

Harmonizing Reporting Pilot

Final Review

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REPORT
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This review report details the results of the ‘Harmonizing Reporting Pilot’ and the experience of donors and partners with the harmonized reporting template, also called ‘8+3 template’. Piloting the harmonized reporting template for the last two years showed that most users view the new template as a significant improvement over existing donor templates, because it simplifies and standardizes the narrative reporting process considerably. As such, the new harmonized reporting template is an important building block in achieving the Grand Bargain commitment to “simplify and harmonize reporting requirements.”



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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the results of a two-year trial of the harmonized reporting template, also called the ‘8+3 template’, which a group of humanitarian actors have jointly undertaken for the past two years.

Developed in 2017 by the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi), the harmonized reporting template is based on the most common questions to which humanitarian donors require answers in narrative progress and final reports. The intention of the template is to simplify the reporting process by standardizing questions and instructions while giving donors flexibility in selecting the questions that are most relevant to their information needs. The template features a section on basic information, eight core questions relevant to most donors, and six additional questions only relevant to some donors. When using the template, donors should not ask more than the eight core questions and only up to three of the six additional ones, hence the name ‘8+3 template’.

The harmonizing reporting pilot to test the new 8+3 template began on June 1, 2017 in Iraq, Myanmar and Somalia and ended on May 31, 2019. At the beginning of the pilot, 7 bilateral donors, 4 United Nations agencies, and 24 partners declared their willingness to test the 8+3 template and join the pilot. Two more donors joined the pilot at a later stage.

Partners and Donors See Clear Benefits in Using the Harmonized Reporting Template

Based on the feedback collected through interviews and questionnaires, partners particularly value three aspects of the harmonized reporting template: its ease of use, its focus on impact, and how harmonized reporting advances good practices in project implementation. The template simplifies the reporting process by using simple language in the questions and giving clear instructions on the information and level of detail users should provide for each question. All interviewees, except for one, who used the new reporting template rated it better than the templates it replaced. With only one exception, all interviewees who have used the new template do not want their donors to go back to their previous reporting formats. Importantly, the one partner critical of the template mentioned unfamiliarity with the template and not deficiencies of the template as the main reason for his opinion. Additionally, the available feedback from partners also highlights the harmonization benefits of the 8+3 template: a much more predictable reporting process, easier capacity-building due to far fewer specialized trainings, and improved internal learning because reports can be analyzed systematically.

Among donors, the 8+3 template is also largely seen as an improvement over previous reporting practices. For most donors, the harmonized reporting template meets their different reporting needs, provides additional useful information that may not have been requested previously, enforces clarity and well-organized answers, and allows for a more systematic analysis of information across projects. For 9 out of

the 11 donors who completed the donor survey, the overall assessment of the template is positive, and 6 out of 11 find that the quality of the reports they receive from their partners has improved. Some donors also see tangible benefits, such as quicker turnovers and fewer requests for additional information. The fact that UNHCR, OCHA, France, Germany, and the US State Department (BPRM) will either continue or start using the harmonized reporting template globally demonstrates that a significant number of donors appreciate its practical merits.

Overall, most users see the harmonized reporting template as a significant improvement over existing donor templates and capable of simplifying and standardizing the narrative reporting process considerably. As such, the new harmonized reporting template is an important building block in achieving the Grand Bargain commitment to “simplify and harmonize reporting requirements.”

The Harmonized Reporting Template Can Be Further Improved

While most of the donors and partners who provided feedback in writing or in interviews explained that nothing should be changed or added to the template in its current form, others suggested ways in which the 8+3 template can be further improved. First, the template requires improvements around consistent language in a few areas, and additional optional questions also seem sensible. Second, some partners struggled to find answers to individual questions, although this seems linked less to the questions themselves and more to the issue of when in the project cycle certain questions are asked. Finally, many interviewees felt that communication around the template was limited and ought to be improved.

Moving the Template from Idea to Global Standard

While most donors and partners clearly appreciate the new simplified template, realizing its full potential depends on four conditions. First, those donors who took part in the pilot should now use it across their entire humanitarian portfolio. Second, more donors – particularly larger donors who did not participate in the pilot – should start using the 8+3 template. Third, partners should advocate much more forcefully for its use. Fourth, partners should also begin introducing the template internally – for instance, when they cooperate with other (local) partners. In essence, the signatories of the Grand Bargain as well as other influential actors within the humanitarian system should work individually as well as jointly toward moving the template from an idea to a global standard.

Action Points

To capture the benefits of the harmonized reporting template and make good on the Grand Bargain commitment to “simplify and harmonize reporting requirements,” the co-convenors, donors, and partners should address the following action points:

- » **Action point 1:** Within the next 3 to 6 months, donors – particularly those with substantive humanitarian portfolios – should take an organization-wide decision on using the 8+3 template. Given the positive feedback on the template, donors should ideally either introduce or scale up their use of the harmonized reporting template. This will ensure that the momentum the pilot created is not lost.
- » **Action point 2:** Bilateral donors should assess whether the reporting they request from existing pooled funds can be switched to the harmonizing reporting template. When defining reporting criteria for future pooled funds, they should ideally take the harmonized reporting template as a starting point.
- » **Action point 3:** Partners, in particular INGOs, who sub-contact extensively should commit to reducing their partners’ reporting workload. Ideally, the harmonized reporting template serves as a basis for internal monitoring and reporting as well.
- » **Action point 4:** NGO networks, both those working internationally and those working only at a national level, should actively engage with donors within their sphere of influence to advocate on behalf of their members for wider uptake and consistent use of the harmonized reporting template.
- » **Action point 5:** The work stream co-convenors should address the most pressing shortcomings of the harmonized reporting template immediately and engage with donors about their information needs to determine whether additional optional questions may be necessary. This should include developing options to ensure continued guardianship over the harmonized reporting template and make it future-proof.
- » **Action point 6:** As a follow-up to the pilot, the co-convenors of the work stream should invest further time and resources in increasing knowledge among donors on the good reporting practices that have already been developed. This includes presentations at Good Humanitarian Donorship meetings or in other fora where the main stakeholders are present.
- » **Action point 7:** The pilot participants and co-convenors should actively improve their communication around the template, including through repeated messages to partners on their (future) use of the harmonized reporting template and their rationale for changing reporting requirements. An online repository of 8+3 documents alongside basic information would help support such communication.
- » **Action point 8:** Donors should carefully evaluate and seek to reduce the frequency with which they request reports. Significant gains in reducing the reporting burden can be expected as a result.
- » **Action point 9:** Donors and partners should actively seek further ways to fulfill the additional commitments of Grand Bargain work stream nine, beyond implementing the harmonized reporting template.

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List of Acronyms

AAP	Accountability to affected populations
ACF	Action Against Hunger (Action contre la Faim)
ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
BPRM	Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
CBPF	Country-Based Pooled Fund
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
DFID	Department for International Development
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DRK	Deutsches Rotes Kreuz
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GPPi	Global Public Policy Institute
HIAS	Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society-Kenya
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International non-governmental organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MDM	Médecins du Monde
NCKK	National Council of Churches of Kenya
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OFDA	Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance
RCK	Refugee Consortium of Kenya
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WS	Work stream

Introduction

This report summarizes the results of a two-year trial of the harmonized reporting template, also called the ‘8+3 template’.¹ A group of humanitarian actors have jointly undertaken the pilot over the past two years, addressing the Grand Bargain commitment to “simplify and harmonize reporting requirements by the end of 2018 by reducing its volume, jointly deciding on common terminology, identifying core requirements and developing a common report structure.”

Piloting the 8+3 template took place in Iraq, Myanmar, and Somalia between June 2017 and May 2019, and a mid-term review providing an initial assessment of the template and the pilot at the halfway mark is available in addition to this final assessment. Both reports – the earlier mid-term review as well as this final review – should be read in conjunction.

Developing the Harmonized Reporting Template (‘8+3 Template’)

At the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016, humanitarian actors committed to the Grand Bargain, a sector-wide reform intended to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action. *The Grand Bargain – A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need* specified ten areas in which donors and partners should cooperate to improve the way humanitarian assistance is planned and delivered. One area – or “work stream” – among those ten is to simplify and harmonize donor reporting. Germany and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) are acting as so-called “co-conveners” of this work stream.²

Following up on Grand Bargain commitment 9.1 to simplify and harmonize donor reporting, in 2016 the German Federal Foreign Office commissioned the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) to develop a standardized reporting template that simplifies narrative reporting.³ Based on an analysis of 21 reporting templates from 19 donors, GPPi synthesized donors’ information needs, standardized the questions donors commonly ask in their narrative reports, and subsequently drafted a harmonized reporting template. The harmonization of financial reporting is not

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- 1 The terms ‘harmonized reporting template’ and ‘8+3 template’ are used interchangeably in this review.
 - 2 Each Grand Bargain work stream is led (‘co-convened’) by one donor government representative and one humanitarian agency or organization to facilitate change and to ensure commitments are upheld.
 - 3 The work stream focused primarily on commitment 9.1 since it was seen by the co-conveners and signatories as central and manageable for achieving collective progress on simplifying and harmonizing reporting. Activities towards achieving commitments 9.2 (“invest in technology and reporting systems to enable better access to information”) and commitment 9.3 (“enhance the quality of reporting to better capture results, enable learning and increase the efficiency of reporting”) were not part of the pilot.

part of this template. The simplification and harmonization of financial reporting currently falls under work stream four (“Reduce duplication and management costs with periodic functional reviews”), led by Japan and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Reflecting the most common questions to which humanitarian donors require answers in mid-term and final project reports, the harmonized reporting template features a section on basic information, eight core questions relevant to most donors, and six additional questions that are only relevant to some donors (see Table 1).

Table 1: The Questions Featured in the 8+3 Template

Section 1: Basic Information	Section 2: Core Questions	Section 3: Additional Questions
Name of partner; project number ; reporting period; budget; choice of assistance modality or mix and reasoning; etc.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overall Performance 2. Changes & Amendments 3. Measuring Results 4. Affected Persons 5. Participation & AAP 6. Risk Management 7. Exit Strategy & Sustainability 8. Lessons Learned 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Value for Money & Cost Effectiveness 2. Visibility 3. Co-Ordination 4. Implementing Partners 5. Activities or Steps Toward Implementation 6. Environment

Since the 8+3 template is designed as a modular template, donors have flexibility in selecting both the questions that are most relevant to their information needs and the overall number of questions. Yet to keep information requests manageable, donors should not ask more than the eight core questions and only up to three of the six additional ones. The harmonized reporting template is therefore also known as the ‘8+3 template’. Asking fewer than 8+3 questions is always possible and is also recommended for progress reports. Even a reporting template with only a single question would be in line with the harmonized reporting template. In addition to control over the number (and order) of questions, donors also have command over the level of detail they request for each of the questions as well as the frequency with which they request reports. While the template suggests an appropriate answer length for some questions, donors are free to determine these aspects themselves. To establish good practices, an additional 8+3 guidance, developed in early 2019 from the reporting experience of those taking part in the pilot, nevertheless makes recommendations on report length, question choice, and frequency, among other aspects.

Piloting the 8+3 Template

Alongside the development of the harmonized reporting template between late 2016 and early 2017, Germany, ICVA, and Grand Bargain signatories discussed the development of a joint pilot to test the common template approach. Following agreement between these parties, the Harmonizing Reporting Pilot began on

June 1, 2017 in Iraq, Myanmar, and Somalia and ended on May 31, 2019.⁴ At the beginning of the pilot, 7 bilateral donors, 4 United Nations (UN) agencies, and 24 partners declared their willingness to test the 8+3 template and participate in the pilot (see Table 2).

Table 2: Pilot Participants





Donors	Governments	UN Agencies
	Canada Germany France (joined in 2018) Italy Norway Switzerland Sweden United Kingdom	ILO (joined in 2018) OCHA UNHCR UNICEF WFP
Partners	Non-Governmental Organizations	UN Agencies
	Action Against Hunger Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development CARE Deutsche Welthungerhilfe Danish Refugee Council Handicap International INTERSOS International Rescue Committee Johanniter International Lutheran World Federation Médecins du Monde Norwegian People's Aid Norwegian Refugee Council Oxfam Save the Children World Vision	FAO ILO IOM UNFPA UNHCR UNICEF WFP WHO

‘Joining’ the pilot refers to a formal commitment, made on behalf of the organization, to issue an 8+3 template for a select number of projects (which designates them as ‘donors’) or to report to funders using such a template (which designates them as ‘partners’). In some instances, a pilot participant may be both a donor and a partner at the same time. This is the case if an organization partners with or sub-contracts local organizations to implement projects on their behalf while at the same time receiving funds from bilateral or multilateral donors. Related to this, it is important to highlight that many more partners than those who formally committed to the pilot were using the 8+3 template during this period. In particular, local partners or sub-contractors working for (I)NGOs or UN agencies have used the template extensively, even if they are not listed in Table 2 above. Once they committed to using the 8+3 template, donors were tasked to create their respective reporting templates based on the original harmonized reporting template and to forward their template to their partners and

⁴ Prior to this, the German Federal Foreign Office and ICVA, the co-conveners of the Grand Bargain Reporting work stream, engaged with donors and partners to establish the conditions for piloting the 8+3 template.

to the different projects they singled out for reporting using the new template. Donors were free to decide to what extent they wanted to participate in the pilot. For instance, it was possible for a donor to exclude the use of the template in one or two of the pilot countries, or not to use the template with specific partners or projects (Table 3). Much like the template, the pilot was designed to be flexible to increase participation. Yet at times this led to a very narrow use by some donors and limited the overall number of cases in which the template was used. One donor who originally committed to the pilot did not follow through on its commitment.

Table 3: Donors Issuing an 8+3 Template Across the Pilot Countries and Globally

	Iraq	Myanmar	Somalia	Globally
Pilot Countries				
Donors	Canada France Germany Italy Norway Sweden Switzerland OCHA UNHCR WFP	France Germany Italy Norway Sweden UK OCHA UNHCR WFP	France Germany Italy Norway Sweden OCHA UNHCR WFP	France OCHA UNHCR US*

*outside of the pilot

During the course of the pilot, France and the International Labor Organization (ILO) joined the pilot as donors. Moreover, UNHCR, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and France decided to use their new reporting template not only in the three pilot countries, but also globally. France thereby introduced a French translation of the template. UNHCR requests reporting based on the 8+3 template for all of its partnership agreements, while OCHA introduced their version of the 8+3 template across all Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) as well as all projects financed by the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Outside of the pilot, the US State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) adopted a template based on the harmonized reporting template but with slight changes to meet their information needs. PRM uses this template globally across all their grants to NGOs. These decisions greatly extended the use of the new template and increased the amount of feedback on it, which is reflected in the analysis.

Supporting the Use of the 8+3 Template Throughout the Pilot

In addition to bilateral donors and UN agencies issuing their respective version of the harmonized reporting template to partners, the co-conveners and GPPi actively supported donors and partners in their use of the new template and ensured that the pilot proceeded as planned.⁵

Following the mid-term review of the pilot (completed in July 2018) and based on its recommendations, the co-conveners tasked GPPi with a revision of the template as well as the development of additional guidance and information materials. GPPi further simplified the language of the 8+3 template to make it more accessible for non-native English speakers. While users at the mid-point of the pilot already valued the simple language of the 8+3 template, the extra editing sought to remove any remaining complicated language from the template. Beyond improved wording, the revised template now also includes an additional request for information on the assistance modality. Included in the ‘basic information’ section, this additional question asks partners to estimate the value of cash, vouchers, and/or in-kind assistance and to provide a brief explanation of why this modality or mix of modalities was chosen. This intends to better capture the proportion of different assistance modalities as well as to help track cash projects across a donor’s aid portfolio.

Beyond these modifications to the template, GPPi further drafted a background note to provide potential users of the 8+3 template with basic information on the template as well as a guidance informing donors about good practices in using the harmonized reporting template. The rationale for additional guidance was that donors at times deviated from intended practices, which previously were not explicitly written down. Both the background note and the guidance were completed between late 2018 and early 2019 and shared with donors and partners for feedback and refinement. A download link to access these documents can be found in Annex I.

In addition to this, ICVA facilitated a community of practice on project reporting throughout the pilot to work with practitioners able and willing to change reporting practices in their own organizations and to inform them about good practices as well as about the pilot and the harmonized reporting template. This included, among others, a series of meetings with different stakeholders in Somalia, briefings in Myanmar as well as one presentation in Jordan (the latter together with GPPi). Email updates sent to those who committed to the pilot further sought to ensure that relevant information on the pilot and the template was shared.

Reviewing the 8+3 Template and Its Pilot

The evidence as well as the conclusions presented in this review are based on extensive in-person or telephone discussions with pilot participants and other experts on reporting, a systematic analysis of standardized feedback on the 8+3 template, and a survey of donors that have issued the 8+3 template, which was conducted in spring 2019.

⁵ Information sharing with other work streams was also intended to integrate their evolving agenda into work stream 9 as much as possible. Insights from the cash work stream, for instance, informed the added segment on assistance modalities, which is now included in the 8+3 template. All in all, however, the pilot remained a fairly stand-alone project.

Methodology



First, the author conducted in total more than 70 **semi-structured interviews** during visits to Jordan and Iraq (March 31 to April 7, 2019), Kenya (April 18 to 24, 2018; April 29 to May 3, 2019), and Myanmar (April 29 to May 5, 2018; May 19 to May 26, 2019), as well by telephone and/or Skype.⁶ Interviewees included a broad range of stakeholders, selected based on their exposure to the 8+3 template, their close involvement in the pilot as a donor or partner, or because of their expert knowledge on humanitarian reporting. The overwhelming number of interviewees came from international NGOs, which limits the input from local or national partners in this type of data collection.



Second, GPPi analyzed the **written feedback** provided by pilot participants as part of their reporting using the 8+3 template. Partners participating in the pilot were asked to answer four evaluation questions about the template at the end of each report. These questions were about (a) the time it took to complete the report, (b) whether the partner submitted reporting based on the common template to other donors, (c) whether the questions were suitable, and (d) whether additional information beyond the report was requested. The author analyzed the answers to these questions and aggregated the results to allow for descriptive statistics on the feedback provided by the partners. In total, 183 reports that included answers to these questions were received for the mid-term review, and an additional 24 reports with feedback on the template are included in the final assessment. Here, feedback from local partners is more strongly represented than that from international NGOs.



Third, in May 2019 GPPi **surveyed** bilateral donors and UN agencies that committed to the pilot to assess in detail their views on both the pilot and the template itself. The survey included, among others, questions on changes in report quality as a result of the new harmonized template and whether or not donors plan to continue using the new template in the future. Out of the 13 donors who had issued a harmonized reporting template and actively participated in the pilot, 11 answered (at times partially) the survey questions or provided related information by email.

Limitations

Despite the extensive data collected and analyzed for this review, the final assessment of the harmonizing reporting pilot and of the 8+3 template nevertheless has limitations.

- First, partners' views on the template, as drawn from the feedback questionnaire, were at times of limited value, as they either did not answer the questions or did so in a way that left little room for analysis.
- Second, standardized benchmarks for otherwise highly subjective aspects – such as the “quality of reporting” or the “time spent on preparing reports” – do not

⁶ Please see Annex I for a complete list of individuals consulted for this final review.

exist, which makes it difficult to determine precisely any improvements in report quality or accurate time-savings brought about by the harmonized reporting template. In contrast to the mid-term review of the pilot, the final review avoids any such statements and opts for more general conclusions in these areas.

- Third, fewer cases materialized than initially expected in which partners received the harmonized reporting template from a larger number (> 3) of donors. Despite two years of piloting, these cases are still fairly limited, which makes it difficult to determine with confidence the intended harmonization effect. Despite these limitations, the extent of feedback captured in interviews, as well as the general direction of the views users have on the template, make it possible to generate enough validity to draw initial conclusions on the harmonization effect of the template.

Finally, distinct from the limitations discussed above, the assessment of the pilot and of the template is not an independent evaluation. GPPi was closely involved in the design of the template, supported and advised the co-conveners throughout the pilot, drafted additional information materials as well as a guidance, and has also conducted this final review as well as the previous mid-term review. Nevertheless, the author of this review was not involved in the initial development of the 8+3 template, data was extensively triangulated, and the review itself was reviewed by the co-conveners of the work stream to identify and mitigate any potential biases.

Feedback on the 8+3 Template

The central question at the end of the pilot is whether the desired benefits of simplification and harmonization have been achieved. Based on the feedback collected (and discussed in more detail below), the answers are clear:

- Partners strongly value the simplification and predictability that the 8+3 template offers for the reporting process.
- With only one exception, all the interviewees who used the new reporting template rated it better than the templates it replaced.
- With only one exception, all the interviewees who have used the new template prefer it over the previous reporting formats used.⁷
- Among donors, 9 out of 11 who completed the donor survey assessed the template positively overall. Two donors are neutral in their assessment and do not see any improvements at this point. Importantly, none of the donors using the template says that the harmonized reporting template is unsuitable for use or that the report quality has decreased.

Overall, the harmonized reporting template is seen by most users as a significant improvement over existing donor templates.

Reach of the Harmonized Reporting Template

Over the past two years, the 8+3 template reached a sizeable number of partners – from local organizations and NGOs to UN agencies. As of May 28, 2019, donors have forwarded 207 reports in total, with written feedback on the template from projects included in the pilot. 183 reports with feedback were received for the previous mid-term review, and an additional 24 reports with feedback for the final review. The 207 reports with feedback are spread fairly equally across the three pilot countries (see Figure 1 on the next page) and cover projects funded by Canada, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, OCHA, and UNHCR (Figure 2).

The figures on the number of reports with feedback received give a rough indication of the scope of the pilot, which unfortunately cannot be precisely determined. Whether the project reports forwarded for the review represent all the project reports

⁷ The organization with the differing opinion on the harmonized reporting template also explained that their critical view of the template is a consequence of using it for the first time and not being familiar with the template. They also see the benefits of a harmonized reporting template used by multiple donors.

donors actually received from partners cannot be verified. It is possible that the number of projects using the 8+3 template is actually higher. Moreover, a number of reports were received without feedback and are not featured in the statistics above. As such, the figures above represent the minimum scope of the pilot and the reach of the 8+3 template.

Figure 1: Distribution of Reports with Feedback Across Pilot Countries

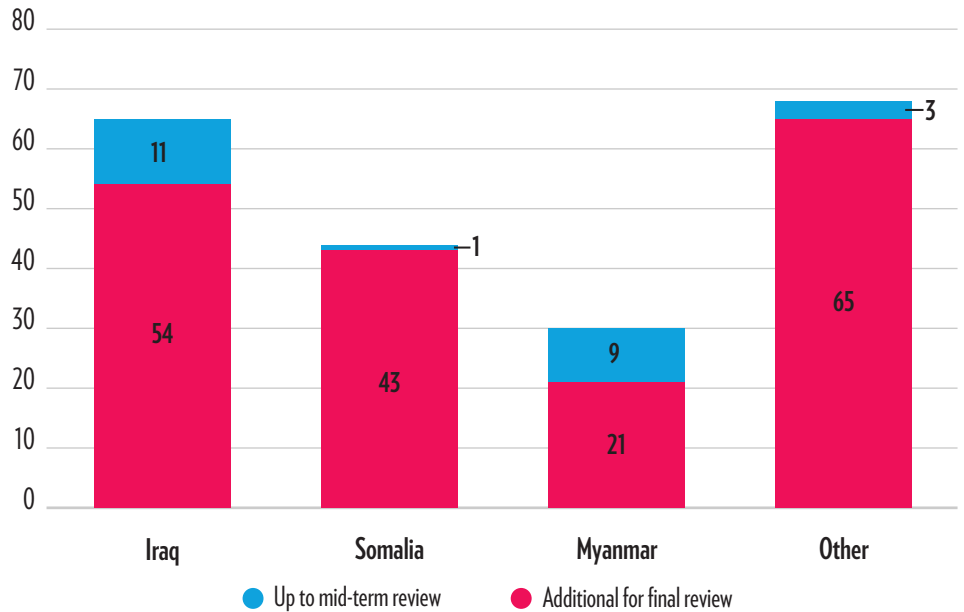
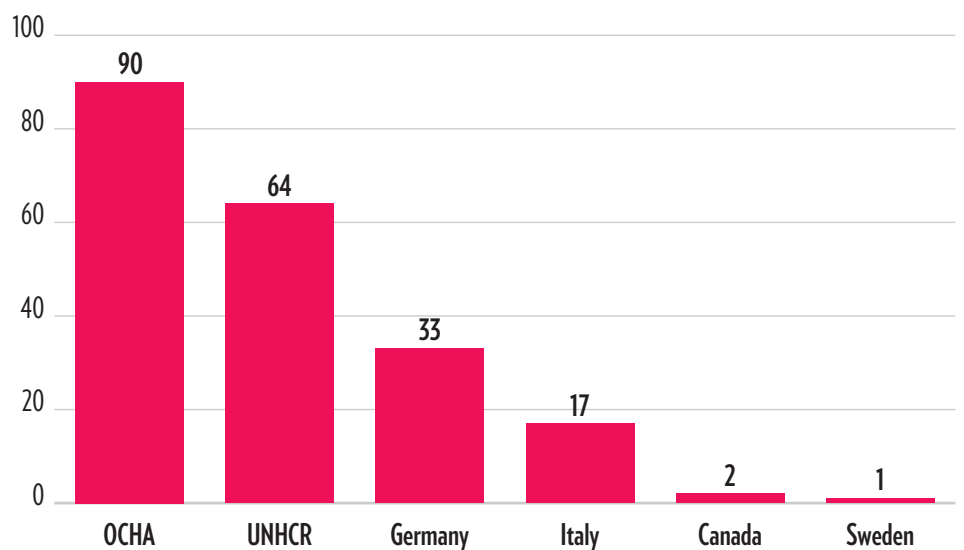


Figure 2: Distribution of Reports with Feedback Across Donors



Partners Highly Value the New Harmonized Reporting Template

The written feedback partners provided was systematically analyzed and, together with information drawn from interviews, provides a detailed and robust picture of the harmonized reporting template, showing that partners value it highly. Partners stand to benefit most from harmonized reporting, and the following statement from a partner is indicative of the broad sentiments regarding the 8+3 template: “It is a big step forward to have the [8+3] template.” Most partner representatives interviewed throughout the pilot gave a similar answer. Most were very positive in their general assessment of the template, as statements taken from other interviews show:

“It is a very reasonable template.”

“It is very beneficial for us to use the template.”

“Using the [8+3] template certainly makes reporting easier.”

“I very much like the [8+3] template and I wish all donors would use it.”

“By far, [the 8+3 template] is the best template I have ever worked with.”

Importantly, this is not a biased representation of answers. None of the partners interviewed said that the 8+3 template is of poor quality or in any way unsuitable to replace existing donor templates.⁸ To the contrary, partners particularly value three aspects: its ease of use, the focus on impact, and how harmonized reporting advances good practices in project implementation. Additionally, time savings are also mentioned as benefits, though less consistently (see Table 4 on the next page).



Ease of use: Beyond the general view that the 8+3 template is highly suitable for reporting, a key benefit of the 8+3 template is its ease of use and its simplification of reporting. In this regard, the features partners valued – as consistently pointed out in interviews – include its simplicity (“lighter and thus less overwhelming”; “questions are more direct”), the comprehensibility of the questions and instructions (“staff members have different ways/styles of reporting and the standardized format helps internally to prepare reports because it also ‘harmonizes’ the way reports are drafted”; “it helps people with little reporting experience to draft reports”), and the structured way in which information is requested (“clear expectations are set what information is required when”; “the order of the fields is very logical”). Overall, the benefits of the template materialize at different levels of the report-writing process: field staff writing up first drafts value the simple language of the questions and the clear instructions, while those collating and editing reports at the country offices value the more structured and coherent writing they receive from their colleagues in the field. These valued features (and their consequences) were sometimes absent from the previous reporting templates donors had provided, which is why reporting is often viewed as cumbersome.

⁸ These views from interviewees are backed up by the written feedback collected through the questionnaire at the end of the template.

Table 4: Features of the 8+3 Template that Are Valued by Partners

Valued Features		Achieved By
Ease of use	Simplicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction of questions • Possibility to select number of questions depending on information needs • Suggestions on answer length for selected questions
	Comprehensibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly formulated questions • Detailed and easy-to-understand instructions for each question • Easier language tailored to non-native English speakers
	Organized structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No overlapping sections • No repetitions • Logical question order
	Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant for some donors: reports can be now prepared and submitted in English
Focus on impact		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General wording of the questions and instructions move away from activities towards outcome and impact • Requesting information of substance • Q1: Overall Performance as a summary of the project/program • Q8: Lessons Learned
Advancing good practices		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence of explicit questions and unambiguous instructions • Q4: Affected Persons • Q5: Participation & AAP



Focus on impact: While simplicity, ease of use, and organized structure are important benefits of the 8+3 template, many partners also highly value its focus on impact. For many partners, reporting is not only an exercise in demonstrating progress on activities or formally concluding a project or program; reporting is also often seen as the only way to demonstrate the value, effectiveness, and importance of a project to a donor. Internally, reporting is an important way to help staff improve the quality of programming and achieve outcomes and impact because it forces a reflection on these issues. In particular, the wording of the questions and instructions moves away from describing activities toward reflecting on outcomes and impact. Moreover, a number of questions – such as those on ‘Overall Performance’ (Q1), ‘Lessons Learned’ (Q8), or ‘Participation & AAP’ (Q5) – explicitly make this link and give the report a focus that many other donor templates do not have. The “questions regarding lessons learned as well as participation of and accountability to the affected population are particularly useful to assess the implementation and/or impact of projects and aid the development of future projects” (UN agency operating in Iraq). Even though many partners appreciate that the 8+3 template has a tendency to request more detailed reporting on impact, some partners nevertheless felt that they lack space to describe their activities. As such, there is a risk of losing important details on the implemented activities, which may be important to some donors.



Advancing good practices: Partners value questions that reflect on current good practices in humanitarian programming. For instance, requesting information on how the needs of vulnerable people were taken into account, breaking down beneficiary numbers to demonstrate sensible targeting, detailing mechanisms to prevent sexual exploitation, and providing detailed information on how the project/program sought to maximize accountability to affected populations are all critical levers that motivate

staff to improve programming. Many partner interviewees who hold leadership positions in their organizations emphasized this as an important effect and secondary benefit of the harmonized reporting template – even though it sometimes requires staff to rethink the way they work and report on projects.



Time savings: Beyond the valued features of the 8+3 template, does its use lead to tangible benefits and “less paper, more aid” (ICVA 2016)? Specifically, does the reporting process now require less time and fewer resources? At this point, it is possible to showcase a number of tangible benefits and tendencies partners have mentioned, but impossible to provide conclusive answers on time savings or reduced bureaucracy.⁹ For the final review, it must suffice to say that some partners interviewed mentioned reduced time spent on reporting as a consequence of the 8+3 template (“the 8+3 templates took staff less time to complete reports – except for one staff member who thought otherwise” – a partner in Myanmar), but the benefit of time savings is not as explicit as the other benefits outlined above. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that a number of answers regarding time spent also point out that staff members needed time to familiarize themselves with the new template. Many people explained that spending more time on the report is a consequence of using it for the first time, and that there is a learning curve, as a partner receiving funding from a UN organization explained:

“The template was rather different, that’s why we needed some time to rethink and to formulate certain sections. For the 2019, it will be much easier to develop the report considering the current year experience.”

Now that the template has been in use longer, some partners did point out that the initial time they spent on reporting has been reduced. As an NGO operating in Iraq and receiving funds from different donors who used the harmonized reporting template explained: “It takes us less time and effort to draft reports.” This pattern confirms the mid-term review’s assumption that it simply takes time to get used to a new template. Finally, those partners who had to translate reports into German or Italian prior to submission mentioned significant time savings now that both the German Federal Foreign Office and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation accept narrative reports in English.

9 The mid-term review of the harmonizing reporting pilot at the half-way mark stated that already “the majority of those who have used a version of the 8+3 template [...] suggest that completing a report based on the template has taken them equal or less time, compared to the same donor’s old reporting format. Specifically, slightly less than one-third of the partners said that using the new 8+3 template has taken them less time compared with the previous formats” (Gaus 2017: 18). These numbers were calculated based on coding the answers to the question of how much time it took to complete the report. Since many of the subsequently received feedback questionnaires covering the same projects do not include updated answers to this question, it is not possible to determine accurate figures at the end of the pilot with certainty. Moreover, the answers given about the time spent on reporting vary quite a bit (e.g., 8 hours or 2–3 weeks), since those who gave answers have very different conceptions of “time spent.” To complicate the analysis further, no comparative benchmark exists to specify what is considered the normal amount of time necessary to write a report. For these reasons, the initial results on the time spent on reporting using the harmonized reporting template should only be seen as indicative.

Donors Are Largely Positive About the Harmonized Reporting Template

While partners stand to benefit most from a system-wide uptake of the harmonized reporting template, donor assessment and feedback are equally important. As a representative from a partner operating in Somalia said, “the harmonized reporting template has to be a template that works for both donors and partners.”

Based on the results of the donor survey as well as interviews with donor representatives, donors also largely view the 8+3 template as an improvement over previous reporting practices. While donors’ views on the template do not entirely point in the same direction as partners’ views, 9 out of the 11 donors who completed the survey assessed the template positively overall. For them, the harmonized reporting template:

- Continues to meet donors’ different reporting needs;
- Provides additional useful information that may not have been requested before;
- Enforces clarity and well-organized answers;
- Allows for more systematic analysis of information across projects.

Two donors are neutral in their assessment. Importantly, none of the donors using the template say that report quality has decreased or that the template is unsuitable for use.



The 8+3 template meets different reporting needs: In interviews, donors highlighted a number of different purposes attached to narrative reporting. Most relevant is the ability to assess whether a project or program reaches its milestones, whether planned activities are implemented, and whether outcomes are achieved. Donors generally wish to receive enough information in reports to fulfill any explicit or implicit domestic or donor accountability requirements. Some donors also use this information for more active project steering – that is, engaging with partners to determine the most efficient and effective project implementation and to define future projects or programs more actively. Judging from donor feedback, the 8+3 template is certainly capable of supporting these different reporting purposes, and at least as capable as the reporting templates or instructions donors previously provided. As one donor put it, “in our view, the template covers the essential issues relevant for grant management in the humanitarian sector.” Another donor with a large grant portfolio sees the template similarly:

“We do not feel like we have lost any key information that we used to receive, and we feel like we are actually getting more reporting in certain areas.”



The 8+3 template provides useful information: Beyond the ability to support different reporting purposes, a number of donors also value the 8+3 template because it provides relevant information that their previous reporting templates did not request. While donors could have added specific questions without waiting for the 8+3 template, they are not always aware of what information may be beneficial or which information other donors value and request. The harmonized reporting template’s question list

lifts that veil. As one UN agency explained, the “question on risk management, which we have not asked explicitly before, gives us very interesting information.” Whether donors receive information that may be useful to them is a direct consequence of the questions asked, of course, but the modular design of the 8+3 template easily allows for adaptation. While the large range of questions to choose from is a clear advantage, donors should nevertheless aim for light reports that contain only the most relevant questions to stay in line with the Grand Bargain commitment to simplified reporting.



The 8+3 template enforces structured reports: Much like partners, donors see the clear and accessible structure as a benefit not in itself, but because it enforces structured reports and produces higher-quality reports. Donors generally find the 8+3 template very structured and easy to use due to the clear guidance provided on how to answer the questions. This translates into report templates that are “lighter and thus less overwhelming” (a UN agency) for partners, which in turn “simplifies communication with partners [since] partners have a good understanding of what we expect under the 8+3 template” (a bilateral donor). Another positive review in this regard comes from a UN agency that found that the harmonized reporting template “allows for comprehensive reporting while being simple and easy to use at the same time.” Furthermore, donors explicitly value the brevity of the reports and the fact that they take less time to review. This is a positive development compared to reports that require too much time to review, either because of their length or because the relevant information is difficult to extract. For these reasons, 6 out of the 11 donors who completed the survey find that the quality of the reports they receive from their partners has improved.¹⁰ The other donors either do not see any qualitative differences compared to their previous format or find it too early to properly assess this. No donor said that report quality had decreased. As a cross-check, partners have not reported an increase in informal reporting as a consequence of using the harmonized reporting template, which indicates that donors are largely content with report quality.



The 8+3 template allows for systematic aggregation and analysis of information: Donors oftentimes aggregate information from individual project reports into larger portfolio summaries. This may be required internally for accountability purposes, or because donors (e.g., UN agencies) who receive funding from bilateral donors must report “upward.” As the feedback on the clear, concise structure of the harmonized reporting template shows, its design allows for systematic aggregation and analysis of information. Information is collected from partners systematically and comparably, which is (at least theoretically) particularly useful for donors who do not provide their partners with detailed reporting instructions and leave report structure and design to the partner’s discretion. Whether this theoretical benefit materializes in practice remains to be seen, but as a UN agency explained:

¹⁰ Another donor did not attribute improvements in the quality of reporting to using the 8+3 template, but rather to efforts in providing trainings for field offices and better guidance/support on reporting. Generally, the precise causal link between the 8+3 template and improved quality may be difficult to trace, due to other intervening factors that cannot be controlled for in this review. Moreover, not all donors provided an answer to the question of whether report quality has changed.

"[W]e will make use of it in our annual report and time will tell if it will make it easier for us to extract information [...] from the different project reports."

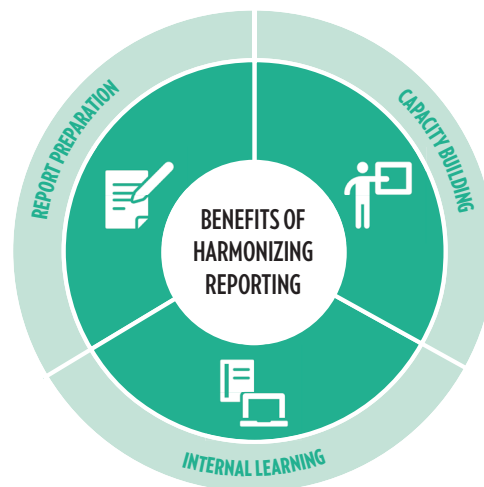
Cognizant of these benefits, many donors explicitly stated that they do not want to return to their previous reporting templates or have already made an internal decision to scale up their use of the 8+3 template. Yet one donor also said it would require much larger international buy-in and usage by other (major) donors before further committing to using the harmonized reporting template.

Effects of Harmonization

Beyond simplifying reporting and creating tangible time savings, harmonized reporting is a core expectation for the 8+3 template. Harmonization is hereby understood as the consequence of a partner only using the 8+3 template when reporting to different donors – in other words, efficiency gains and a reduced reporting burden due to a selection of identical reporting questions used across projects and donors.

Unfortunately, despite two years of testing the 8+3 template, there were only relatively few instances of partners receiving the template from multiple donors simultaneously at country level: only 17 out of 207 partners stated that they also received the template from other donors.¹¹ While that relatively low number impacts the evidence, the feedback available for those cases – as well as the insights drawn from interviews – clearly point in one direction: the use of the 8+3 template by multiple donors is beneficial, and many partners see advantages of harmonization in three areas: when preparing reports, around capacity-building, and for internal learning.

Figure 3: Benefits of Harmonizing Reporting



Report preparation: A straightforward benefit of harmonized reporting is that staff members, particularly frontline staff providing information on reporting, have an easier time collecting and preparing the information for different donors because they know what information is required. One partner operating in Iraq put it plainly: “The 8+3 template helps people with little reporting experience to draft reports.”

¹¹ This is calculated based on the answers received through the feedback questionnaire, which asked whether partners also had to submit reports based on the 8+3 template to other donors.

Interviewees responsible for reviewing draft reports prior to submission to donors also find that the drafts are of better quality, thus requiring less reworking and fewer edits. A grants manager from a partner in Myanmar said:

"I appreciate that report drafts are now more organized. For the most part, the quality of the reports I receive has increased."

Additionally, staff turnover and planned staff leave often interfere with internal report-preparation processes. Staff turnover in particular often calls for repeated trainings in report writing. Harmonized reporting is expected to make a positive impact in that regard as well: less need for specialized knowledge means less reliance on experts and much easier takeover by colleagues (with only minimal training).

Capacity-building: Ensuring compliance with complex reporting requirements often calls for specialized knowledge. Many partners explained that they invest considerable resources in capacity-building activities to train staff, both about reporting in general and about project-specific requirements in particular. As stated by one partner operating in Somalia:

"We have a curriculum on donor report writing and every time we have a grant, we do a kick-off meeting where we explain everything about report writing for this grant."

Given the wide variety of donor reporting requirements, it is at this point not possible to conduct a standard training on reporting. In this regard, the tangible benefits of harmonized reporting include less need for reporting trainings, capacity-building and donor specialists. As an NGO operating in Iraq put it: "Time is better spent on other trainings, for instance providing psycho-social support." In addition, some partners have argued that harmonizing reporting empowers local organizations and would greatly support the localization agenda – primarily as a result of 8+3 template's ease of use, but also because knowledge about one donor's reporting requirements could be easily applied to all other donors as well if all donors used the same template. As one partner operating in Iraq put it:

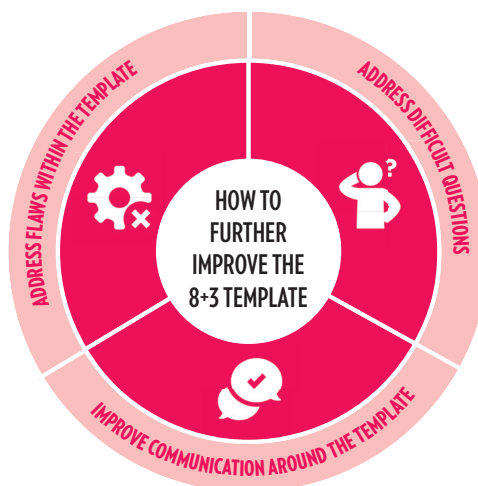
"If donors are serious about localization, they must simplify reporting because local partners cannot provide quality reporting the way it is currently demanded by most donors. It is too complicated."

Internal learning: A final point mentioned by some partners was the (potential) benefit of greater internal learning when the 8+3 template is used by multiple donors. Essentially, standardized reporting questions across projects and donors make it much easier for organizations to monitor and compare assessments – on lessons learned, risk, coordination, and other highly contextual aspects – in a systematic way. Data analysis requires comparable data that can be easily extracted, and the 8+3 template facilitates this – which is why some partners see this as an additional benefit of harmonized reporting. However, none of the interviewees mentioned having done such cross-project analysis so far.

How to Further Improve the 8+3 Template

While most of the donors and partners who used the 8+3 template said that nothing should be changed or added, some pointed out aspects around the 8+3 template that could be improved. These included ensuring greater consistency of terms, improving question instructions, and more options for additional questions, among others. Some users also expressed difficulties in answering specific questions, which requires a more extensive discussion. Lastly, many interviewees felt that communication around the template was at times limited and should be improved going forward.

Figure 4: How to Further Improve the 8+3 Template



Address flaws within the template: A number of partners suggested improvements to the template (Table 5), which would ideally be addressed before launching a system-wide use of the template to avoid donors changing the template on their own. Most of the issues that were mentioned can be resolved through a careful edit. This includes ensuring that terms are consistent as well as adding language on currently neglected issues – such as gender, safeguarding and protection – to the instructions.¹² A slightly

¹² While a revision of the template in these areas is sensible, cross-cutting themes and specific project focus areas were intentionally left out of the template. The logic is that the only way to appropriately incorporate these elements into programming is when they are planned in the design stage of the intervention. When that is done properly, the 8+3 template is flexible enough to allow for detailed reporting on those specific aspects.

more ambitious change are new instructions on the question “Value for Money,” which many users found difficult to answer. While donors have very different conceptions of how best to answer this, it would be important to find a common denominator and formulation for this increasingly important question and its instruction. Users also recommended adding new questions and that seems particularly sensible if doing so will enable more donors to commit to using the harmonized reporting template. Importantly, since such questions should be added to the “additional questions” section, the original idea of choosing up to three additional questions would not change – the range of options would simply increase. Nevertheless, increasing the overall number of questions decreases the likelihood of harmonized reports and adding new questions to the harmonized reporting template should be the exception.

Table 5: User Suggestions for Improving the Harmonized Reporting Template

Aspect	Elements/content that requires improvements
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include stronger language on gender and safeguarding. • Include a focus on protection • Explicitly allow the inclusion of annexes (e.g., to showcase activities or track actions against planned timelines) • Allow for more flexibility on word limit, as some donors have specified a maximum word count rather than an acceptable range • Strengthen usability for multi-annual programs
Section: Basic information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve language on assistance modality • Revise the request to calculate program costs to eliminate discretion about what counts as program costs
Section: Core questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q2: Place Q2 after Q3 (suggested twice) • Q4: Eliminate double-counting of beneficiaries due to the overlap of age groups < 5 and < 18 in the beneficiary table • Q5: Include wording on sexual abuse (not just exploitation) in instructions to partners
Section: Additional questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve instructions for the question on value for money/cost effectiveness • Consider adding a dedicated M&E question • Consider adding a question on theory of change as an exercise to reflect on the assumptions guiding the project or program • Consider changing the question on environment to “cross-cutting issues” such as environment, gender or protection

Address difficulties with questions: Partners struggled with questions at times. This may be a consequence of either a lack of capacity, expertise or willingness on the side of the partner – or the template itself. Judging from discussions with partners, the main reason was not a lack of capability or willingness to answer the question, but rather that some questions were perceived to be ill-suited to the timing of the report. For instance, some partners suggested that it is very difficult to answer the question on sustainability or exit strategy (Q7) in a quarterly or progress report. As one partner working in Somalia stated: “You can’t credibly determine your exit strategy at interim level.” Similarly, some partners found it difficult to answer that question for a project that is clearly short-term and not designed to be sustainable without follow-up funding. In these instances, Q7 invites generic answers that most partners want to avoid. This highlights the importance of tailoring the reporting template and choosing different questions for different types of reports instead of relying on a single template for both interim and final reports. The available guidance makes suggestions in this regard. In addition, some difficulties answering questions are linked to unavailable data. For example, a Kenyan NGO explained that a donor requested granular beneficiary data as a result of switching to the 8+3 template, but that such data has not been collected at

that level before. Expectations about reporting shaped by extensive experience with other templates also created difficulties, which is why one organization favored the old donor template over the new harmonized reporting template. Generally, those concerns should diminish as partners accumulate more experience with the 8+3 template.

Improve communication around the template: Communication is the final aspect some partners criticized. While insufficient communication is generally linked to the harmonizing reporting pilot more than to the 8+3 template as such, this feedback is critical if donors seek to expand the use of the template in the future. Put simply, some partners found the information shared around the template (and the pilot) to be insufficient. Donors often introduced the 8+3 template with no additional comments and in those cases, partners wanted more instruction and explanation. Many still have basic questions about the template, such as why it is called the ‘8+3 template’. Notable exceptions with regard to limited communication are Germany and UNHCR: both informed their partners well, according to interviewees. While this places additional responsibility on donors, partners must equally ensure that such information is repeatedly shared within their organizations and reaches the staff members who are responsible for reporting, particularly at headquarter level where information from donors is received and changes to reporting are managed.

Discussion and Action Points

After two years of piloting the harmonized reporting template, it is reasonable to conclude that the 8+3 template largely meets the original expectation that it will simplify reporting. Many of the benefits of the template discussed in the mid-term review are still valid, as the feedback from partners and donors captured since then confirms: the harmonized reporting template simplifies the reporting process with simple language in the questions and clear instructions on the information and level of detail users should provide. It also makes reporting much more predictable for partners, because it clarifies what information donors require. This benefit will become much more useful in practice once more donors begin to use the new harmonized reporting template.

Of those approached for feedback, most donors and all partners but one appreciate the new simplified template. However, realizing its full potential for harmonization depends on three conditions: First, donors who took part in the pilot should use it across their entire humanitarian portfolio. Second, more donors, particularly larger ones who did not participate in the pilot, should start using the 8+3 template. Third, partners should advocate much more forcefully for its use and also introduce the template internally – for instance, when they cooperate with other (local) partners.

To convince both donors and partners to scale up their use of the harmonized reporting template in a significant way, the 8+3 template requires further improvements. The same is true for the strategic communication around its implementation. Moreover, to capture the benefits of the harmonized reporting template and make good on the Grand Bargain commitment to “simplify and harmonize reporting requirements,” the template should be used more consistently and in line with a number of good practices, detailed in the separate guidance.

The sections below highlight and discuss the most critical points across these issues. **Action points** (marked ») provide recommendations for increasing a sensible use of the harmonized reporting template. Most of the recommendations target the German Federal Foreign Office and ICVA as work stream co-convenors, but other stakeholders (donors, partners, NGO networks) may also see ways in which they could lead on or support the recommended actions.

Donors must take action to move the 8+3 template from idea to global standard.

Taking action to move the 8+3 template from idea to a global standard must be a priority. This responsibility falls primarily on donors, since partners rarely challenge their donors on reporting practices or recommend approaches to reporting. UNHCR, OCHA, Germany, France, and the US Department of State (BPRM) are already leading the way in this regard and have decided to globally expand their use of the harmonized reporting (with exceptions). Ideally, other humanitarian donors with significant portfolios would introduce the harmonized reporting format as well.

For at least one donor taking part in the pilot, the lack of buy-in from major donors is an argument to refrain from using the 8+3 template after this pilot ends. This shows that the decision on whether to use the 8+3 template in the future is not a technical one based on the template’s suitability (the same donor pointed out that the “8+3 template

was user-friendly and straightforward” and that “implementing partners found little difference between this 8+3 template and our current humanitarian reporting template”), but rather a political or strategic decision on whether to spend political capital on a reform that may provide few direct improvements for donors. If more pilot participants follow this reasoning, then donors who are waiting for a critical mass will likely also be discouraged from using the template in the future. These trends would reinforce each other and quickly drive down use of the 8+3 template.

While quick and widespread uptake of the template by bilateral donors is paramount to its success, introducing the 8+3 template in pooled funds managed by the UN (OCHA’s Central Emergency Response Fund and County-Based Pooled Funds) highlights another area in which harmonized reporting can play an important role: multi-donor funds and consortia. Increasingly, donors pool funds and – depending on the level of earmarking – request individual reports based on their own reporting templates to account for their contributions, or engage with consortia to create a common reporting format from scratch. Many interviewees involved in multi-donor funds suggested that reporting is often very time-consuming and that using the harmonized reporting template would be a very positive development.

- » **Action point 1:** Within the next 3–6 months, donors – particularly those with substantive humanitarian portfolios – should take an organization-wide decision on whether they will use the 8+3 template. Ideally, given the positive feedback on the template, donors will either introduce the harmonized reporting template or scale up their use. This will ensure that the momentum created by the pilot is not lost.
- » **Action point 2:** Bilateral donors should assess whether the reporting they request from existing pooled funds can be switched to the 8+3 template. Ideally, when defining reporting criteria for future pooled funds, they will take the harmonized reporting template as a starting point.

Partners have to take more responsibility for simplifying reporting.

It is important to recognize that the Grand Bargain commitment to simplify reporting not only requests change from governments and UN organizations, but also from partners. While donors play a leading role in determining the future of the 8+3 template, partners also bear a responsibility across different levels.

Partners, particularly INGOs, often act as donors themselves when they work with (i.e., subcontract to) local organizations, which then become implementing partners. It is crucial that such partners reflect on their role as donors and on the potential consequences of creating high reporting burdens for their (local) partners. The pilot implicitly focuses on changing practices among bilateral donors and UN agencies, and there is a danger that the benefits of the harmonized reporting template will materialize only for intermediaries and not be passed on to local partners. Evidence from interviews shows that some partners pass on the 8+3 template, while others continue to rely on their own internal reporting templates. In addition, the 8+3 template is also an opportunity for partners to shape reporting requirements when donors who do not have a standardized template allow partners to structure project reports. Understandably, partners often do not feel they are in a position to make requests toward donors (out of fear of antagonizing funders or because they do not want to weaken their position in the competition for funding), which means NGO associations

will need to advocate for wider uptake of the harmonized reporting template on behalf of their entire membership.

Finally, some individual NGOs or NGO associations – such as the Disasters Emergency Committee in the UK – also run public appeals and fund emergency responses. As such, they become donors, thus establishing their own reporting processes and requirements. The harmonized reporting template has not yet been used in such cases but would likely be beneficial, given its ease of use. This would also be an opportunity for partners to actively follow up on their Grand Bargain commitment and establish good practices in reporting without depending on donors.

- » **Action point 3:** Partners, in particular INGOs, who subcontract extensively should commit to reducing their partners’ reporting workload. Ideally, the harmonized reporting template will also serve as a basis for internal monitoring and reporting.
- » **Action point 4:** NGO networks, both those working internationally and those working at the national level, should actively engage with donors within their sphere of influence to advocate for a wider uptake and consistent use of the harmonized reporting template on behalf of their members.

The 8+3 template and its use can be further improved.

The shortcomings of the 8+3 template (see Table 5 for details) should be addressed as soon as possible to facilitate the move from idea to global standard.

When adjusting the template, it is crucial to find a balance between too many additional requests for information and future-proofing the template in a way that will help it remain relevant as donors’ information needs change.

More consistent use of the template in line with a number of ‘good practices’ is also essential. Two such good practices, detailed in a separate guidance, are paramount: First, users should not change the wording of questions or instructions for partners when designing their own templates. Consistency in the wording across donor templates is essential to unlock the different harmonization effects discussed above. Second, donors should avoid requesting too much information, particularly in progress reports. Ideally, donors should develop separate templates by simply starting with the harmonized reporting template they use for final reports and removing those questions deemed irrelevant or unsuitable for progress reports.

Finally, much more thorough and consistent communication around the harmonized reporting template across the humanitarian system is necessary. Many discussions with partners and donors showed that the basic logic of the template (modularity, flexibility around question selection, and the opportunity to use the template for programs) is not as widely understood as expected. Many ask what ‘8+3’ stands for. This is largely due to insufficient explanation of the new template, its purpose, and its background on the part of donors. A number of interviewees only realized that their organization had used a new template when they were approached for this review. However, donors are not solely responsible for improving communication; partners share this responsibility, too. In humanitarian work, the staff turnover rate on the partner side is often quite high. As a result, it is difficult to create knowledge of new administrative practices among field practitioners, as very few hold a position long enough to work through multiple reporting periods in the same location. In the long

run, it will be important to develop a system that supports easy, ongoing orientation around harmonized reporting.

- » **Action point 5:** The work stream co-convenors should immediately address the most pressing shortcomings of the harmonized reporting template and engage donors about their information needs to determine whether additional optional questions may be necessary. This should include developing options to ensure continued guardianship over the harmonized reporting template and making it future-proof.
- » **Action point 6:** As a follow-up to the pilot, the co-convenors of the work stream should invest further time and resources into increasing knowledge among donors on the good reporting practices that have already been developed. This includes presentations at Good Humanitarian Donorship meetings or in other fora where the main stakeholders are present.
- » **Action point 7:** The pilot participants and co-convenors should actively improve their communication around the template. This should include repeated messages to partners on their (future) use of the harmonized reporting template and their rationale for changing reporting requirements. An online repository of 8+3 documents alongside basic information would help support such communication.

It takes more than a template to achieve the Grand Bargain commitment.

Using the 8+3 template across the humanitarian system is an important lever to simplify reporting, but it is not the only solution. It will take more than the harmonized reporting template to achieve the Grand Bargain commitment to simplify and harmonize reporting. One equally important way to reduce the reporting burden on partners is to lower the frequency of donor report requests. While the US government did not participate in the pilot, USAID/OFDA's decision to switch from quarterly reports to bi-annual reports as part of the measures to follow through on their Grand Bargain commitment cuts the volume of reporting they request from partners by 50 percent. Significant gains can be made if other donors follow this lead. From a partner's perspective, weekly or monthly reports should be the exception. In addition to the frequency, a number of organizational practices – such as risk management (on the donor side) and interal clearance processes as well as extensive collection of data and information (on the partner side) – also contribute to time-consuming reporting processes and should be reviewed to further reduce reporting workloads. Beyond addressing these issues, donors and partners should actively seek further ways of fulfilling the commitments of Grand Bargain work stream nine.

- » **Action point 8:** Donors should carefully evaluate and seek to reduce the frequency with which they request reports. Significant gains in reducing the reporting burden can be expected as a result.
- » **Action point 9:** Beyond implementing the harmonized reporting template, donors and partners should actively seek further ways of fulfilling the additional commitments of Grand Bargain work stream nine.

The 8+3 template is a starting point for further improvements to the humanitarian system.

Finally, it is important to see the potential impact of the harmonized reporting template on the humanitarian system beyond just simplifying reporting. In this regard, two aspects were highlighted throughout the interviews:

First, the proposal process is reshaped by the information requested at the reporting stage. Many interviewees think that redesigning reporting requirements also changes the proposal process to match the reporting. Particular aspects which some donors have not previously emphasized – such as accountability to affected populations or risk management – will likely be discussed and integrated more prominently into project designs and proposals. In more abstract ways, the harmonized reporting template can be expected to lead to much greater awareness among partners around specific issues linked to high-quality project implementation, thus motivating behavioral and organizational changes. The fact that OCHA has already adapted its proposal requirements based on its new harmonized reporting template underlines this assumption.

Second, for many partners, the harmonized reporting template is an important tool to advance the localization agenda. The confirmed simplicity of the template makes it easier for local partners to provide high-quality reports and may also lower the barriers for bilateral donors to fund local organizations directly. Reporting (and project management more generally) is a practice ripe with specific codes, jargon, and certain ways of doing things that are difficult to master and often not well understood by local partners who have less experience and fewer capacities than INGOs. Harmonized reporting creates a reporting standard that is highly inclusive and accessible. If implemented to a much greater extent, the 8+3 template essentially removes one layer of specialized INGO knowledge about dealing with large bilateral donors. Since many donors indicated that they faced little resistance to or problems with introducing the harmonized reporting format within their organizations, it appears to be one of the most efficient ways to strengthen local capacity, with very few drawbacks.

Overall, the harmonized reporting template justifies a narrative that frames it not simply as another set of standards to comply with, but as a powerful entry point for further, broadly desirable reforms and changes to the humanitarian system.

Annex I: Interviews

Note: An additional 35 interviews were carried out for the earlier mid-term review (Gaus 2017). Please see Annex 1 of the mid-term review for further details on this.

Iraq & Jordan

Name	Organization
Amandine Camet	MDM
Amani Salah	OCHA
Chiara Fabrizio	NRC
Cliff Mushaya	DRK
Hanna Abu Barham	OCHA
Jessica Rowe	Handicap International
Julien Peissard	Swiss Government
Justine Hildebrandt	ACTED
Kendra Hughbanks	ACF
Luisa Rueda	Johanniter Nothilfe
Madiha Shafi	Oxfam
Malaka Mahmoud	Lutheran World Federation
Nicolas Puvis	MDM
Pietro Caburoso	INTERSOS
Rana Nassar	DFID
Sharma Tulasi	Care
Sonya Wellhausen	Welthungerhilfe

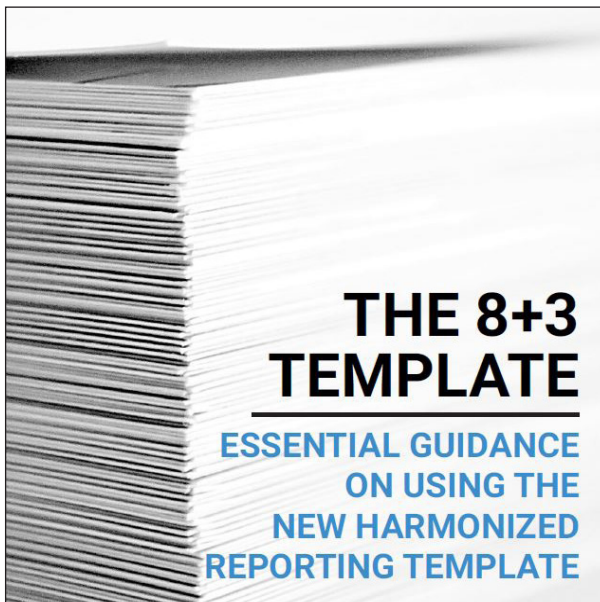
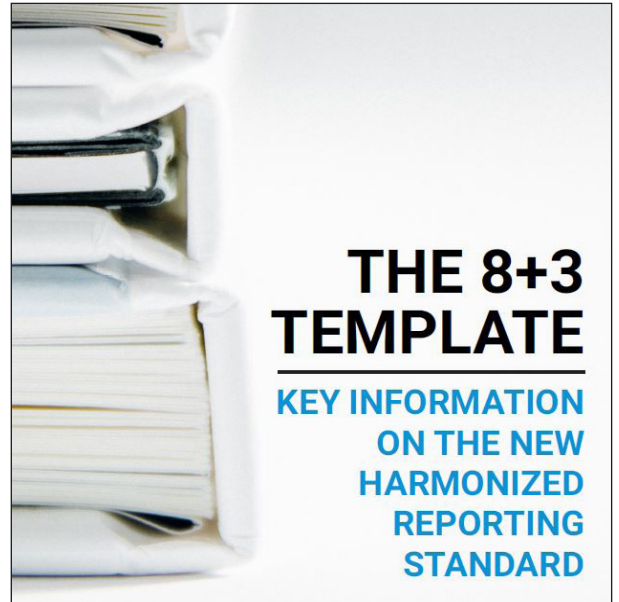
Myanmar

Name	Organization
Adira Zwelling	USAID
Aoife McDonnell	UNHCR
Frida Gadzhimirzaeva	NRC
James Robertson	UNICEF
Myat Htwe Mon	World Vision
Narciso Rosa-Berlanga	OCHA
Paul Edwards	UNICEF
Shoko Kuroda	UNHCR
Stacer McChesney	Plan International
William Von Schrader	ACTED

Somalia & Kenya

Name	Organization
Afifa Ismail	OCHA
Agnes Cherono	UNCHR
Carmeline Wanjiru Mwenja	UNCHR
Caroline Muasya	DRC
Christopher Hoffman	World Vision
Cynthia Onyango	IRC
Dinah Makambi	NRC
Dismus Obegi	Save the Children
Francesco Rigamonti	Oxfam
Giovanna Fortuni	Arche Nova
Helen Bishop	Oxfam
Juergen Feldmann	Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe
Patricia Gimode	World Vision
Yuko Tomita	IOM
Focus group discussion	Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society-Kenya (HIAS); National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK); Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK)

Annex II: Additional 8+3 Documents



All additional 8+3 documents can also be accessed at:
gppi.net/eightplusthree

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