but these have not reliably translated into shared standards, or consistent practice across responses. Too often, 'context specificity' has become the default justification for uneven application of reforms - masking the absence of political will to make system-wide changes. The sector's approach has also tended towards piloting rather than scaling: a form of risk aversion that generates learning but rarely produces the step change needed to shift

behaviour across the humanitarian system. One concrete example is the Grand Bargain's work on harmonized reporting, including the 8+3 template. This generated a promising pilot and useful learning, but it never became the default across donors and agencies. Uptake remained limited and inconsistent, and the initiative gradually lost momentum rather than scaling into a system-wide shift in reporting practice.<sup>8</sup>

**Progress has also been held back by unhelpful incentives and power dynamics that have not been consistently tackled.** Key decisions are often made outside the Grand Bargain – by senior leadership, boards, finance ministries and parliaments – while local and national actors and crisis-affected communities may participate but do not have real decision-making power. For example, many of the biggest choices the Grand Bargain is trying to influence, such as risk appetite, earmarking, compliance rules, and where resources go, are ultimately made through donors' domestic decision chains and the governing boards and senior leadership of large agencies. And while participation has expanded, power has not followed: most major agencies now have feedback and complaints mechanisms, but affected people still have the least formal power and their feedback rarely translates into influence over major decisions. This is behind Ground Truth Solutions' argument that the Humanitarian Reset must be shaped by what crisis-affected communities say they need, and not only by institutional constraints.<sup>9</sup>

**A persistent gap remains between what is said and what is done:**

Communities are consulted but not always heard; and women and girls are widely prioritized as people to be reached, but not yet consistently treated as leaders who shape the response and agents of change with real influence over decisions and resources. The same is true for localization: despite repeated commitments to shift power and funding (including the 25% target for humanitarian funding going as directly as possible to local and national actors), progress is now at risk of backsliding under scarcity, and localization is too often reduced to narrow funding channels rather than genuinely equitable partnership and shared decision-making. Similarly, despite years of emphasis on transcending the humanitarian–development (and now -climate) divide, progress is frequently confined to pilots and organizational restructuring rather than a new approach that changes outcomes for people in protracted crises. This fuels a growing frustration that Grand Bargain meetings have become spaces for self-congratulation, while decisions and behaviour on the ground lag behind what is said at the table.

**Finally, the operating environment has exposed how fragile many of the gains are.** The funding cuts that intensified sharply in 2025 have hardened a push for quantity over quality and increased the risk that the principles, norms and standards that form the foundation of legitimate, quality humanitarian response are deprioritized or ignored (or worse, attacked) when resources tighten. Indeed, the safeguards and standards the sector has spent the past decade promoting have become the first things cut under current scarcity – treated as optional extras rather than essential to effectiveness and legitimacy.

Overall, the picture is clear: progress since WHS is real, but uneven and at risk. Without stronger collective incentives to turn policy into system-wide practice, clearer accountability, and better evidence of impact, progress is vulnerable to backsliding – precisely when the system is under the greatest pressure.

## From Grand Bargain to next steps

Over the past decade, signatories have used the Grand Bargain to unlock certain reforms, but they have also run up against structural constraints that slowed progress, diluted impact, and produced diminishing returns. The lesson is straightforward: if a Grand Bargain-like forum is to continue to exist, and if the next phase is to matter, it needs to build on and narrowly focus on what the Grand Bargain does well, and fix what repeatedly blocks progress.

### Grand Bargain strengths: what enables progress

**The Grand Bargain creates convening power and continuity.** It gives the system a regular rhythm (meetings, reviews, reporting) that keeps reform visible and provides a place to return to when priorities drift.

**The Grand Bargain offers a rare multi-constituency space.** It is one of the few places where donors, UN agencies, INGOs, and local and national actors sit together around the same table. This matters because it can reduce fragmentation, build shared expectations across constituencies, and bring local partners closer to decision making.

**Grand Bargain caucuses create trusted spaces that make progress more possible.** Smaller political caucuses – a more recent innovation – have become the places where candid discussions take place and practical pathways forward can be shaped. This means the chances of agreement and action are higher than in larger forums, which can tend towards empty rhetoric and showcasing.

**The Grand Bargain has helped institutionalize reform language and norms.** It is not the only source of today's narrative – local and national actors and wider movements have also been major drivers of this – but the Grand Bargain has provided a shared reference point for 'good practice' and what signatories feel pressure to demonstrate. This matters: agreements in the Grand Bargain forum have created pressure for internal change in agencies and donor systems, even if implementation remains uneven.

*If the next phase is to matter, it needs to build on what the Grand Bargain does well, and fix what repeatedly blocks progress.*

**The model is relatively low cost in direct cash terms – less than €1m a year for the Secretariat - for what it convenes.** The Secretariat itself is small and much of the Grand Bargain's work is voluntary, including that of the Eminent Persons and the inputs across signatories. But the platform is not 'free': the annual meeting, the time spent in caucuses and working groups, and the effort required for self-reporting all represent a real investment by signatories. The question, especially under scarcity, is therefore not whether the Grand Bargain is inexpensive to run, but whether it converts this collective investment into clearer priorities, stronger follow-through, and measurable improvements in quality outcomes.

## Grand Bargain barriers: what stalls change

**The Grand Bargain often lacks a shared problem definition and theory of change.** Signatories do not always agree on what needs to change, what success looks like, or how change will happen. This has meant that time goes into debates over wording and scope, rather than decisions that shift behaviour, resources and incentives.

**Ambition has in some cases exceeded delivery.** Some commitments set expectations that have proven unrealistic and have been hard to retire even when progress has stalled (for example, the efforts to harmonize and simplify donor reporting). This has led to an expectation gap and commitment fatigue: effort goes into keeping processes alive instead of delivering a smaller set of achievable priorities.

**Accountability mechanisms remain weak and contested.** Self-reporting encourages showcasing, but metrics (the numbers reported) are not always comparable across organizations. This has made it hard to distinguish real progress, and even harder to build confidence and credibility because results cannot be verified or communicated consistently.

**Progress is easier for individual organizations than for the system as a whole.** Many gains – promising policies, guidance and pilots – sit inside single agencies without becoming shared standards or consistent practice across responses. This has left reforms fragmented: improvements exist, but they do not add up to system-wide change. Part of the problem is a 'one size fits all' assumption, where reforms are written as if the same policy and tools can be applied by everyone, everywhere, in the same way. In reality, progress would require a more graduated approach, with clear minimum standards for all, and differentiated expectations and pathways depending on context, mandate, capacity and risk.

**Senior leaders increasingly do not attend Grand Bargain meetings, and Grand Bargain work often stays inside the room.** Regular participants make progress on how to deliver commitments, but they do not consistently brief or engage senior leadership (executives, heads of

agencies, and directors general), creating a transmission gap between technical work and executive decision-making. As a result, senior leaders do not step up to lead Grand Bargain caucuses. In donor organizations, Grand Bargain progress is not discussed at senior management meetings. Similarly, UN agencies and INGOs do not regularly discuss Grand Bargain issues at management meetings or in their boards. This has meant leaders do not routinely track performance, demand course correction, or hold teams accountable, so commitments rarely shape strategy, resourcing, or organizational incentives.

**The gap between global policy forums and country reality weakens implementation.** Many humanitarians working on the ground are not aware of what has been agreed in Grand Bargain forums or what is currently being discussed, so commitments are not translated into planning choices or day-to-day practice. Feedback from operations into global discussions is also limited, so priorities are not consistently grounded in country realities. This has sometimes left commitments abstract, led to uneven uptake across responses, and made good practice harder to spread and scale.

**National Reference Groups (NRGs) remain promising, but limited.** NRGs are intended to connect global Grand Bargain commitments to country realities, but many see themselves primarily as localization spaces, without the necessary power or resources to promote change beyond that agenda. If NRGs are tasked with holding donors and UN agencies to account for delivery of all Grand Bargain commitments on the ground, without the mandate, authority, resources or leverage to drive change, this is unrealistic and risks setting them up to fail.

**The Grand Bargain's place in the wider architecture remains ill-defined.** Its relationship to Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) processes - and now to the Humanitarian Reset - is not formally clarified, so some stakeholders treat it as duplicative rather than decision-relevant. This has meant Grand Bargain outputs carry less weight and can be seen as optional, and the system risks losing a clear multi-stakeholder home for quality, accountability and learning, unless these functions are explicitly anchored in the wider reform architecture.

**The Grand Bargain does not yet tell a convincing 'value and efficiency' story - and perception matters.** Signatories and the Secretariat do not consistently translate progress into clear, credible messages that decision-makers and practitioners recognize in daily work. This creates a risk that delivery is discounted: if stakeholders just see meetings rather than results, engagement and political backing may fall away.

**Diminishing returns are now a real risk.** When the Grand Bargain revisits the same issues without clear decisions and follow-through, it can start to look like a 'talking shop' rather than a driver of change. Over time, this risks weakening engagement and influence - precisely when funding cuts make faster choices and clearer accountability more important.

**Implications for the next phase:** *If the Grand Bargain is to shape transformative decisions, it needs fewer priorities, clearer mechanisms*

*Implications for the next phase: If the Grand Bargain is to shape transformative decisions, it needs fewer priorities, clearer mechanisms that drive behaviour change, stronger and more credible accountability, and explicit links to where decisions and incentives sit - so the platform consistently supports delivery, not just discussion.*

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## **A new operating reality: Scarce resources, higher stakes decisions**

The Grand Bargain is set to enter its next phase at a moment when the humanitarian system is being forced to make more difficult choices with fewer resources. Humanitarian needs are rising while resources are contracting, forcing hard trade-offs about where to operate, what to fund, and what to deprioritize. In this environment, calls for an 'efficiency revolution' are gaining traction: sharper targeting, faster delivery, and greater use of tools and approaches that are consistently cost-effective.

But efficiency under scarcity is not only a technical agenda; it is a governance challenge. In the absence of credible checks and balances, inclusive input, and quality guardrails, pressure to 'do more with less' can drive perverse incentives - optimizing for scale, speed and visibility at the expense of quality, accountability, equity and learning. Five shifts in the operating environment are especially relevant to the future of the Grand Bargain:

1. **Pressure to achieve quantity over quality.** Funding cuts and staffing constraints are pushing the system toward hyper-prioritization and narrower objectives, with success increasingly judged by scale and speed alone. Without explicit quality guardrails, responses risk narrowing to what is easiest to count and deliver, squeezing out learning and the practical work needed to sustain quality and effectiveness.
2. **Local humanitarian leadership at risk.** Hyper-prioritization can also drive a retrenchment in locally led humanitarian action. International agencies can often demonstrate rapid scale more easily than local actors, so 'bigger and faster' incentives can tilt allocations away from national responders. There is also a risk that the current push to 'localise fast' prioritizes quick disbursement over genuine local leadership – treating rapid funding flows (including through country-based pooled funds) as the main measure of progress, even where this comes with short-term grants, and limited decision-making power and leadership for local and national actors. Stakeholders point to this dynamic in some US Government-funded pooled funds, where pressure to move large volumes quickly has, at times, favoured international actors over local and national organizations – falling short of the power shift that localization was meant to deliver.
3. **A trust and solidarity crunch.** As resources tighten, public confidence in the international humanitarian system - and in its reform forums - has weakened, alongside waning political support for international solidarity. In terms of the Grand Bargain, when stakeholders see repeated process without visible results, it becomes easier to dismiss collective commitments, and harder to sustain the political space and financing needed for principled humanitarian action.

4. **Erosion of IHL and humanitarian principles.** Respect for IHL and principled humanitarian action is deteriorating in many settings, yet efforts to defend these foundations - and to clarify what principled humanitarian action means in today's conflicts - remain fragmented. Without a clear, shared forum to uphold minimum standards, accountability and learning, the foundations of humanitarian action risk being eroded under pressure. The consequences are not abstract: whole groups may be cut off or deprioritized on political grounds; needs rise as violence and restrictions increase; aid becomes more openly instrumentalized; and trust in humanitarian action deteriorates - among affected communities and among publics and taxpayers in donor countries.
5. **Decisions concentrating in narrower arenas, with local voices missing.** Hyper-prioritization, Reset processes and pooled funds are increasingly where the hardest choices are made - about what gets funded, where the system stays present, and what standards are treated as non-negotiable. Yet even as the reform language emphasizes 'as local as possible', many local and national leaders report that they are not part of those conversations. This risks 'efficiency' decisions being made about locally led action rather than with local actors, weakening legitimacy and accountability at precisely the time when trade-offs are most severe.

The practical implications of these shifts are clear: Whatever institutional shape the next phase of the Grand Bargain takes, it must help the system make scarce-resource choices without losing quality, equity, and legitimacy - and it must do so in ways that key constituencies recognize as relevant, credible, and efficient.

## What we need next

This paper has so far made three primary points. First, there has been real progress since the WHS, but these gains are fragile, especially under funding cuts. Second, ten years of Grand Bargain experience also shows a consistent pattern: some design features enable progress, while others create predictable bottlenecks and diminishing returns. Third, those lessons matter now, because the system is being forced to make sharper choices under scarcity and key decisions are shifting into narrower arenas.

It is clear that the Grand Bargain cannot continue in its current format. It is no longer fit for purpose as a vehicle to deliver its stated aims or to drive the depth of reform now required; nor does it yet provide a credible way for all constituencies, particularly local and national actors and crisis-affected people, to have real voice and influence.

Three choices now sit in front of the Grand Bargain signatories.

**One option is to close the Grand Bargain** at the end of the current iteration, document what it achieved, capture lessons, and fold any genuinely useful work into other processes or institutions.

**A second option is to subsume the Grand Bargain under the OCHA-led Humanitarian Reset.** In practice, this risks becoming a slow fade rather than a decision: the Grand Bargain would remain nominally alive but would lose independence, political balance, and visibility. It would end up as a secondary UN-led forum with limited leverage over the actors and incentives it was created to influence, as well as forfeiting its role as a counterbalance to the Humanitarian Reset's agenda and narrative.

**The third option is to design a model** that builds directly on the signatories' stated direction: a next phase that focuses on stronger accountability for quality and shared standards, effectiveness and equity of response, and on accelerating system transformation through collaboration across constituencies and sectors.

**Oxfam does not believe the Grand Bargain should be entirely shut down or subsumed under the Humanitarian Reset, and therefore rejects options 1 and 2. Instead, we advocate for purposeful redesign.** At a time when power is concentrating among few international actors and hard trade-offs are being made behind closed doors, there is still a clear need for a counterbalance to an increasingly UN-centred humanitarian system: a place where donors, UN agencies, INGOs and – crucially - local and national actors can contest decisions, surface risks, and hold the system to account. The Grand Bargain remains the most viable multi-stakeholder platform and it should be strengthened, not sidelined, so that local and national partners have real voice and influence, not just tokenistic participation.

This matters even more under scarcity, loss of trust and increased donor driven control. The WHS helped shift expectations so humanitarian action is now judged less by the quantity of inputs and outputs, and more by whether the response is relevant, accountable and of real quality for people living through crisis. Today the question is not only 'how many were reached', but 'was the response the right one, did it work for people, and has it reduced the need for humanitarian assistance?'. The Grand Bargain has been central to keeping that shift alive in practice, by turning it into shared commitments and a reference point for what 'good' looks like.

Now, as funding falls and 'doing less' becomes unavoidable, there is a risk that quality is quietly traded away – with participation, protection, localization and learning treated as optional extras rather than core to effectiveness. That is precisely when an independent, multistakeholder forum matters most: to make trade-offs explicit, protect minimum standards, and keep reform anchored in real-world outcomes rather than institutional convenience.

Therefore, the solution is to **move forward with option 3: redesigning a multilateral forum that builds on progress and that works for communities.** But to make that credible, the next phase would also need to revisit the Grand Bargain's operating model. It needs to learn hard lessons from what has enabled (or hindered) delivery, simplify and prioritize, and put in place practical enablers so that commitments translate into consistent change on the ground, rather than more

process. In other words, the next phase must be designed to use what has worked, fix what has held delivery back, and avoid a Grand Bargain that limps on, consuming time without leverage or impact at a moment when most organizations are under acute pressure to prioritize scarce capacity and engagement in policy processes.

Building on the analysis above – and Oxfam’s position that the current framework should be replaced with a redesigned model – this section sets out a checklist and options to inform the Facilitation Group’s design choices for the next iteration. It is not a final blueprint. It is a set of concrete elements that can be combined and adapted, focused on whether the next phase can deliver visible change under scarcity, rather than adding another layer of progress, and meet the ‘what good looks like’ test across acceleration, accountability and enablers:

*The next phase must be designed to use what has worked, fix what has held delivery back, and avoid a Grand Bargain that limps on, consuming time without leverage and impact.*

## Acceleration: Fewer priorities, better incentives and visible change on the ground

### Box 2: Checklist for effective Acceleration

#### **Fewer priorities**

- Keep the agenda short and dynamic. Focus on a limited list of priorities that signatories agree will make a difference – see suggestions below - and retire/replace/rescope items that are stalling (using clear criteria), such as harmonized reporting.
- Start with a shared problem statement, theory of change and a practical plan. Agree on what ‘better’ looks like, and the few changes that will get there. Be explicit about what must change, by whom, and through which levers.
- Make reform realistic under funding cuts. Focus on changes that can actually be delivered in a time of resource scarcity.
- Set expectations that match reality, by laying out a range of implementation plans. Specify who is expected to do what (by actor type and political space), rather than pretending everyone can deliver the same changes everywhere.

#### **Better incentives**

- Bring in the people who can change the rules. Include budget holders and senior leaders who can shift risk appetite, contracting, funding terms, and internal incentives - not only technical leads.
- Tie work to real decision levers. Lock in donor coordination so funding decisions don’t pull in different directions. Donor signatories should explicitly commit to using their funding to drive implementation of agreed reforms by fixed deadlines (not just endorse them in principle).
- Reward delivery, not participation. Make progress visible and valued (through peer comparison, leadership attention, public recognition),

and make 'no movement' uncomfortable.

- Resource delivery properly. Protect time, Secretariat capacity, and technical support so signatories can implement changes rather than just attend meetings.

#### **Visible change on the ground**

- Define country-level 'proof' in plain terms. Specify what should change in day-to-day operations (faster funding flows, fewer transactions, clearer decision rights, better quality controls), instead of just providing new guidance.
- Build strong loops between central policy and country reality. Ensure regular input from operations on what is working and what is being cut back, and clear feedback to country teams on what has been agreed and what must change.
- Avoid indefinite piloting. Use pilots only if they come with a scale decision, timeline, and a plan to make them standard practice.

## Acceleration in practice

### Accelerator Track 1 - Localization that shifts power and money (not just participation)

**What should change look like on the ground?** Local and national responders have real decision-making roles in response planning and coordination and receive a predictable share of funding. Partnership quality improves because local actors can negotiate terms, not just accept them. Local responders have predictable access to pooled funds and bilateral funding channels, with simpler contracting and faster disbursement, and fewer 'pass-through' layers that add cost without adding value.

What should the forum do?

- **Agree on a clear minimum standard for 'local decision-making power' in each context**, defining what decisions local/national actors must lead or co-lead (e.g., local and national actors must co-lead and co-approve all decisions related to priorities and targeting, including who is deprioritized under hyper-prioritization, and all resource allocation rules for country based pooled funds).
- **Set a small set of comparable localization measures**, e.g. share of funding reaching local/national responders (direct and indirect, with transparency on overhead and subgrant terms), percentage of programme decisions jointly agreed, and minimum standards for partnership quality (fair risk-sharing, reasonable overheads, timely payments, and access to information).
- **Lock in donor-side commitments**. Align donor requirements so that pooled funds and key bilateral grants require (i) defined decision-making roles for local/national responders, (ii) transparent subgrant terms, and (iii) time limits and justification for multiple intermediary layers.

- **Create a practical deal that reduces transaction costs for local responders.** Simplify due diligence through shared approaches, reduce repetitive assessments, and agree on a small set of model clauses/contracting expectations that can be used across donors and agencies to speed up funding and reduce harmful contract terms.

**Who needs to be in the room?** Donor budget holders and contracting/policy leads (including pooled fund governance and managers), national and local NGO leaders (including women-led organizations), UN agency and INGO leadership responsible for partnership models, and OCHA/coordination leadership to align how decision-making roles work in planning and coordination. NRG representatives should be included as the country reality check, but not as the main accountability mechanism.

## Accelerator Track 2 - Hyper-prioritization with quality guardrails (so 'do less' does not mean 'do worse')

**What should change look like on the ground?** Humanitarians use a shared quality hierarchy to make trade-offs under scarcity. Quality is not a 'nice to have': it includes speed and scale where they save lives, but also the elements that prevent harm and make assistance effective - listening and responding to people (AAP), safety and protection, equitable partnerships and locally led planning and delivery, and funding behaviours that enable this (predictability where possible, flexibility within limits, fair cost recovery, and sensible risk sharing). Under this shared quality hierarchy Priority 1 standards are treated as non-negotiable safeguards; Priority 2 standards are reduced only with clear justification; and Priority 3 standards are applied when resources allow. When quality is reduced, teams use a common short template and a lean evidence set to record the decision, the trade-offs made, and the mitigation steps - so choices are consistent, transparent, and focused on avoiding harm rather than on what is easiest to cut.

What should the forum do?

- **Set clear criteria** for placing elements of a quality response into Priority 1/2/3 and publish the rationale (e.g. risk to life/protection; safeguarding risk; legal/ethical duties; predictable harm; differential impacts on women, girls and marginalized groups; and whether savings are meaningful relative to harm).
- **Agree on the actual hierarchy.** Specify which quality elements sit in Priority 1, 2 and 3, so teams are not left guessing or redefining this in every crisis.
- **Agree on a lean evidence set and guidance** that teams on the ground can use quickly. This should include a short template, a small number of common indicators/thresholds, and clear expectations on minimum mitigation steps and what must be communicated to affected people when standards are reduced.

- **Define how adherence is checked** through light-touch monitoring that combines (i) periodic spot checks/triangulation, (ii) a small sample of country reality checks through NRGs or peer review, and (iii) a simple escalation route when Priority 1 standards are not met.

**Who needs to be in the room?** Quality/standards owners; operational decision makers who apply trade-offs, chosen to reflect different operating contexts, across UN, INGO and local/national responders; representatives of donors and coordination leadership; and local/national leadership voices chosen from NRGs.

## **Accelerator Track 3, for international and national NGOs - Cut transaction costs, investigate mutualization of resources, and speed up delivery (without lowering safeguards)**

**What should change look like on the ground?** NGOs (local and international) spend less time on repeated assessments, duplicate reporting, and inconsistent donor requirements, and more time on delivery and quality. Local and national partners face fewer parallel due diligence and compliance processes, and receive faster contracting and disbursements. Safeguarding and risk controls remain in place, but are applied in a simpler, more consistent way across donors and agencies, so funding flows faster, overheads fall, and operational capacity is not drained by paperwork. Where feasible, humanitarian actors should explore mutualization of services - for example shared partner due diligence/assurance, joint safeguarding support and training, pooled procurement and logistics, common cash delivery platforms, or shared back-office functions - so scarce capacity is protected for frontline delivery.

### **What should the forum do?**

- **Agree on a small set of 'must-harmonize' requirements** for processes that create the biggest burden (e.g., partner due diligence, risk tiers, safeguarding checks, financial controls, and core reporting expectations), and explicitly stop trying to standardize everything.
- **Take a shared approach to partner risk and assurance.** Adopt a common set of risk categories and a 'recognize and reuse' principle (if a partner has been assessed to an agreed standard, others accept this for a defined period, with clear rules for updates and red flags).
- **Create practical tools that can actually be used.** Model partner agreements and minimum fair partnership terms (including payment timelines, overhead norms, audit expectations, and proportional compliance), plus short templates that replace multiple bespoke formats.
- **Set a simple method to check uptake and remove blockers.** Track whether signatories are using the shared tools, identify where legal/procurement rules prevent adoption, and escalate those constraints to decision-holders for fixes - so tools translate into implementation, not another guidance exercise.

- **Mutualize services** such as shared partner vetting, shared training and safeguarding support, joint procurement and logistics, common cash delivery platforms, or pooled back-office functions.

**Who needs to be in the room?** Donor contracting/procurement and compliance leads (not only policy staff), representatives of donor Supreme Audit Institutions and INTOSAI, international/national NGO legal and partnership leads who control contracting templates and risk rules, finance/risk owners who set assurance thresholds, and local/national partner representatives who can test whether the 'simplification' actually reduces the burden. Include a small number of country operations leads to confirm what is driving delays and duplication in practice.

## Accountability: protect quality, prove progress, and stop heavy compliance processes

### Box 3: Checklist for effective accountability

#### **Protect quality**

- Use a simple, common signal of status (e.g. traffic lights) so 'holding the line' is visible and comparable, not buried in narrative self-reporting.
- Protect hard-won gains by tracking backsliding. Explicitly monitor whether cash, AAP, localization, flexible funding, etc. are being cut back under scarcity, and require corrective actions where slippage appears.

#### **Prove progress**

- Start from the shared problem statement and theory of change, and use these as the basis for accountability measures.
- Define a small set of measurable objectives for priority areas that are still in motion, and for those being accelerated (e.g., localization, participation/accountability, partnership quality), with comparable indicators plus short evidence notes – not just self-reporting that becomes showcasing.
- Build in country validation including light-touch reality checks, to close the loop between policy and practice.
- Trigger course-correction when delivery stalls. When something goes red, it triggers a fix plan, leadership attention, and a decision to simplify/replace approaches that aren't working.

#### **Stop heavy compliance processes**

- Replace heavy reporting with a light-touch Quality and Accountability Pack, for example using traffic lights and a small number of shared

metrics that are comparable and can be easily calculated and verified, along with short evidence notes and periodic learning reviews.

- Communicate results in ways that protect political and operational relevance. Produce a small set of repeatable products (e.g. scoreboard, backsliding watchlist and a 'proof pack') that make progress and slippage visible, link them to real operational consequences, and state the decisions required - so the forum is recognized as protecting delivery, not producing meetings.

## Accountability in practice

A single, standard Quality and Accountability Pack is used by all signatories - built to drive decisions, not reporting. Updated on a fixed cadence (e.g. semi-annually), it makes 'holding the line' visible under scarcity and triggers course-correction when delivery stalls. It comprises:

1. **A one-page scorecard** showing progress in priority areas (e.g. localization, AAP/participation, partnership quality, cash, flexible funding), through:
  - Traffic lights: Green (on track or achieved) /Amber (off track, recoverable) /Red status (off track, needs attention) with clear definitions;
  - Shared metrics: Two or three comparable indicators per area (simple to calculate); and
  - A three-line evidence note stating what has changed in practice, what trade-offs were made, and what decision/action is needed.
2. **A backsliding watchlist (with corrective actions)** that explicitly tracks rollback under scarcity (e.g. cash coverage, AAP capacity/feedback loops, partner funding terms/overheads, decision-making power, flexible funding share). For each item include what is being cut, where, why it matters, and the corrective action required (owner and deadline).
3. **Light-touch country validation:** Verification is selective (spot checks and triangulation with partners/community feedback), designed to build confidence without creating a compliance machine.
4. **Escalation:** Red triggers a fix plan within a defined time window and automatic senior leadership escalation, including a decision to simplify/replace approaches that aren't working.
5. **Communication products:** a one-page public scoreboard, a targeted backsliding watchlist for decision-makers, and a short 'proof pack' used for periodic learning reviews.

# Enablers: a forum that has legitimacy, the right voices, and the authority to matter

## Box 4: Checklist for Enablers

### **Legitimacy**

- Rebrand the platform if needed, to signal a break from perceptions of a 'talking shop'. Consider changing the 'Grand Bargain' name and narrative so the next phase is clearly understood as a delivery-focused mechanism (with clear decisions, accountability, and real-world impact), not another reform forum.
- Hold political attention, not just technical participation. Keep senior-level engagement visible enough that the forum carries weight beyond its regular attendees.
- Prioritize a flagship issue that senior leaders will engage with. Tackle the politically hard questions – e.g. respect for and application of humanitarian principles in today's conflicts, resource allocation under scarcity, and/or rebuilding trust in aid and public solidarity - so leaders re-engage and take decisions rather than receive updates.
- Create a clear decision point for each senior-level meeting. Set and circulate one concrete decision in advance (the 'ask'), so the right people engage; avoid broad, open-ended discussions with no outcome. If there is no specific decision to be taken, do not convene the meeting.
- Tell a value story that resonates. Explain, in plain terms, why quality and accountability matter under scarcity - so the forum is defended when budgets tighten.

### **The right voices**

- Give local and national actors equal negotiating weight. Build in equal voice at the point of shaping decisions - not late-stage consultation - and protect this even if decisions shift to smaller arenas.
- Use National Reference Groups for what they can do. Connect global commitments to country realities, but don't treat NRGs as accountability bodies for donors/UN agencies without mandate or leverage.

### **Authority to matter**

- Use a governance model that can act. Combine representative constituency participation with a small decision-making group that can prioritize, make choices, and follow through.
- Match attendance to decisions, not representation. Bring in the people who can actually decide (budget holders, operational leads, local/national leaders) only at the moments their choices are needed. Stop designing 'for everyone, everywhere' meetings that dilute progress on decisions and accountability, and waste time.
- Define where the forum sits in the wider system. Clarify how it complements the IASC/Humanitarian Reset and operational planning processes so outputs are treated as part of how the system runs, not

optional add-ons.

- Carry decisions upward. Communicate clearly to senior leadership (via briefings, clear asks and decision points) so progress doesn't stall at mid-level and disappear inside institutions.

## Enablers in practice

A three-part model under a rebranded Accelerators and Accountability Platform is proposed, comprising: Accelerator Tracks; a small accountability function; and a leadership forum that endorses accelerator outputs, takes stock of accountability, and re-engages political leadership around a flagship issue.

### 1. **Accelerator Tracks: Three Accelerators that produce adoptable outputs**

These accelerators (see Accelerators in Practice, above) do the technical and political crafting of practical 'deals' (standards, tools, model clauses, donor levers – either new, or endorsing existing ones) and then shift to uptake and fixing blockers. Each track is co-led (one local/national, one other constituency), draws in the right actors for each topic (as set out above) and is run through short, time-bound sprints with clear products and owners.

### 2. **Accountability function: signatory-governed, Secretariat-run**

A small accountability and learning function is hosted by the Secretariat, but governed by signatories through a rotating Accountability Reference Group (6–8 members, constituency-balanced, with local/national representation). The Reference Group agrees on the scorecard metrics and traffic-light definitions, reviews and signs off the semi-annual outputs, and ensures follow-up when performance slips - so accountability is owned by signatories, not framed as Secretariat reporting. The function produces the semi-annual Quality and Accountability Pack: a one-page traffic-light scorecard, a backsliding watchlist with corrective actions (owner and deadline), and selective light-touch validation (spot checks and triangulation) to build confidence without creating a compliance machine. When an area turns red, it triggers a short fix plan, senior attention, and a decision on what will change, by when. The Reference Group also issues a small set of repeatable communications products (a public scoreboard, a targeted watchlist for decision-makers, and a short 'proof pack') to keep progress and slippage visible, comparable and decision-relevant.

### 3. **Senior Forum that meets for decision and political re-engagement moments**

A Senior Forum, chaired by an Eminent Person, meets twice a year to: (i) approve or endorse the Accelerator Track outputs that need senior authority to land; (ii) review the Quality and Accountability Pack and take decisions where progress is stalling, including agreeing corrective actions and removing blockers; and (iii) take up one flagship political issue each cycle and make a clear decision on the way forward. Flagship issues could include: how principles are applied

in today's conflicts; how the system allocates under scarcity; how to rebuild trust and public solidarity; how to manage access and protection trade-offs; or how to reduce compliance burdens without weakening safeguards.

**Secretariat role:** Beyond logistics and signatory relations, the Secretariat keeps the Accelerator Tracks moving (convening the right people, supporting drafting, tracking ownership and deadlines), supports the signatory-led accountability process (assembling the Quality and Accountability Pack, organizing light-touch validation, and managing follow-up on agreed corrective actions), and produces a small set of products for two audiences: (i) senior decision-makers (clear briefs with the choices required) and (ii) operational teams and partners (what has changed, what it means in practice, and where to raise problems). The Secretariat also strengthens NRGs so they have the capacity and power to support the forum's work, both in terms of global policy and in enabling delivery on the ground. The gap between policy and practice is reduced by building country and partner input into each Accelerator Track from the start, by performing light-touch country level verification of accountability results and using NRG feedback as a standard step before major outputs are taken to the senior level for approval.

# Conclusion

Oxfam's position is clear: what is needed right now is a multilateral forum that works for communities. The reform function established under the Grand Bargain should not be discontinued or absorbed into the Reset, but redesigned with a new operating model fit for today's context. At a time of shrinking decision-making space and concentrated influence, the system needs an independent counterbalance: a multi-stakeholder forum where donors, UN agencies, INGOs and – crucially – local and national actors can contest decisions, surface risks, and hold the system to account.

The Grand Bargain cannot continue in its current format. Under today's funding cuts, its original aims – more equitable, effective and efficient humanitarian action – are more urgent, not less. Whatever comes next must therefore be designed to use what has worked and fix what has repeatedly held delivery back. In practice, that means a redesigned model built around three strands: accelerating a small set of priority reforms to visible operational change; strengthening accountability without creating a heavy, new compliance machine; and securing the legitimacy, voice and authority needed for decisions to carry weight. If designed this way, it will enable the system to make sharper choices without losing quality. The credibility of the system – and people's trust that it will ensure quality, principled humanitarian assistance for those who need it – requires decisive action now.

# Notes

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# About Oxfam

Oxfam is a global movement of people who are fighting inequality to end poverty and injustice. We are working across regions in more than 70 countries, with thousands of partners, and allies, supporting communities to build better lives for themselves, grow resilience and protect lives and livelihoods also in times of crisis. Please write to any of the agencies for further information or visit [www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org).

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