



Charter for Change Statement on the 2026 Grand Bargain Annual Meeting

As we mark ten years of the Grand Bargain, it is important to reflect on the shared ambitions – and distinct origins – of two initiatives that have helped shape the localisation agenda: the Charter for Change (C4C) and the Grand Bargain.

Established in 2015 and 2016, respectively, both initiatives emerged from a growing recognition of the need for fundamental reform of the humanitarian system, with the shift of power, resources and decision-making authority towards local and national responders central to that transformation. Yet they approached the localisation of aid from somewhat different starting points. The Grand Bargain was conceived primarily as an agreement between donors and major humanitarian organisations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. The Charter for Change, by contrast, focused more specifically on the role and responsibilities of international NGOs, emphasising the need for them to reform their own institutional practices, address unequal power relations, and build more equitable partnerships with local and national actors.

More fundamentally, for C4C, localisation has always been about far more than improving the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. At its core, it is about transforming unequal power relations within the humanitarian system by shifting resources, leadership and decision-making authority towards local and national actors, recognising them as equal partners and leaders in their own right rather than merely implementers of aid.

These two objectives – shifting power towards local actors and improving humanitarian efficiency and effectiveness – are not in tension with one another. On the contrary, we firmly believe that the former reinforces the latter: greater local leadership and decision-making power is vital for driving more efficient and effective, responsive and accountable humanitarian assistance.

Over the past decade, the two initiatives have developed increasingly overlapping constituencies and complementary structures, including annual reporting, meetings, working groups and country-level mechanisms. A distinctive feature of C4C has been the active role of local and national NGO Endorsers in shaping its agenda, advocating for accountability and taking on leadership responsibilities. Its rotating secretariat, hosted by local and national

organisations across different crisis contexts, reflects this commitment to putting local leadership into practice.

At the same time, the Grand Bargain offers something uniquely valuable: a platform bringing together donors, UN agencies, international and local NGOs, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement around shared commitments to humanitarian reform. Preserving this inclusive, multi-stakeholder space is essential. The growing – although still far too limited – participation and influence of local and national actors within the Grand Bargain did not happen automatically. It is the result of years of sustained advocacy by local organisations, C4C Signatories and Endorsers, and other allies committed to more equitable humanitarian action. These hard-won gains must be protected and strengthened.

C4C has played an important role in these efforts, particularly through its country-level networks and collective advocacy. In several contexts, existing C4C working groups and localisation dialogues have helped lay the groundwork for Grand Bargain National Reference Groups (NRGs). As the Grand Bargain enters its next phase, with NRGs expected to assume a more central role, there is an important opportunity to connect global commitments more directly to country-level priorities, realities and accountability.

However, the lessons of previous Grand Bargain transitions must not be forgotten. Successive restructuring processes have too often consumed six months or more, dissipating momentum, weakening engagement and delaying implementation. At a time when humanitarian actors face unprecedented pressures, the next transition must be faster, smoother and more purposeful. Clear governance arrangements, sustained engagement from Signatories, meaningful leadership by local and national actors, and adequate support for NRGs need to be established without unnecessary delay.

The challenge for the Grand Bargain's next decade is to ensure that those commitments produce measurable changes in who holds power, who controls resources, and who shapes humanitarian decisions. To this end, we recommend five action points:

- **Ten Years of Evidence Demand a Fundamental Shift in Power and Resources**

Over the past decade, a substantial and growing body of evidence, research and practical experience has reinforced the case for locally led humanitarian action. Across different crises and contexts, this evidence demonstrates the value of placing greater resources, leadership and decision-making authority in the hands of those closest to affected communities.

Yet, despite ten years of accumulating evidence and repeated international commitments, progress in fundamentally changing how the humanitarian system operates has been deeply inadequate, as the Grand Bargain's own latest independent report makes clear. Persistent assumptions about the capacity and credibility of local and national actors continue to undermine their leadership, while entrenched institutional incentives, unequal power relations and longstanding funding practices prevent existing knowledge and commitments from translating into meaningful change.

Further evidence and learning are certainly welcome, but claims of insufficient evidence can no longer be used to justify continued inaction or incremental reform. We already know more than enough to justify a far greater and more urgent shift in resources, power and decision-making authority than has been achieved over the past decade.

- **Accountability Must Mean Action, Not Just Reporting**

Commitments matter. Over the past decade, both the Grand Bargain and Charter for Change have demonstrated their value in shaping humanitarian debates, setting priorities and establishing shared expectations for reform. Yet the record of Signatories in translating these commitments into sustained, system-wide changes remains mixed at best. Too often, progress has been confined to individual pilots, innovative/flagship programmes or particular country contexts, rather than becoming standard practice across organisations and their operations.

As we enter the Grand Bargain's tenth anniversary meeting, a central challenge is no longer simply securing stronger commitments, but ensuring that existing commitments are implemented and that Signatories are held accountable for delivering on them. Accountability must mean much more than annual reporting. It requires clear mechanisms for following up on unmet commitments, identifying and addressing barriers to implementation, and ensuring that findings lead to corrective action. Who is responsible for following up when commitments are not met? What incentives exist to encourage meaningful institutional change, and what consequences follow persistent inaction? The next phase of the Grand Bargain must provide clearer answers, backed by measurable, time-bound targets that demonstrate tangible shifts in funding, institutional practices, and decision-making power.

We strongly welcome the more central role envisioned for country-level processes, particularly NRGs, in the Grand Bargain's next phase. These mechanisms offer important opportunities to ground accountability in country-level realities and the priorities of local and national actors. But stronger country-level engagement must be matched by sustained commitment and accountability at the global headquarters level, where many of the policies, incentives and institutional decisions that constrain localisation are ultimately determined.

Finally, accountability requires continuity. Previous Grand Bargain transitions have resulted in lengthy disruptions to collective engagement and implementation, including the nearly year-long gap between the dissolution of the Localisation Workstream and the establishment of the Localisation Community of Practice. We cannot afford to repeat these losses of momentum. Rather than spending valuable time rebranding or restructuring effective global mechanisms, such as the Risk Sharing Community of Practice and the Subgroup on Intermediary Agencies and Modern Partnerships, the priority should be to preserve and strengthen them, connect their work more effectively to NRGs, and ensure their recommendations lead to concrete institutional action.

- **Local Leadership Requires Quality Funding**

Shifting more funding to local and national organisations is essential, but the quality of that funding is just as important as the quantity. Funding should not simply enable local

organisations to implement programmes designed, directed and controlled elsewhere. It must provide them with the resources, authority, flexibility and time needed to lead humanitarian responses, determine their own priorities and develop solutions grounded in the needs and perspectives of affected communities.

The Charter for Change's [work](#) on [Quality Funding](#) has identified the essential characteristics of financing that genuinely enables locally led action: funding that is timely, accessible, flexible, predictable, multi-year, as direct as possible and transparent. It must also support full cost recovery, including fair indirect cost recovery, strengthen institutional capacities, promote equitable risk sharing and reduce excessive administrative burdens. These should not be exceptional features of a handful of innovative funding mechanisms or pilot programmes, but standard expectations across humanitarian financing.

Equitable access to quality funding must also extend explicitly to women-led and women's rights organisations, whose leadership and contributions are too often overlooked or inadequately resourced. These organisations must not be left behind within broader localisation targets or expected to take on growing humanitarian responsibilities without the sustained funding, institutional support and decision-making authority necessary to fulfil them.

Above all, quality funding must strengthen the long-term sustainability, independence and leadership of local and national organisations. This means investing in their institutional development, leadership capacities and ability to define and pursue their own strategic priorities, rather than tying resources exclusively to short-term project delivery.

- **Equitable Partnerships Require a Fundamental Shift in Power and Resources**

Quality funding is essential, but it must be accompanied by a fundamental transformation in how power, resources and decision-making authority are shared within humanitarian partnerships. For most local and national civil society organisations, access to international humanitarian funding continues to depend on intermediaries, including international NGOs, UN agencies and, increasingly, locally led pooled funds. Too often, these relationships remain characterised by unequal power dynamics, with intermediaries retaining control over resources, privileged access to donors and disproportionate influence over programme design and institutional decisions.

Genuinely equitable partnerships require more than consultation or improved partnership practices. They require a meaningful redistribution of power and resources. Without addressing these underlying structural inequalities, efforts to promote co-ownership risk reinforcing existing power imbalances rather than transforming them. Partnerships must instead be grounded in complementarity, mutual trust, transparency, shared accountability, equitable risk sharing, joint design and decision-making, and reciprocal capacity strengthening. Above all, they must enable local and national actors to lead or co-lead humanitarian responses, rather than remain primarily implementers of programmes controlled by others.

Charter for Change Signatories and Endorsers have played leading roles in advancing these issues within the Grand Bargain, particularly through efforts to strengthen intermediary accountability. These include improving the tracking and transparency of funding passed through to local actors, encouraging donors to embed clear requirements for equitable partnerships in their grant agreements, and supporting local and national organisations to assume intermediary roles themselves, including through locally led funding mechanisms.

These efforts must be sustained and strengthened in the Grand Bargain's next phase. The objective should be to progressively transform intermediary relationships and arrangements so that local and national actors exercise greater control over funding, partnerships and humanitarian decision-making. Ultimately, equitable partnerships should be measured by the extent to which they redistribute power and resources, strengthen local leadership and deliver better outcomes for crisis-affected communities.

- **Country-Level Leadership Is Essential: Accelerate, Empower and Resource National Reference Groups**

One of the most important lessons from a decade of Charter for Change and Grand Bargain commitments is that meaningful reform requires much stronger connections between global policies and country-level practices. Too often, commitments made at headquarters remain disconnected from how donors, UN agencies and international NGOs allocate resources, develop strategies and engage with local actors on the ground. The Grand Bargain's NRGs offer a critical opportunity to bridge this gap, bringing together local and national organisations and international stakeholders to drive reform where it matters most.

We strongly welcome the more central role envisioned for NRGs in the Grand Bargain's next phase. However, their success will depend on much more than encouraging participation. All Grand Bargain Signatories should commit to actively engaging in and supporting NRGs in as many relevant contexts as possible, directly or through designated stakeholder representatives with the authority to influence institutional decisions. At a minimum, NRGs should have clear and sustained links to donor coordination groups, Humanitarian Country Teams, INGO country directors' networks and NGO forums, ensuring that the priorities and concerns raised by local actors reach senior decision-makers and result in concrete action. Equally important, NRGs must have effective channels to global headquarters, where many of the institutional policies and incentives that constrain localisation are determined.

Adequate, predictable and flexible funding for NRGs is essential, not optional. Local and national organisations, including women-led and women's rights organisations, must have the resources and authority to convene stakeholders, set agendas, track commitments and sustain collective advocacy. Funding for these mechanisms should not be controlled or determined exclusively by international intermediaries, reproducing the very power imbalances that NRGs are intended to address. Locally led governance and decision-making over resources must be central to how NRGs are supported.

NRGs should also be empowered to monitor how global commitments translate into country-level funding decisions, partnership practices and institutional reforms; document successful approaches; identify persistent barriers; and secure clear, time-bound responses

from Signatories. Accountability must flow in both directions: from global commitments to country-level implementation, and from country-level experience back to the institutions responsible for changing policies and practices.

A one-size-fits-all model is neither necessary nor desirable. Where effective local actor networks and multi-stakeholder platforms already exist, these should be strengthened rather than duplicated. What matters is ensuring that every humanitarian context has meaningful opportunities for locally led dialogue and collective action with those holding resources and decision-making authority.

Promising examples are already emerging of senior donor, UN and INGO representatives engaging in country-level discussions convened by local actors and following through on the issues raised. The Grand Bargain's next phase must make such engagement the norm rather than the exception, in Congo, Juba, Kyiv and beyond.

- **What's next for Charter for Change?**

The Charter for Change is currently undertaking a process of reflection and strategic reorientation, culminating in our virtual Annual Meeting in December, when we will collectively define our priorities and direction for the decade ahead. We warmly welcome your feedback and suggestions to help shape this process. Please share your thoughts by email at: admin@charter4change.org creating a sustained pathway for local actors to drive change from Geneva to Goma, Yan