

Experience-based learning on ultimate road to localization

Campaigners at risk while localization Bottlenecked at top level

Since the beginning (2007) the Principles of Partnership (PoP) has been urging for the primacy of local organizations implementing the humanitarian as well as development projects basically for the livelihood improvement of the poor and humanitarian response to the affected population. World Humanitarian Summit (2014 to 2016) is another global milestone process from where the localization campaigners first received a very tangible agreement about partnership for implementing humanitarian response. The outcome of this process with detailed and achievable indicators is manifested in the Grand Bargain (GB) commitments which is adopted in Istanbul, Turkey in May 2016.

Since the consultation on GB along with PoP started in Bangladesh, it is noticed that substantial challenges are lying with the higher level of the international humanitarian and development agencies, who usually are on the influencing side of the partnerships as they are the funding partners. On the other side, the recipient organizations and campaigners who work at the frontline have been exposed to risks. Thus, the campaigners felt these issues should be widely discussed.

1. **Without a plan of implementation at headquarter level, urging in the frontline means going against the tide.** The international agencies and networks have signed the GB commitments alongside the PoP agreements. However, most of the headquarters of the signatories hardly displayed any plan to apply these in their operation. Many of them have projects on localization in different parts of the world, but hardly any new policy or revision of the existing ones are introduced by their headquarters in this regard, though they are the ones expected to show the light.
2. **Partnership policy with long term vision based on specific context and criteria**

through transparent and competitive implementation is a primary need.

The basic reasons of localization are sustainability of the effort, accountability to the affected population and local government and reduction of the transaction cost of the fund which is meant for the poor. It won't happen if the present practice of partnership goes on. Partnership selection is one of the example area where handpick approach is popular in place of standard scrutiny. International agencies who usually influence the partnerships need to prepare a partnership policy or reform their existing one. The policies should be based on local context considering partner criteria and should have a long term vision to develop local actors in the target country. Above all, the policy should be implemented with transparency and competitiveness and it should be free from conflict of interest of their national staff. So that the sustainable local forces in course of time can take on the responsibilities through a progressive phase out of external forces, i.e. international agencies and there could be a healthy competition for effective works.

3. Little presence of localized complaint response and accountability mechanism to protect the whistle blowers. The headquarters of the international agencies hardly realize that their country leaders work almost in a free rein, hardly having any localized accountability or complaint response mechanism/ policy to protect the whistle blowers. Here localized means using local language a simplified way of issuing complaints which is easily accessible by local stakeholders even if they are half or non-literates. It is the reason why many times international agencies fell into the debacles of media criticism. In the absence of this, partners, stakeholders or any staff members

at the country level hardly dare to challenge the country leaders, and eventually, they lose the opportunity to get feedback for their continuous improvement of their system or services. It should be more balanced with upward and downward accountabilities.

In spite of being certified by a global humanitarian and ISO standard certification system, one international organization has recently faced serious complaints against them. Their complaint response mechanism was reviewed, which is complicated and only available in their international website and there is no policy for protecting the complaint raiser and whistle blowers. They channel the complains as feedback.

4. Role of UN: as a REFEREE, ANIMATOR or COMPETITOR? In fact, it is the UN who led and conducted the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and which has resulted the Grand Bargain commitments. However, they hardly played any role to promote this later on. Instead the civil society played a fundamental role to promote almost all UN led covenants including GCR (Global Compact on Refugees) and GCM (Global Compact on Migration). Civil society raised a huge campaign on localization where UN seemed to play a role of a 'referee'. In some humanitarian crisis UN agencies seemed as competitors for fund. UN could play the role as an Animator in those cases. There are good examples in Bangladesh where the UN leader is committed.

Recently the UNSG has declared NWoW (New Way of Working) where accountability at local level and working with local actors for sustainability is emphasized. However, there are a little implementation and adherence to it on the ground.

GB, PoP and Charter4Change (C4C) have created much inspiration and hype among the local actors who have been conducting a country-wide campaign and creating a demand-side mobilization. They tried to pursue positive engagement and dialogue with international agencies and government. But sometimes they have experienced some bitter truth:

- (i) Single out – making isolation: In most cases they have been made isolated and left behind.
- (ii) They have been termed as 'aggressive'. Even the campaign was officially termed as 'alarming'.

Though the campaign is going on without a minimum appreciation, at least the forces at frontline and grassroots level demanded accountability of the existing establishment. The international agencies should be satisfied on this.

We all have to realize that GB should not be considered from minimalist approach. The localization is also needed to have a vibrant civil society movement for democracy, human right and justice in our country. So, we cannot keep it at the mercy of national level actors of the international agencies. Rather we should consider to take it to the political level, to the governments and media of the developed countries and to their tax payers, so that there could be pressure for policies to result a transformative behavior of international agencies with appropriate complementarity approach.

