

Who is building who's capacity?

Poaching skilled Staff from local organizations

Almost all local organizations of Cox's Bazar faced severe staff poaching by International humanitarian agencies aftermath of August 2017 Rohingya refugee influx. COAST and Mukti, two local organizations, have lost around 400 staff. Both have been working in this district for long time with a commitment for sustainability as they are originated from here and have the local leadership.

Humanitarian response to the sudden refugee influx requires huge human recourse, it is natural. But, unfortunately most of the staff have been picked recklessly by quite an unethical approach.

- (i) recruitment is completed without any clearance from the predecessor organization;
- (ii) No notice period was given;
- (iii) Partnership with the implementing organization by definition meant to assist in their capacity development which is severely undermined by poaching their staff without any discussion;
- (iv) Staff of the local NGOs were directly offered high salaried job while they went to international agency office for other purpose; and
- (vi) Even candidates having police case for money misappropriation and vandalism are also recruited without any verification.

These unexpected practices have been done by the international humanitarian agencies who are signatories of Charter4Change, even who are certified for quality accountability and management and who are prominent as faith based organizations. Some national NGOs also have done the same.

INGOs agreed while signing the Charter4Change to compensate local NGOs if they hire staff from them. But they hardly adhered their commitment in this case. Charter4Change group conducted a study in this regard and pleaded for ethical recruitment. And the signatories themselves hardly took any initiative to establish their commitment.

Two cases of COAST

COAST employed a local boy who came with a secondary school certificate from a remote island. COAST invested on him by paying until his tertiary education and gave him a lot of training during his seventeen years career. Ultimately, he was lured by a famous international agency in an informal process and recruited him without any notice or checking with COAST.

Another international humanitarian agency came to Bangladesh and with the help and partnership of COAST they started operation in Cox's Bazar. COAST has given them office space and desk in its small premise and deputed a senior and trained woman colleague to that project. Very soon they established their own office in Cox's Bazar and recruited the woman with higher salary without any notification or minimum courtesy consultation with COAST.

Subsidy from the local organizations

As a development organization, COAST has a value-based recruitment process where new recruits are given comprehensive training to be capable of working with target population and grow certain values and right-based understanding to serve the people. This is why some international agencies prefer to attract and recruit this trained recourse for their benefit. They don't need to invest to prepare the new recruits to serve. This is a subsidy from the local organizations who prepared the human recourse, but neither recognized, nor compensated.

COAST has a commitment to work in the coastal area of Bangladesh and that's why it developed a progressive microfinance program with right based approach and gained a level of operational sustainability. COAST spend around 30% of its budget for staff training with a principle that they will work and stand for the rights of coastal poor at the end.

So, COAST do like to raise the issue of this investment from the poor people's money for preparing a work force to realize poor people's right. Sometimes it is said that shifting job is an individual choice. But, COAST demands the right of the organization who serves the people should prevail over individual choice.

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International organizations claim that they build the capacity of the local and 'small' organizations. If the history of almost four decades of this 'capacity building' is evaluated and compared with the current advantage of having ready and trained staff without any investment to serve them, it could be understood actually who's capacity is being built by whom.

That's why an ethical recruitment policy is widely demanded in both emergency humanitarian response and regular development project interventions in Bangladesh. Donors, INGOs and UN agencies are expected to follow a common salary framework for their own project or in partnerships with local NGOs.

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