

Capacity Development or Capacity CONVERGANCE?

FALLACIES Prevent Localization

Capacity cannot be EXCUSE for INABILITY or UNFAIR practices

UN agencies and INGOs now raise questions on the 'capacity of local NGOs' on which they have invested a lot during the last 4 decades. It is now said that there should be no compromise with the quality of services. If still the local organizations don't have the capacity, then what is built in the last 40 years?

On the other hand, a humanitarian and development activist who goes through the discourses of Principle of Partnership (2007), Charter 4 Change (2015) and Grand Bargain commitments (2016) should be able to identify that three more priority issues i.e. Sustainability, Local Ownership and Accountability. Hence, the primacy of local leadership comes in.

There are numerous examples of not giving projects to local NGOs even when they had recognized and certified qualities. UN agencies and INGOs might have been lacking of localized partnership policy based on long term vision to be practiced in transparent and competitive way. Rather, there are instances of giving projects based on the personal interests of the national level officials.

Three fallacies on capacity discourse

1. Capacity: DEVELOPMENT or COVERGENCE?

Colonial rulers used to decide the needs of the natives and provided them with necessary training, for example, language training. For the comfort of a few rulers, thousands of the natives needed to learn the foreign language. Donors do have some obvious accountability requirements which should not be undermined, but at the same time, the donors, UN agencies and INGOs should also recognize the built-in capacities of local partners which could be quite useful and capable of bringing more outcomes.

For the sustainability of all humanitarian and development interventions along with the local ownership and accountability, the actors need to understand local dynamics of power and cultures and act accordingly. Local capacities are fundamental and should be relied upon.

That's why the approach of 'Capacity Convergence' is much more democratic than that of 'Capacity Development'. It doesn't undermine the development, rather promotes a joint process of going together.

2. Accounts-ability or ACCOUNTABILITY?

We have always given priority to both internal and external accountability. We never undermined accountability to the fund givers, because it is natural. We emphasized accountability more to the frontline, to the affected population, poor and marginalized families, who are basically the fund was given for. But the common practice of donors, UN agencies and INGOs is giving more importance to the accounts ability of the fund recipient organizations. Sometimes they impose unrealistic systems and devices to achieve that hardly considering the local context and locally available capacity, while maintaining those management are quite cumbersome and costly.

We believe, giving importance to the accountability obviously builds the expected capacities over time since commitment to accountability generates an attitude of learning the excellence.

3. TOP-DOWN or TRIPATRIATE ASSESMENT?

It is always the donors or UN agencies or INGOs who assess the capacity of the fund recipient organizations based on their own set indicators and criteria. They hardly provide any scope for the local NGOs or the affected population to assess their capacity in return. Since it is the matter of sustainability, local ownership and accountability, local NGOs and affected population should not be the passive listeners or silent recipients. They should be considered as the equal actors. And at the end it will help all the three parties to promote a responsive development process.