**Grand Bargain Series (1/4)   
  
Where are the Women?**

**Gender, Localisation and the Grand Bargain**







“Where are the Women? Gender, Localisation and the Grand Bargain”

*This is the first in a series of seminars and round table discussions organised in collaboration with ActionAid, Dochas, Irish Red Cross and Trócaire. The aim of the series is to raise awareness of key Grand Bargain work streams among humanitarian and development practitioners, the academic community in Ireland and Irish Aid. The discussions will examine some of the key issues arising from the development of the Grand Bargain, following the World Humanitarian Summit of 2016. The next seminar will take place on 27th October and the theme will explore further two work streams of the Grand Bargain: Strengthening Engagement between Humanitarian and Development Actors and Multiyear Planning and Funding.*

Localisation and the Grand Bargain

Since the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, the desire to reframe the understanding of local people and their involvement in development and humanitarian strategies is increasingly prevalent amongst International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs). This is more so now that local populations (receivers of development aid) are rejecting INGOs’ decisions to implement programmes reflecting their own perception of what the locals need. In this context, there are increased talks about shifting the power and giving more control to the locals. However, if there is a push for localisation, it seems that questions of gender and the place of women have largely been overlooked, as is the case in the commitments of the Grand Bargain. For example:

*“The Grand Bargain commits donors and aid organizations to providing 25 per cent of global humanitarian funding to local and national responders by 2020, along with more un-earmarked money, and increased multi-year funding to ensure greater predictability and continuity in humanitarian response”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

ActionAid is committed to increasing partnerships with women led Local NGOs to support women in achieving their right to self-determination. The reasoning behind this ambition is that the local population (men and women) possess the necessary contextual knowledge that best enable them to define what their needs are and what actions need to be taken in times of humanitarian response. Moreover, they are on the ground long before the intervention of any INGO and will remain there long after international actors leave. Therefore it is essential that they design and control pilot programmes or response strategies to ensure that these are sustainable. However, the current trend is for international organisations and INGOs to arrive after a disaster and decide their own strategies, different to the ones already being implemented by the locals, who are pushed aside. Funding in this context is very unequal and because the local and national NGOs have limited resources, their voices are not being heard[[2]](#footnote-2). Indeed, 80% of humanitarian funding managed by the United Nations (UN), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other INGOs. The remaining 20% goes to Local and National NGOs and an even smaller percentage to women led organisations. This is not only unfair but highly ineffective. This is why there is a need to provide local populations with the necessary tools and resources so they can advocate for what they want and be heard at government level without the involvement of INGOs.

What can be done to make sure that women are included?

When designing and implementing pilot programmes under the Grand Bargain we need to make sure that local women are in decision making positions and that their voices are reflected in the interventions. In order to achieve this, the purpose of long term investments has to change and INGOs must be willing to take risks by trying new methods. In addition, women led NGOs need to receive more support. It means linking them to funding opportunities as well as including them in international discussions where they have decision making power. On this note, a change also needs to occur in INGOs leadership roles to achieve gender parity by 2020 as women are currently underrepresented.

Cooperation with governments is also essential to successfully bring about these ambitions. They are the ones who hold the most significant resources (helicopters, planes, boats, military…) and have the ability to deploy rapidly and massively on the ground. Moreover, they are of prime importance for INGOs when it comes to partnership and funding.

In its second National Action Plan (2015-2018) the government of Ireland aims to protect women and girls in humanitarian crises through increasing funding provided for the protection of women and girls in emergencies. It is also implementing the *One World, One Future* commitments to empower women in fragile and humanitarian contexts through building capacity of local Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) including women’s organisations. More specifically, Irish Aid is committed to promoting good humanitarian donorship by ensuring their implementing partners involve beneficiaries in all steps of humanitarian response.

Little has changed in practice since the World Humanitarian Summit in May2016. In order to give local populations and specifically women more power in decision-making, it is necessary to make aid more efficient, rapid and effective. For this, better and smarter partnerships are needed. It doesn’t mean that largescale responses aren’t necessary but they need to be more balanced. Another key concept that needs to be taken into consideration when framing development and humanitarian responses is the concept of norms. A recurrent theme within academic debate is that, too often, development aid tends to impose western culture to non-western contexts.

It is also important to remember that basic needs aren’t always material but can also be psychological and spiritual; therefore it is essential to take into consideration the importance of religious practices when designing interventions. INGOs need to better engage with local religious groups from all denominations who are sometimes the only support system for women victims of GBV.

Overview of the table discussions:

Question for Discussion: As part of the Grand Bargain pilot projects & field initiatives, how do we hand over power to ensure local women have the opportunity to take leadership in emergency response?

* To ensure an increase in women’s leadership roles as well as their participation in decision making processes, INGOs need to select partners who are feminist focused
* We should not dictate to women or organisations – we should stand aside and let them take the lead
* Women led partner organisations in Disaster Risk Reduction can help us to better identify with the humanitarian-development nexus; would this be better identified as the development-humanitarian nexus?
* Locally designed research to support women led emergency preparedness and response could be very useful if concrete recommendations and pilot projects emerge
* Are we truly ready to hand over power as international actors? Currently we have complete technical control of programmes and high levels of visibility (branding) in the implementation areas
* We need to address existing social norms and men as ‘blockers’- men in general don’t want to be addressed by women as equals or accept women’s leadership in their communities. We can work with local grassroots leaders and actors (eg faith leaders, youth) and other mediators in advance to address this
* We need to work closely with women and get them to build their needs into programmes- not assume on their behalf
* Additional resources and financing are needed if we want to identify new partners
* When choosing partners, it is beneficial to identify and train the women who are most capable of representing the local population and who hold substantial contextual knowledge. However, when doing so, INGOs need to make sure that these women are not from ‘elite’ groups as they could lose in legitimacy if not representative of the communities
* Support systems have to be put in place for women leaders as they are at higher risk of GBV when they challenge the power balance of men over women
* Financing needs to be increased to allow more human resources and better salaries for local aid workers
* Cultural aspects of the society need to be respected. It is important to understand cultural differences and not to impose western customs in a context where they don’t belong. This also means remembering that, in a patriarchal context, handing over power to local women cannot be achieved if men and boys are left out of the process. The dynamics of power will need to be addressed first to allow for a sustainable change of mind-set within the local context.
* Another challenge will be to make sure that the burden on women won’t be increased due their involvement

1. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-hosted-iasc [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Still, they are the ones who face greater risks. In 2014, 90% of humanitarian workers killed on the field were locals. In 2015, they were 13 times more locals killed than international workers in the countries of Somalia and Afghanistan; seven times more at the global level. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)