

Our Common Space, our Complementary Roles: Partnership for Sovereign and Accountable Civil Society Growth

1. Who we are, why and how it is.

We are Bangladeshi national and local non-government organization (NNGO/LNGO) or civil societies, working within national boundaries with a home grown or indigenous background. We consider ourselves as National Non-Government Organizations (NNGO) in this whole of statement, when we mention NNGO it also includes LNGO. In necessary places, we have defined and use the term LNGOs. We do both humanitarian and development activities, and we also consider ourselves as a part of civil society. We consider non-government organizations (NGO) which work in more than one national boundary, whether they are from global north or south to be as International NGOs (INGOs), they are also part of civil society.

We appreciate the WHS (World Humanitarian Summit) outcome. We are also inspired by the Grand Bargain (GB) outcomes, signed up to by 53 of the largest humanitarian donors, UN (United Nations) agencies and INGOs to improve the way aid is delivered to people in need. Although, there are little participation from southern NNGOs.

We are committed to inform the WHS and GB outcomes in the root level, although we have some differences in interpretations, we feel that far more attention should be given to minimize the gap between policy declarations and policy implementation.

We know that, we have some committed allies in global north too, we also invite them to support this feedback petition as a supporter to our appeal that, building a civil society sector is our common space, but we the NGOs from global south and north should have different role, complementary to each other and in respect of national level in global south, we need equality and dignity based partnership for sovereign and accountable civil society growth.

2. Our belief and our premise.

We believe that growth of civil society or NGOs, historically due to some limit of our state and markets and complementary thereby. As in some special circumstances state organs (including political parties) and markets agencies face limitations to meet some public demands, especially to marginalized and affected population. So to meet the need as on the basis of complementary approach, it is a common and generally acceptable narrative that, there should be balance existence of state, market and civil societies. It is to promote welfare and redistributive state, and this trinity factors should be leading to a society which should be based on democratic principles and respecting human rights. We believe that we have a

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unity among the southern and northern NGOs that we need more or equal space and right full share as civil society for participation. It is to play an effective role for our common future and public goods. Especially in global south the need is immediate and imperative. But, we also believe that our state (including political forces) is in all above, will work as regulatory factor in this regard.

In fact the debate of equal space to civil society along with state and market sector is almost over, especially if we look at the discourse of aid effectiveness to development effectiveness, which has evolve from Paris Declaration (2005) to Nairobi Declaration (2016). State parties in generally have agreed on this, in most cases UN and most states has created rightful spaces for civil societies in this regard.

There is strong nexus in humanitarianism and development activism, while humanitarians emphasize saving life, development lead to a society toward not to create such a humanitarian crisis. Nowadays almost all the development NGOs take part in humanitarian

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3. Complaint Response Mechanism and Protecting Whistle Blower Policies,
4. Minimum 20% overhead Management Cost to the Partner Organization, Not Only for Central Management, for Institutional Development also,
5. INGO and UN Organizations Must Consider Getting Out of Direct Project Operation and Fund Raising in National Level,
6. Stop Brain drain from NNGOs. Introduce Equal Compensation for Same Level of Competency. Reduce the Gap in Salary and Benefits during Partnership,
7. Partnership Agreement Must Include the Clause for Arbitration and Joint Evaluation:

work, but there are also a continued need for those that focus solely on humanitarian works, like Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and MSF. So, we should consider the need of unity in work in both the sectors rather than bringing the discourse of separation in this regard. Our common objectives are to build a society where no humanitarian crisis will arise in the future, which is in fact actually a long term development goal too.

3. Our urge during WHS: equality and dignity based partnership.

We Bangladeshi 28 NNGOs in the banner of Bangladeshi NGOs for WHS were involved in WHS process during May 2015. <http://coastbd.net/national-consultation-process-for-world-humanitarian-summit-2016-with-bangladesh-national-ngos/>. We conducted focus group discussions in different 20 districts of Bangladesh on different issues related to disasters. After the consultation and in the eve of Dushanbe South and Central Asia WHS consultation, we have developed a statement titled “Equal and Dignified Partnership for Sustainable Capacity in Disaster Risk Reduction and Response”. <http://coastbd.net/equal-and-dignified-partnership-for-sustainable-capacity-in-disaster-risk-reduction-and-response/>. We endorse those demands, key common issues came from those consultations were;

- a. Institutional and capacity building support to NNGOs
- b. Priority to work with local government and government agencies.
- c. Need of priority based investment to construct embankment in coastal and flood prone area.
- d. Increasing investment for disaster risk reduction and

building resilience community.

e. INGOs should not compete with NNGOs in respect of fund hunting in national level.

f. UN should consider new protocol of climate displaced people as we feel that Bangladesh alone will hardly be able to meet this displacement situation.

Then before the WHS global consultation in Geneva we have developed another statement through participatory process titled “Making Humanitarian and Development Activism Localized and Accountable: 7 Initial Actionable Proposals on Reshaping Aid”. <http://coastbd.net/7-initial-actionable-proposals-on-reshaping-aid/>. These 7 actionable proposals were elaborated after a series of consultation in different parts of the country with NNGOs representatives that ended with a National level consultation with NGOs and Government policy makers. The statement was widely distributed during Geneva WHS consultation as well as in WHS Istanbul Summit (May 2016). Key issues of the statement were;

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4. Minimum 20% overhead Management Cost to the Partner Organization, Not Only for Central Management, for Institutional Development also.

When INGOs think to create a network, they must first consider whether it is possible with existing networks, they should consider helping them first. INGOs must also consider and specify in long run how the network will run on sustainable basis. INGOs must consider it on criteria based, through a transparent and inclusive process and all above in such a way that, it should not create tension and conflict within the sector

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Apart from above, COAST has organized a National level seminar titled as “Principles of Partnership: Learning and Way Forward” in cooperation with International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) in August 2015 in Dhaka. Please see the outcome and report. <http://coastbd.net/principles-of-partnership-learning-and-way-forward/> .

And on 19th August 2016 we observe World Humanitarian Day with a title of “WHS Outcomes: Experiences of Recent Disaster Response in Bangladesh”. It was mainly a seminar event with national level stakeholders to popular WHS outcomes, the Grand Bargain and Charter for Change (C4C). Please see the outcome and report. <http://coastbd.net/whs-nngos-bangladesh/>

4. INGOs and UN agencies primary role should be to facilitate and promote local civil society in global south.

One of the primary outcomes of the WHS was localization and accountability. It means promotion of local level civil society, which demands appropriate partnership. There was global level discourse and of the re-affirmation of the Principles of Partnership (<https://www.icvanetwork.org/principles-partnership-statement-commitment>), agreed by 40 organizations, UN agencies, World Bank, international Red Crescent and Red Cross movement and others during 2007. The principles are Equality, Transparency, Result Oriented Approach, Responsibility and Complementarity. But there was little on the follow up and operationalization of those partnership principles in the root level. In global south, INGOs / UN agencies both have to play facilitating role to promote local civil societies; they must step back from operational role. So, we feel there are needs in this regard (i) need of preparation of partnership policies by INGOs and UN agencies, and its implementation through open, transparent and competitive basis, (ii) there should

code of conduct in this regard, (iii) annual open review of implementation of this partnership principles and code of conduct, (iv) devise downward management accountability mechanism (e.g., information disclosure policy, complain response mechanism, whistle blowing policies for beneficiary / affected populations and partners) and (v) investment in creating demand side among the NNGOs, so that they can have dialogue to change the existing narrative of “sub contacting or patron client relationship”. INGOs and UN organizations have to examine why they are working in an operational manner in global south, while they hardly are sustainable, their local level advocacy are hardly politically acceptable and while their transaction cost is comparatively so high.

5. Principled and criteria based partnership with NNGO: create a transparent and healthy competition but in maintain highest Level of inclusiveness and coordination.

WHS and Grand Bargain outcome should not be interpreted only with direct funding and funding to NNGOs. It is also for NNGOs accountability toward community, implanting sustainability of development and humanitarian initiative with the community and mobilization for facilitating the enhanced state responsiveness for public goods too. So, taking this in view INGOs, UN agencies and donors must prepare their partnership policies and set criteria. Following points should be considered in this regards, (i) NNGO should not only be effective in service delivery but also be effective in advocacy towards state, (ii) the NNGO should have a transparent accountability framework which is active, regular and free from conflict of interest, and (iii) proven track record of generating own resources for fast response and gaining sustainability. The partner selection process must be in a transparent and competitive process toward a reward for good and committed work.

6. Activate existing network first, prior to going for forming new network, the process must be transparent and inclusive.

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through a transparent and inclusive process and all above in such a way that, it should not create tension and conflict within the sector, while sector wise unity and coordination is a primary and priority need, especially within the context of Bangladesh. Doing network in haste without such a study / thinking seems that it is just work for work.

7. INGOs must concentrate on campaign against “De-globalization of Humanity and Responsibility” in their home of origin.

Most of the northern INGOs have been originated with private individual funding with awareness in global north that, humanity is global and the individual must have to take responsibility as a global citizen. But it is observed that, due to the increase public / government funding in north for overseas development assistance, most of the INGOs has become busy with fulfilling conditions given by northern governments and being playing the role as mere operational or intermediaries. In this present age of growing xenophobia and protectionism, INGOs should re-consider their present role in aid architecture. They should conduct development education and advocacy in their northern countries against such “de-globalization of humanity and responsibility”, should uphold the spirit of “global citizenship” that we are living in one planet, we have to save it and we have to share responsibility and resources.

8. Cash programing without considering local context: undermines civil society development and community approach in southern countries.

While the Grand Bargain has come out as a transformative agenda toward process in humanitarian architecture, there are also one stream which is related to programming, this is cash distribution. Some donors and INGOs are already practicing this for last few years in southern countries including Bangladesh. We assume that this is to induce market and private sector in the humanitarian sector. We welcome market and private sector development in humanitarian sector. But it should not be generalized and imposed, different context of localities in southern countries should be considered, e.g., (i) there are some areas where market is hardly available and works, even when it works during the crisis period, it become costly to afford, (ii) there are some indispensable community livelihood infrastructure like water, drainage and sanitation, which have to be managed by community with the contribution from community, while state agencies are not there still or state agencies cannot respond as fast as needed, (iii) In the long run or repeated practice of cash distribution, resulting an attitude of relief dependency, rather than an attitude toward self-dependency and (iv)

while cash distribution being conducted through NNGOs we should not undermine the organizational development aspects of that NNGOs. We need to understand that NNGOs need to exist as they have been indigenously originated to meet some limitation of state and market forces and they are the fast and first responders in humanitarian crisis and also they are responding root causes too.

We have some experiences while such a cash programming being practiced in Bangladesh, e.g., (i) most of the time cash has gone to family head, in most cases in Bangladesh it is the male is the family head, while he purchased things, he hardly considered the need of women, children and older ones who are in most cases being treated as subordinate culturally, and (ii) Cash receivers have given important to individual need rather than need of community, especially to repair or rebuild community infrastructure. In view of above reflections, donors and INGOs should have a review, over generalization and ignoring local context is a concern in this regard.

9. Priority should be to self-esteem and self-made approach: capacity standard have to be contextual, accountability should be first rather than accounts-ability.

Capacity development is a popular buzz word in NNGO development; it seems that it's a never ending effort. We need to revisit the approach critically; but we are not denying the fact on need of capacity building. But time has come INGOs and donors need to develop self-esteem and thereby to promote self-made approach first among the NNGOs, in creating conducting environment i.e. through equality and dignity based partnership relation.

All above we also need to decide capacity in view of local context, e.g., which is expected from highly qualified highly paid salaried staff or which is expected in northern social perspective, that cannot be expected from a less qualified low paid salaried staff in a different southern social perspective. What we feel the best approach is to give importance to develop accountability aspects of NNGOs first, accounts- ability should give importance in subsequent stages.

10. Localization means local control: national pooled fund should be managed, controlled and owned by NNGOs. Creating intermediary has concern in respect of sustainability.

There are growing intentions from donors on creating national pooled fund managed and owned by NNGOs, in respect of humanitarian and development response. This will not only reduce transaction cost, but also appropriately result local response / voice and also with sustainability index.

There is successful evidence in this regard in global south. In respect of humanitarian response there are global pooled fund which is being mostly managed and control by INGOs. INGOs should reconsider their approach and donors should come forward to initiate national pooled fund should be managed and control by NNGOs. Or it should be through open bidding process with criteria, limited to the competitions of NNGOs only in this regard. Creating new institutions has concern and questions in respect of long term sustainability.

11. LNGOs and NNGOs whose leadership originated from specific locality should get priority to get projects for that specific locality: No to imported NNGO or LNGOs with temporary project assignment in the localities.

LNGOs (local NGOs) means organizations that who work in a locality / districts / regions, the organization originated from the locality, and leadership is also from the locality. They and also the NNGO who is originated and whose leadership has originated from that specific locality, both this type of LNGO and NNGO should receive priority to received project specified for that specific location. This is important for sustainability, long term impact and local community participation. There should not be any imported NNGO or LNGO taken there, if the NNGO and LNGOs is available on that specific location based on capacity criteria.

12. We all (UN organizations/ INGOs/NNGOs/ LNGOs) should have participatory multi stakeholder and open review of cyclone (e.g. Ruanu and Mora) and flood (e.g. Hoar) response in view of WHS and the Grand Bargain response. Repeated duplication of mistakes is wastage of resources.

Since 2013 to till date, during this period while we have this WHS and Grand Bargain discourse, we all have implemented relief and rehabilitation work in Bangladesh, especially related to the response in respect of cyclone Roanu, Mora and flood Haor. We should consider doing review in this regard, the review should not be a consultant based work, it should be through an open / transparent and mutli stakeholder (including community)

participatory, from local to national level. So that it will not be a mere report production, it should also be a process where everybody will realize and learn which will help us for a new narrative of transformation as proposed by WHS and Grand Bargain.

We have to consider that (i) who are the NNGO has responded first and fast, (ii) who are NNGOs leadership has come from that localities, (iii) who are the NNGO that work sustainable and long term basis in that localities, (iv) there should be no more practice of imported NNGO culture. INGOs and donor agencies has the partnership with that non local NGOs that cannot be a reason in this regard any more. Major concern must be on indigenous growth of both leader and organization, long term existence, long term impact, community participation and sustainability.

13. Local context of Corruption have to be considered. Threats or stigmatization cannot be an answer, capacity and NNGO governance must give space to response first.

We do respect the concern of INGOs and donors in respect of corruption. But corruption has to be considered in view of local context and in view of capacities, e.g., in remote places vendors do not use receipts, it cannot be considered as corruption. Moreover like other southern countries, in Bangladesh too we live in an insecure society, in such a situation if corruption happened in a lower level, then you cannot say that whole organization and leadership is corrupt. INGOs and donors must have to look at the system, whether there is a system and how the system can be improved further. After receiving complaints, INGOs and donors should not act directly, they should give the space to the governance of the NNGOs to respond first. Wholesale threats and stigmatization cannot be an answer in this regard.

14. Accountability toward community is indispensable in localization: Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) and certification is an option available in this regard.

NNGOs have great role for adopting localization. They should put in place accountability, quality management and governance throughout the organization. By complying with Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) one organization can evidentially demonstrate accountability to community; establish quality management system in the organization.

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So that donors, UN agencies and INGOs get confidence to be collaborate with respective NNGOs. Regarding the accountability toward community most of INGOs have developed and implementation being facilitated by CHS Alliance (www.chsallience.org), preceded from HAPI (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International). Now the process which have also been joined and accepted by different UN and bilateral donors (e.g. Danida). Based on this CHS, there are certification system that has been developed by a separate independent body "Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI) (www.hqai.org). Some Bangladeshi NGOs are the member of this CHS Alliance and one of the Bangladeshi NGO who got two time certification on accountability and quality management from HAPI, now is in the process of HQAI certification. This is a bit costly at least if it is for LNGOs. NNGOs and LNGOs have to be in alliance and take initiative to commission low cost and appropriate contextual certification process in the country, in taking recognition from global initiatives in this regard. In fact this will give respite and reduction of capacity development cost to the INGOs/ donors / UN agencies.

15. Last but not least: We / LNGOs need to stand on our own feet with an accountable, inclusive and knowledge based approach.

NNGO has to understand the changing paradigms and has to remold their role, in following line of actions, (i) Humanitarianism and development is not mere service delivery, it is also an advocacy as we have to integrate our work in a rights based approach, i.e., facilitating our state and political forces accountable for public goods, (ii) We have to be internationalist but with patriotism, taking the voice from local to national and to international, as all policies and practices integrated in those levels, so that we have to be knowledge and technology based, (iii) We have to be accountable simultaneously to peer and as well to subordinates, toward community, we must have accountability framework which is active, regular and free from conflict of interest, (iv) In national level it is might be difficult to have a common platform, but we can coordinate with each other (e.g., in providing information on what we are doing, inviting each other's events, not attacking each other in creating face loss situation), (v)

Critical but constructive advocacy and positive engagement with government and political leaders for policy and practice changes taht and facilitating our state responsiveness, at the end of the day it is the state and political forces can introduce changes, they did in our history too, (vi) Maintaining a transparent and rule based cost culture which reflect our commitment to poor or downtrodden people, value to the money, philosophy that we are working for social welfare and RBA, we are not working for profit, and simplicity so that as much as money and resources will go to the community, (vii) Implanting sustainability index / indicators in our effort so that we will have own resources to respond fast and long term capacity to stand without dependency and (ix) Advocacy to our government so that government will come forward to provide public resources to our initiatives in long run, so that we will have less external aid dependency.

16. Our campaign is countrywide, transparent and inclusive. Above expectation or demand will be revised, updated and enriched in course of time.

We have had a lot of meeting and communication in last four months, we have developed these expectations / demands primarily in consultations with NNGOs who have been involved since WHS process. We will place expectations or demand through an open dialogue which will take place in Dhaka on 19th August i.e. on the eve of World Humanitarian Day. So far we have the plan to go the division at least, if possible we will go all the districts of Bangladesh.

In all places we will disseminate and discuss the outcome of Development Effectiveness, WHS and the Grand Bargain. Then we will revise, update and enrich these expectations or demand too. We are also contemplating to prepare an Accountability Charter for us and a related road map that how we can proceed further in this regard. We are contemplating to announce that result and charter and updated expectations from all other stakeholder through a conference by the end of 2017 or in the beginning of 2018. We solicit cooperation from our government, donors and INGOs friends for our sovereign, sustainable and accountable growth in Bangladesh for humanity and democracy.

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