

Experiences and Challenges of Bangladeshi Civil Society, UN Agencies and INGOs Localization Approach for Rohingya Response

Rely on Local Capacities Anticipate Tomorrow. Deliver Today



Background and objective

The paper is written by two insiders from local organizations working in Cox's Bazar for long time and also working in Rohingya response since August 2017 influx. They are mobilizing local NGOs through a NGO / CSO alliance called CCFN (Cox's Bazar CSO NGO Forum, www.cxb-cso-ngo.org) and representing them in different government and UN led committee on this issue. They believe in behavioral changes or advocacy through positive engagements and dialogue.

Objective of the paper is to share the experiences and challenges as well as to highlight what worked well. Authors of the paper are life long civil society activists, believing in the development of NGO/ CSO as a third sector to interplay with market and the state. They have been actively involved in the WHS (World Humanitarian Summit) process and mobilized the Bangladeshi NGOs on the Grand Bargain commitments and they have developed charter of expectations from UN and INGOs in this regard.

One of the Authors, who is leading an NGO called COAST (www.coastbd.net), has been working in Rohingya response in three areas i.e. relief, advocacy and alliance building. He is a board member of CHS Alliance while his organization, COAST achieved quality management and accountability certification from HQAI (www.hqai.org).

What worked well

- (i) Since the beginning we have started Positive Engagement and Constructive Dialogue approach with government and other important stakeholders keeping a critical perspective. We tried to avoid the blame game as less as possible, as it might create hostile environment. We found that advocacy from isolation does not bring results. All above, we believe that whether we are local, national and international NGOs, we are part of a common sector i.e. civil society. We found that, in fact, UN agencies also have been trying to promote civil societies in global level.
- (ii) Whatever we organized, public events and research, we tried to partner with INGOs and UN agencies for a shared ownership and take them with us. It increased our audiences and listeners at all levels.
- (iii) We also tried to engage Local, National and International Media as much as Possible, which helped us to reach to all possible policy stakeholders and creating critical mass at all levels. Especially it helped us to pacify anti-refugee narrative at local level.

- (iv) We and our advocacies are benefited from the Linkages with International level as we have succeeded to maintain this. We are also benefited from the maintaining linkages with C4C (Charter 4 Changes) London, ICVA and UNHCR at Geneva level.
- (v) We took all the opportunities to present formal and unified position from local CSO/NGOs to strategically important persons or institutions and we found we were duly listened. We presented our demands based on the Grand Bargain commitments i.e. localization to Mr. Mark Low Cook, the UN Under Secretary General, UN Security Council Delegation and Regional Representative of World Bank.
- (vi) we have Benefited from Our three leaders, the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner, the United Nation Resident Coordinator and the Senior Coordinator of ISCG (Inter Sectoral Coordination Group), who we found Participatory, Transparent and Inclusive. They have acknowledged our value and recognized the importance of our messages. They have given space to us so that we are able to disseminate our messages within a system of distributive and decentralized management.

Our Major Achievement So Far

- (i) UNHCR has become the leading agency at operation level and our government has signed the agreement with UNHCR for repatriation and other issues.
- (ii) Localization has been officially recognized as a cross cutting issue in the JRP (Joint Response Planning for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis, March to December 2018).
- (iii) There is a decision of allocating 25% of the budget for the host community, as we demanded for it.
- (iv) Our representation in the SEG (Strategic Executive Group), the policy guidance body of ISCG and HCTT (Humanitarian Coordination Task Team); and
- (iv) Organized events to pacify anti-refugee sentiments especially in Cox's Bazar.

Challenges Ahead

- (i) **Appropriate Interpretation of Localization and other Grand Bargain (GB) principles should be embedded in the Refugee support.** Some official documents stated that the employment of national staff in international NGOs and UN agencies is an implementation of localization-

List of campaigns by CCNF

Date	Place	Event	Title
19 Oct 2017	Cox's Bazar	Press Conference	Localization and accountability is demanded in Rohingya Relief Works
09 Nov 2017	Dhaka	Press Conference	Beside the full government control in Rohingya Relief Works, Localization and accountability is demanded
13 Dec 2017	Cox's Bazar	Day Observation	Uphold the Human Rights for both Rohingya refugees and host communities
16 Dec 2017	5 Unions of Ukhia & Teknaf	Day Observation	National Victory Day and the 4 principles of the State i.e. nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism
21 Feb 2018	5 Unions of Ukhia & Teknaf	Day Observation	International Mother Language Day and promoting education and secularism in the camps
28 Feb 2018	Cox's bazar	Seminar	"Integration of Grand Bargain Commitments in FDMN Relief and Facilitating Localization"
03 Mar 2018	Dhaka	Seminar	"Integration of Grand Bargain Commitments in FDMN Relief and Facilitating Localization"
31 Mar 2018	Cox's Bazar	Research Presentation and Dialogue	Impact of FDMN Influx on the Host Community: Emphasizing Monsoon Crisis Mitigation
30 Apr 2018	Cox's Bazar	Memorandum Hand over	To the UN Security Council Delegation
12 May 2018	Cox's Bazar Jointly with ISCG	Information Sharing Meeting	JRP 2018 for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis and Affected Host Communities in Cox's Bazar

which is an inappropriate interpretation. Such misinterpretations are based on some self-interest. We have translated the 10 commitments and 51 indicators of Grand Bargain commitments in the context and also proposed possible indicators.

We have been explaining that, reducing transaction cost, accountability to the local level and affected communities and partnering with local organizations and local government are the key to localization.

- (ii) **As the signatories of GB and C4C, UN Agencies and INGOs must have implementation policy and milestone achievement target from their headquarter level.** There are not many signatory INGO and UN agencies having policy and planning in this regard. Therefore, their staff at national to field level are hardly aware about this issue and sometimes some of them interpret these commitments mostly driven by their own personal understanding and interest. Most of the INGOs and UN Agencies consider the local NGOs as mere implementing partner, not as a decision-making partner in their operation. Most of them openly acknowledge this. They are reluctant to concede the historical fact that, Bangladeshi CSO/NGOs has the proven track record of leading and gaining of sustainability.
- (iii) **Whole of Society vs. Island of Happiness Approach.** There is a race for visibility which is creating an atmosphere of unfair competition and leading to conflict and thereby wastage of resources. Moreover, there are approximately 1,200 expatriates working in Rohingya responses. They hardly have any training on local culture and local/ Rohingya language. We accept that

One million Rohingya could be a big work force. But they are just sitting idle for receiving the relief food items. If we could use their productivity, it also could minimize the risk of being involved in offensive activities.

- Nurul Huq
Local Journalist, Ukhiya



Only informing us about it is not enough. We, the local people's representatives as well as the local government should have been able to participate in the planning meetings to decide what interventions are necessary on the ground.



- Mozaffar Ahmed
Chairman, Palongkhali Union

there is a need of expatriates as it is a complex problem and through them Bangladesh can expose the problem to the global level to gain political and other support of different countries. Most of the agencies and organizations hardly have a complaint response mechanism for the beneficiaries and stakeholders. But ISCG led by RRRRC (Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner) wants to work with coordinated and distributed governance approach with a set of professionals who have capacity to work in inter-cultural situation. It seems that most of the agencies are working in an alienated culture and in their own "island of happiness". In fact, it creates duplicated use of resources and increase tension because of the competition.

- (v) **Aid agencies must be accountable to the local level as the aid transparency is fundamental.** ISCG should track the financial flow and publish data on regular basis. It needs a coordinated effort to reduce the transaction cost. Since the beginning we have been urging the aid agencies to publish their aid data in line with IATI (International Aid Transparency Initiatives) principles. There are confusions and questions about the "lavishness" approach in the operation of some aid agencies. NGOs, especially local ones have to go through rigorous scrutiny of government system both in national and local level. A report says, only 4% of Rohingya response aid go through local NGOs, while Red Crescent gets 7%, INGOs 20% and UN agencies 69% (*When the Rubber Hits the Roads: Rohingya Crisis Response, Humanitarian Advisory Group and NIRAPOD, December 2017*). There is hardly any study on the aid flow, especially in

view of Grand Bargain and Charter 4 Change commitments. We urge to all Local/ National NGOs, INGOs and UN agencies to publish their aid data at local level, especially to the community who has the right to know about the cost of management, input and operation. We do agree that there is a need of expatriates, for specialized technical purpose and also for Bangladesh need international support. They should have easy access including appropriate and quick visa processing. But, there is also a question whether around 1,200 expatriates are demand driven or supply driven? We all, including NGOs and UN agencies, must continuously strive for reducing transaction cost as we see the scenario of dwindling aid flow. For example, all UN agencies and INGOs could have one common car or logistics pool in Cox's Bazar, which could reduce a lot of cost.

(iv) **Cost culture in Rohingya response especially staff poaching has become a major threat to sustainable Development of CSO/ NGO in Bangladesh.** Except the local NGOs, almost all other organizations (including big national NGOs) are offering a never ending competitive salary for staff recruitment, barely respecting minimum ethics. It should be a part of their safeguarding policy. The are the obvious losers are the local NGOs who have been working in Cox's Bazar and adjacent area for decades for sustainable development. This approach violates the commitment to "reinforce rather than replace local capacities". Even in the other part of Bangladesh CSO/NGOs are facing staff crisis due to this imbalanced salary offer. Poor and lower income class in Cox's Bazar are facing economic pressure due to the high price of common facilities which have increased by 200 to 300% in cases. Local NGOs have raised these issues to all stakeholders for a common minimum agreement for the sake of promoting a stable human resource and thereby to support sustainable CSO development in Bangladesh.

(v) **Need of Pragmatic Step by Step Result Oriented Humanitarian Advocacy.** It seems that this will be a long term protracted crisis and the problem is already ridden over Bangladesh. Myanmar junta is applying a dilly dally tactics. Some of the global and regional super powers are trying to see this as a bilateral issue. On the other hand, there is a question of human dignity of Rohingyas.

There is a need of pragmatic step by step result oriented non-threatening advocacy toward Bangladesh government, and need of rigorous effort at international level to hold Myanmar junta to account. Otherwise, we are paving a passage for growth of an ultra nationalist fascist state in Asia. We have to keep the spirit that this is an international issue. Most of the NGOs working in Rohingya response are not interested in humanitarian advocacy both in local, national and international level. They only try to do advocate for easy access in relief operation. We have to change this mindset. We have to act at all levels. We should not be advocacy blind. Otherwise it will be an injustice to Bangladesh keeping the problem only for the country.

(vi) **Rhetoric must boil down to practical steps; Cox's Bazar and Bangladesh deserve International assistance.** Different studies have shown that by the end of this year almost all the forests of Cox's Bazar will be depleted due to the firewood collection of Rohingyas for cooking. Even the third layer of drinking water is scarcely available this year. Saline water and contamination has been found in the ground water in Cox's Bazar. Monthly, more than 100 tons of plastic disposal is being dumped in the area. The population density is very high with around of 37,700 per square km, 1 million Refugees are accommodated in about 24 square km. Natural resource is the main lifeline for the poor in Cox's Bazar, that is now depleting. Employment rate for local poor has gone down. There are evidences of women trafficking. Cox's Bazar and Bangladesh deserve international assistance to address these issues. There is a lot of rhetoric but there is little action or impact at ground level.

(vii) **Advocacy and effort needed to keep the Global Political and Donor Interest, Rohingya Issue should not be a lone problem for Bangladesh.** JRP has only succeeded to raise 20% of the funds so far, for the period until December 2018. This is worrying. But the challenges are, how to sustain donors' interest and how to gain support for Bangladesh and gain political support to hold Myanmar junta accountable to justice. INGOs and UN have to play a big role in this regard. They should not be only engaged in relief operation. INGOs also should organize campaign, public mobilization and advocacy in their capital of origin country.