

A Decade of the Grand Bargain: Localization, Power Shifts, and the Future of Humanitarian Action

A Webinar organized by the [Local Humanitarian Leadership \(LHL\) Network](#)

Panelists:

Dr. Puji Pujiono, *National Adviser from Professional Society to the Disaster Management Authority of Indonesia*

Juliet Donna Eyokia, *Refugee Engagement and Policy Influencing Coordinator, Worden Daad Shared Resource Center-Uganda*

Hannah Cooper, *Policy and Research Coordinator, Oxfam International Rights in Crisis Team*

Moderators:

Janice Ian Manlutac, *Senior Local Humanitarian Leadership and Disaster Risk Reduction Advisor, Oxfam America*

Dominic Ramirez, *Local Humanitarian Leadership Network Coordinator*

Executive Summary

The webinar held last 25 June 2026 commemorated the tenth anniversary of the Grand Bargain by examining its contributions, shortcomings, and future direction in advancing humanitarian reform. Bringing together over 25 humanitarian practitioners and localization advocates, the discussion reflected on whether the Grand Bargain has meaningfully shifted power and resources toward local actors.

The online event was based on two pre-reading materials: 1) [Grand Bargain: 10 Years On](#), an Oxfam report which challenges the humanitarian sector to move beyond rhetoric and redesign the Grand Bargain into a stronger, more accountable platform that protects locally led action, safeguards humanitarian principles, and ensures aid is equitable, effective, and focused on the needs of those most affected and 2) [What blocks reform? 10 years of lessons for the humanitarian reset](#), a thought-provoking opinion piece from The New Humanitarian which reflects on why humanitarian reform efforts—including the Grand Bargain and the Humanitarian Reset—often struggle to deliver real change despite years of commitments and discussions.

Through a pre-webinar survey, over 30 participants shared their thoughts on key issues about the Grand Bargain on its tenth year. The answers were presented in the webinar and incorporated in the discussion.

In the webinar, participants acknowledged that the Grand Bargain has successfully elevated localization as a global humanitarian agenda and created stronger policy commitments but most agreed that implementation has been inconsistent. Significant barriers remain, including limited direct and quality funding for local organizations, burdensome donor compliance requirements, unequal partnerships, and insufficient transfer of power and decision-making authority.

Panelists emphasized that the next phase of humanitarian reform should move beyond policy discussions and pilot initiatives toward measurable implementation. Participants called for stronger accountability, equitable partnerships, increased direct funding, and

greater recognition of local leadership. The discussion concluded with optimism that the humanitarian community has accumulated sufficient knowledge and evidence over the past decade to transition from commitments to action.

Highlights from the Webinar

Session 1: Stock-take of a Decade of the Grand Bargain

The first discussion reflected on the Grand Bargain's achievements over the past decade. Speakers acknowledged that its greatest success has been embedding localization as a central principle of humanitarian action, yet they also recognized its limitations in delivering meaningful structural change. Puji Pujiono argued that the Grand Bargain has largely remained a platform for dialogue among donors, the UN, INGOs, governments, and local actors. While it has fostered conversation and opened channels for engagement, it has produced limited changes on the ground, struggling to drive transformative reforms or respond effectively during major humanitarian funding crises. Donna Juliet, drawing from Uganda's experience, highlighted tangible progress. This included greater recognition of local organizations and refugee-led groups, stronger local humanitarian platforms, and improved accountability mechanisms that allow crisis-affected communities to provide feedback on humanitarian services.

Hannah Cooper reinforced that localization has successfully transitioned from a niche advocacy issue to a mainstream humanitarian norm, enjoying broad acceptance across the sector and increasing the visibility of local actors in policies, coordination mechanisms, and partnerships. However, she stressed that this shift in narrative has not been matched by a corresponding transfer of decision-making power, funding, or risk-sharing.

“The Grand Bargain commitment on localization has had the biggest impact. It has enabled my organization to access resources more directly, strengthen institutional capacity, and ensure that community-driven approaches—such as safeguarding trainings and asset-based community development—are recognized and supported within international partnerships.

- Keumala Dewi, Executive Director, PKPA Foundation

Moderating the discussion, Janice Ian Manlutac connected these reflections with the webinar survey results. The survey similarly identified localization as the Grand Bargain's most significant achievement, alongside advances in participation, cash programming,

anticipatory action, needs assessment, and accountability mechanisms. Survey responses and examples from organizations such as PKPA Foundation and Build Hope Uganda illustrated how localization has strengthened institutional capacity, expanded the role of local actors in program design and implementation, and improved the sustainability of humanitarian responses. Nevertheless, the discussion concluded that while local actors are now widely recognized as indispensable partners, genuine power-sharing and direct access to resources remain incomplete, making deeper implementation of localization the sector's continuing challenge.

Session 2: Examining the Gaps

The second discussion explored why many Grand Bargain commitments have failed to produce lasting, system-wide reform, instead resulting in isolated policies, pilots, and organizational initiatives. Hannah Cooper argued that while humanitarian organizations have introduced localization strategies, accountability frameworks, partnership policies, and numerous pilot projects, these efforts have largely remained internal to individual organizations rather than transforming the humanitarian system as a whole. She emphasized that meaningful change requires reforms in funding practices, coordination structures, risk-sharing, and resource allocation, moving beyond isolated organizational initiatives.

Puji Pujiono echoed this sentiment, cautioning against attributing every positive development to the Grand Bargain, noting that innovations like cash programming predated the initiative. He characterized

We pilot something, we learn, and then we move on without making that practice standard, or we move on without saying we have good enough knowledge and evidence that this is the most effective way of delivering humanitarian assistance.

-Hannah Cooper

the Grand Bargain as generating extensive meetings and commitments but little practical implementation, observing that headquarters-level commitments often fail to reach country offices. He also highlighted the limited engagement of Global South governments, arguing that because the Grand Bargain is not a formal UN process, many governments do not consider its commitments binding. In response, local actors have increasingly organized themselves into stronger networks and alliances, choosing to build their own leadership rather than waiting for international actors to transfer power.

The conversation then shifted to structural barriers preventing local actors from exercising genuine decision-making authority. Donna Juliet stressed that the primary obstacle is not a lack of local capacity but unequal control over funding and resources, which continues to concentrate decision-making power among donors and international organizations. She cited persistent compliance requirements, inadequate risk-sharing, limited indirect cost recovery, and the exclusion of local organizations from program design. She further noted that women-led and refugee-led organizations face even greater barriers despite their frontline roles.

Audience contributions reinforced this perspective, with Geoffrey Reyo arguing that discussions on "capacity strengthening" should shift from questioning local actors' technical competence to addressing their lack of direct funding. The discussion also highlighted broader systemic inequities, including burdensome compliance systems designed for international organizations, visa restrictions that limit Global South participation in global humanitarian forums, and the continued concentration of major Grand Bargain meetings in Geneva. Panelists suggested exploring parallel regional meetings and stronger coordination among local actors to consolidate their voices and strengthen their influence in global humanitarian decision-making.

Session 3: Scarcity, Prioritization, and Quality

The third discussion focused on how the humanitarian sector can address shrinking resources while upholding the principles of localization and quality humanitarian action. Donna Juliet highlighted the severe impact of recent funding cuts, especially in Uganda, where reduced food

Drastic changes have happened in the humanitarian sector, especially when it comes to providing, quality assistance in the last one year, and the reality is that, we all need to wake up to see how we can address the challenges we are faced with today.

-Juliet Donna Eyokia

rations and cash assistance have left many refugees without sufficient support to achieve self-reliance. She contended that dwindling resources should not justify compromising the quality of humanitarian aid or neglecting participation, protection, and inclusion. Instead, she advocated for enhanced collaboration among humanitarian actors to minimize duplication, streamline bureaucratic processes, diversify funding sources beyond traditional donors, increase government investment in humanitarian response, and maintain accountability to Grand Bargain commitments. Donna stressed the importance of empowering local organizations with greater decision-making authority, direct funding, and support to ensure sustained, community-centered responses despite financial limitations.

Expanding on these points, Hannah Cooper cautioned that the humanitarian funding crisis has led to "hyper-prioritization" of life-saving interventions, potentially reverting to short-term emergency responses at the expense of longer-term, quality-focused approaches. She argued that categorizing humanitarian action as a simple choice between life-saving and non-life-saving activities is an oversimplification, noting that services like protection, education, and gender-based violence prevention are inherently life-saving. Hannah emphasized that humanitarian effectiveness should encompass not only speed and scale but also appropriateness, inclusivity, local leadership, and responsiveness to community needs. Janice Ian Manlutac supported this view with examples where affected communities valued compassionate, respectful, and needs-responsive assistance, even when delivered slower than donor performance targets,

underscoring the gap between donor metrics and community perceptions of quality. The session concluded with a Mentimeter poll on the future of the Grand Bargain, revealing overwhelming participant support for its continuation as a stronger platform for accountability and systemic transformation, rather than its termination.

Session 4: The Future of the Grand Bargain

The final discussion centered on the future of the Grand Bargain and the evolution of humanitarian reform amid shrinking international aid. Addressing questions about reducing reliance on external funding, Puji Pujiono advocated for humanitarian actors in the

I think there is always the temptation to attribute all of these changes to the Grand Bargain. I would like to remind ourselves, many of these dreams have gone on and will go on with or without the Grand Bargain. We at the global south should continue to organize ourselves. Look around the neighbors. Look at the money that has been underutilized, for example.

-Dr. Puji Pujiono

Global South to prepare for continued declines in international resources. He proposed strengthening local leadership, mobilizing domestic resources, and leveraging alternative financing mechanisms such as government disaster funds, faith-based giving, and community self-reliance initiatives. Pujiono emphasized that the Grand Bargain should expand its focus beyond funding to support the legitimacy, capacity, and enabling environments for local actors.

Hannah Cooper reiterated the importance of continuing the Grand Bargain as a unique multi-stakeholder platform for direct engagement among local actors, donors, and international organizations. However, she stressed the need to redesign it to prioritize accountability, concrete action, and measurable system change over continued dialogue alone. Donna Juliet reinforced the critical link between global commitments and country-level implementation. She suggested strengthening National Reference Groups, local humanitarian platforms, and alternative financing mechanisms to empower local organizations to lead responses and influence humanitarian priorities.

Participants also reflected on the role of local actors in shaping the next phase of humanitarian reform, highlighting the need for stronger collaboration, joint advocacy, and collective action rooted in local realities. Shyamal Sarker urged international and local actors to collaborate on locally defined priorities while amplifying a unified advocacy voice for localization.

In the closing reflections, Hannah Cooper expressed her hope for a genuine shift of decision-making power to communities and local actors. Puji Pujiono proposed using the Local Humanitarian Leadership (LHL) Network as a regular platform for Global South actors to develop common positions before Grand Bargain meetings. Donna Juliet

emphasized achieving equity through a fair sharing of power, resources, and opportunities.

Concluding the webinar, Janice Ian Manlutac observed an overwhelming participant consensus for continuing the Grand Bargain beyond 2026. However, she noted the recognition that its next phase must transition from policy discussions towards implementation, accountability, and collective action. Ian encouraged participants to build on existing momentum, collaborate more effectively, and translate the lessons of the past decade into meaningful reforms that strengthen locally led humanitarian action.

Major Themes

Across the discussions, several themes consistently emerged:

- Equity
- Trust
- Shared power
- Direct financing
- Accountability
- Local leadership
- Systemic reform
- Collaboration
- Practical implementation

Key Insights from Participants

Participants broadly agreed that:

- Localization has become an accepted humanitarian norm.
- Implementation has not kept pace with policy commitments.
- Power remains concentrated within international institutions.
- Local actors continue facing unequal partnerships.
- Future reforms should prioritize measurable action rather than additional commitments.

Recommendations

The webinar generated several recommendations for advancing localization:

1. Increase direct and quality flexible funding for local organizations.
2. Reduce administrative and compliance burdens placed on local actors.
3. Strengthen accountability mechanisms for Grand Bargain commitments beyond self reporting.
4. Institutionalize shared decision-making between international and local actors.
5. Scale successful localization practices instead of continuing isolated pilot projects.
6. Continue strengthening platforms such as the LHL Network for collective advocacy.
7. For immediate action points, members of the LHL Network and panel speakers agree to develop common positions ahead of international humanitarian meetings, including the Grand Bargain Annual Meeting. Please watch out for further announcements on upcoming convenings toward this.

Next Steps

The organizers committed to:

- Preparing and sharing a report based on the webinar
- Making the webinar recording available for wider learning
- Continuing discussions through the LHL Network and other similar platforms
- Exploring regular forums to build collective positions and strengthen local voices ahead of international policy engagements.

 Mentimeter

Share one word describing what you hope the next decade of humanitarian reform will deliver.



Closing Reflection

The webinar concluded on an optimistic note. While participants acknowledged that the Grand Bargain has not yet achieved its envisioned transformative change, there was broad agreement that the humanitarian community has gained sufficient experience over the past decade to move decisively from commitments to implementation.

Instead of calling for a replacement of the Grand Bargain, participants advocated for accelerating localization through practical reforms, stronger accountability, equitable partnerships, and genuine power sharing. The discussion ended with a collective call to translate years of policy dialogue into sustained action that places local leadership at the center of the humanitarian response.

Recent Developments on the Grand Bargain

On June 30, 2026, the Ambassadors convened Sherpas from all Signatories to present the emerging direction of the future platform and to gather feedback before the Facilitation Group's (FG) final deliberations.

The **All-Signatories Meeting** focused on shaping the future of the Grand Bargain beyond 2026, with broad agreement that it should continue as a more action-oriented and country-focused platform. Signatories supported shifting the emphasis from global policy discussions to implementation at the country level, while remaining anchored in the Grand Bargain's core commitments on localization, quality funding, and risk sharing. Participants welcomed the proposed central role of National Reference Groups (NRGs) as locally led accountability mechanisms and endorsed an "accelerator" function to help implement and scale practical solutions. However, they called for greater clarity on governance, mandates, resourcing, and links with existing coordination structures.

Throughout the discussion, signatories emphasized that the future platform should remain lean, complementary to the Humanitarian Reset, and focused on producing tangible results rather than additional processes. They stressed the importance of preserving global accountability while strengthening country-level engagement, ensuring adequate support for local actors, and maintaining attention to quality funding and risk sharing alongside localization. The meeting concluded with broad support for pursuing the proposed reforms, with feedback to be incorporated into a final framework for endorsement at the October 2026 Grand Bargain Annual Meeting.

The discussions in this meeting closely mirror the themes that emerged during *the A Decade of the Grand Bargain: Localization, Power Shifting, and the Future of Humanitarian Action* Webinar.

- **From Narrative to Implementation:** Both emphasized that while localization is widely accepted in principle, the priority must shift toward implementation and measurable change.
- **Country-Level Leadership:** The proposed central role for National Reference Groups (NRGs) aligns with the webinar's repeated calls to strengthen national and local humanitarian platforms as drivers of reform.
- **Beyond Funding:** Echoing Puji Pujiono's remarks, the meeting recognized that legitimacy, accountability, partnerships, and enabling environments are as important as funding.
- **Accountability Over Process:** The meeting echoed the webinar's criticism that the Grand Bargain has generated extensive dialogue but insufficient systemic change. It proposed stronger accountability mechanisms and practical implementation through the accelerator function.
- **Continuation with Reform:** Consistent with the webinar's participant poll, the meeting concluded that the Grand Bargain should continue beyond 2026, but in a redesigned form that is more accountable, action-oriented, and grounded in country realities.

Annex

Key Discussion Points

1. Reflecting on Ten Years of the Grand Bargain

The webinar opened with an interactive poll asking participants what they considered the Grand Bargain's most significant achievement.

Common responses highlighted:

- Localization becoming a mainstream humanitarian agenda.
- Increased recognition of local leadership.
- Greater awareness of power imbalances.
- Improved dialogue between international and local actors.

Participants noted that the Grand Bargain successfully changed the language and discourse around localization, although translating commitments into practice remains a challenge.

2. Progress Toward Localization

Panelists recognized several positive developments over the past decade:

- Localization is now widely accepted as a central humanitarian principle.
- Local organizations have stronger visibility in international humanitarian discussions.
- More opportunities exist for local actors to influence policy conversations.
- The humanitarian sector increasingly recognizes the value of locally led responses.

However, participants stressed that these gains have been stronger at the policy level than in practice.

3. Persistent Challenges

A significant portion of the discussion focused on barriers preventing meaningful localization.

Participants identified several recurring issues:

Funding

- Limited direct and quality funding reaches local organizations.

- Financial resources continue to flow primarily through international intermediaries.
- Local organizations often receive insufficient overhead and institutional support.

Risk Transfer

Donors continue transferring financial and compliance risks to local organizations without providing adequate resources to manage those responsibilities.

Decision-Making Power

Although consultation has increased, local organizations still have limited influence over:

- Funding priorities
- Programme design
- Humanitarian coordination
- Strategic decision-making

Administrative Burden

Participants highlighted:

- Complex reporting requirements
- Multiple donor compliance systems
- Heavy administrative workloads
- Lack of harmonized donor processes

These requirements disproportionately affect smaller local organizations.

4. Power Shift Requires Structural Reform

Panelists emphasized that localization is fundamentally about shifting power rather than simply increasing funding.

True power shifting requires:

- Shared decision-making
- Equitable partnerships
- Trust in local leadership
- Redistribution of authority
- Recognition of local expertise

Participants argued that international organizations should increasingly position themselves as facilitators and supporters rather than primary decision-makers.

5. Moving Beyond Pilot Projects

One recurring message throughout the webinar was the need to move beyond experimentation.

Participants noted that:

- Enough evidence already exists to demonstrate what works and what doesn't.
- Successful localization models should now be scaled.
- The humanitarian community should prioritize implementation over producing additional guidance documents.

As one speaker summarized, the sector should move from "pilot projects and policies" toward concrete action and continuous learning.

6. Strengthening Collective Action

Participants discussed the importance of maintaining dialogue beyond the webinar.

Suggestions included:

- Holding regular LHL Network discussions.
- Developing collective positions before international meetings.
- Building stronger collaboration among local humanitarian actors.
- Using the LHL Network as a platform to influence the Grand Bargain Annual Meeting in Geneva.

Organizers welcomed these ideas and expressed support for continued engagement.

The webinar recording and transcript are found on this [link](#).

For questions/comments on this brief, email janice.manlutac@oxfam.org