

The important thing is not to stop questioning.
Curiosity has its own reason for existing.
– Albert Einstein

1. Aren't you anti-INGO?

Not at all. We are not against INGO. We do believe, INGO and we altogether (including local and national NGOs), are important part of common civil society sector having different roles in different level.

2. Your statements seem to be anti-INGO.

It might appear like that though what we are telling are entirely based on the discourses of Principle of Partnership, Grand Bargain Commitments and Development Effectiveness. INGOs have endorsed, agreed upon and signed all those documents. We are saying nothing new, just urging for implementation of those commitments. And we are raising the issues of lack in policy declaration and implementations.

3. What does it mean that INGO and Local NGOs have different roles in different level?

We believe that, INGOs should play leading role at the international level while at the local or national level they should facilitate local NGOs to take the lead and grow.

4. What does facilitating local NGOs at local level mean?

INGOs could facilitate the local NGOs to grow as sovereign, accountable and sustainable organizations to serve the local people they are familiar with. INGOs with advantages of having knowledge and technology of global north, could transfer those to the local NGOs through a defined and systematic process. In fact, INGOs have been doing this historically and successfully they have facilitated some sovereign, sustainable and accountable local NGOs in global south.

5. How the international, national and local NGOs are differentiated?

In this respect, the definition of IASC (Inter Agency Standing Committee) is taken.

The NGOs working in different national boundaries and working in a country as an international federation member are considered as INGO.

The NGOs having countrywide operations are considered as national NGOs.

And the NGOs originated in a community or in a locality and working there are considered as local NGOs.

6. Do you disagree that local organization needs capacity development?

The limitation of the term “capacity development” is, it is top down and one sided communicative. Former UN human right commissioner Marry Anderson termed this as a colonial terminology where it is assumed that the natives don’t have ‘capacity’ to comply with the international entities.

Instead we want to say that local organization need “capacity convergence”, which means, we are recognizing that the local organization has also some capacity e.g., knowledge and understanding on local culture and appropriate navigation to deal with local power dynamics. In the cases of the conflict situations in Syria and Afghanistan, it was admitted by all humanitarian parties that the local NGOs had better capacity than the international agencies.

So, when we say “capacity convergence” we agree about a two-way communication process and relationship of mutual learning from each other with a horizontal relation.

7. What are your position on risk in fiduciary management or accountability requirement for local NGOS while partnering with donors, INGOs and UN agencies?

We never said that fiduciary management could be compromised. Rather, we say that it could be redefined in view of the local perspective. We believe that local NGO / CSOs are in better position for accountability to the affected population and stakeholders as envisaged in the 6th Workstream of Grand Bargain, participation revolution.

There are a lot of examples that many small local organizations have been managing projects by maintaining very stringent fiduciary management under local intermediaries, e.g., MJF (*Manusher Jonno Foundation*) is managing the funds of DFID and other donors by funding to more than 150 local organizations in respect of promoting human rights and governance even without any assistance of expatriates for more than one decades.

We believe that the assessment and indicators of capacity, accountability and requirements should be revised in view of country and southern perspective. We use a phrase in this regard “for good implementation, accountability should come first rather than accounts-ability”.

8. You have a blanket demand that all UN agencies and INGOs should be roll back from field operation, is it feasible?

First, we need to clarify that, roll back from field operation by UN agencies and INGOs does not mean the full withdrawal from the country.

We believe that their role should be limited into monitoring and technical assistance for project implementation. In respect of Rohingya response, all the field operation and activities in Ukhiya and Teknaf should be led by local NGOs CSOs, local governments and other local actors, while UN agencies and INGOs should remain in Cox's Bazar or Dhaka and do monitoring and provide technical assistance to the partners.

This will ensure Whole of Society Approach (WOSA), tailoring to local NGO CSOs development, local accountability and reducing transaction cost.

Especially in Bangladesh, NGO CSOs have showed proven track records of capabilities in different cases. So, we strongly feel that UN agencies and INGOs could have been remaining in monitoring and technical assistance.

In fact, it should be a universal approach that the prime objectives of UN agencies and INGOs should be to promote local NGO CSOs and thereby to progressively phase out from field operation, especially in the aid recipient southern countries.

9. Don't you think some advocacies should be exclusively led by UN agencies and INGOs?.

There is hardly any single issue of advocacy should only be led by UN agencies and INGOs. In southern countries including Bangladesh, the policy leaders are more inclined to listen to their own CSO leaders rather than from others, especially in respect of any local issue. Instead The local CSO NGO should gradually take over the advocacy issues for longer term sustainability. There are examples of success stories and reputations of Bangladeshi CSOs NGOs for dealing with sensitive advocacy and campaign according to local demand.

It could be more effective toward sustainability if all the advocacy is partnered with local NGOs or mobilized by a local or national organization facilitated by UN agencies and INGOs. This could be the best approach for institutionalizing the sustainability.

10. Sometime your advocacy seems negative, imposing and aggressive. What do you think on that?

Neither do we believe in imposing localization upon anyone, nor we believe in being aggressive or negative. In some situation we have to say the bitter truth.

We are aware of the fact that, the UN agencies and INGOs who have signed or endorsed the Grand Bargain or Charter for Change documents, hardly prepared any internal policy for their staff deployed in the local level. Some of the INGOs have projects on localization and they have produced good reports on doing this on the ground. Considering this situation, we raised our demands to discuss or orient the staff members of UN agencies and I-NGOs on all those agreements and ask them to come up with ideas on what to do. We believe that only such an internal process of self-actualization might bring the sustainability in localization process, i.e., a sustainable and positive local NGO/CSO sector in a country.

We believe in positive engagement and dialogue with all stakeholders, but as we do not like to abandon the critical perspectives. Sometime our statements might seem different. In such a situation we request all others to be tolerant to us, upholding the spirit of “Culture of Polemics” as it is a sort of democratization of development management and it will pave the passage to create knowledge toward a progressive change.

11. All INGOs and UN agencies have their own accountability mechanism. Then why are you pleading for accountability at ground level? Aren't you disturbing their work?

We have to perceive that whether it is local, national, International NGOs or UN agencies, we all are public institutions and we have to be accountable to public at all level. Moreover, we are running with the tax payer's money whether we are from global north or from global south, the tax payers demand accountability at all level.

We all know the limitations of institutional mechanism of accountability, which is top down and it hardly works. So, nowadays we all emphasize accountability in grass root, i.e., accountability from bottom up.

As the local NGOs/ CSOs in fact we are promoting what is agreed by all in those agreements and what is largely demanded. We are primarily emphasizing the Workstream 1- greater transparency, Workstream 2- localization and Workstream 6- participation revolution of Grand Bargain commitment and the commitment 3 of the Charter for Change.

We strongly believe in demanding accountability in front line and through this rather we are cooperating and strengthening their work.

We have to recognize that, former and present Secretary General of UN mentioned that NWoW (New Way of Working) and Localization is a transformational agenda. They urged that in respect of humanitarianism and development, we have to be accountable and transparent to the local level. They also urged to engage with local actors for instituting sustainability. It needs a lot of behavioral change among the actors within the institution.

We believe that it will not come overnight. Moreover, we also believe that there is no formula of one size fits all. It needs a continuous and consistent campaign and engagement from front line and demand side.

12. How do you see the role of INGOs, especially at the international level?

INGOs should take leadership role in global north as well as may be in some respect of international level. There is an emerging sense of “internationalism” especially due to climate change problems, de-globalization of humanitarian responsibilities and “inequalities among countries” due to unfriendly trade and tax regulations. INGOs have good research and campaign in this regard where they could play more active role.

Moreover, in their country of origin, the anti-aid and xenophobic sentiments are growing where they have lot to do. They should consider to reorient their development education in view “global citizenship”, in favour of a world of peace, democracy, equality and justice- this is what we all want.

13. Don't you think, sometimes your statements also seem to be against UN agencies?

We want UN agencies to be limited in monitoring their partners and provide them with technical assistance instead of involving much in the field operation. In fact it is the approach of instituting sustainability and developing the local NGO/ CSOs. There are a number of UN policies where engagement with the progressive civil society is promoted. The critical roles of civil society have been widely accepted in the consultation process of sustainable development goal / agenda 2030, human rights monitoring, global compacts on refugees and migration and many more.

There are some conflict situation like Syria where UN bodies and peacekeeping mission need to take the lead even in the field operations and providing with the basic service deliveries as the local NGOs/ CSOs hardly have facilities to do that. But such a situation is not prevailing in Bangladesh.

14. What do you mean by 'UN is our last resort'? Do you expect protection and space facilitation/ mediator role of UN agencies?

Yes, it is true, UN agencies is our last resort for human rights, democracy, justice and also for redistributive justice. Very recently they have a lot of positive steps towards civil society engagement and development. So, we need a stronger UN system in our world. UN is the one who conducted WHS (World Humanitarian Summit), the source of Grand Bargain commitments.

So, naturally, we expect protection and space facilitation from UN agencies especially for local NGOs CSOs.

15. Do you believe in Inclusive and Complementarity approach?

Yes, of course. Our approach is inclusive, i.e., we need all actors including INGOs, UN agencies and national NGOs. However, in view of complementarity approach, each of the agencies has its own comparative advantage and they should act accordingly and take leading role. And for the sake of sustainability and accountability, they should work with the local CSO/ NGOs.

16. Are you against the expatriates in Bangladesh?

No, not at all. We nevertheless believe it should be demand driven, not supply driven. First, the need should be assessed and checked whether the skill and expertise is available at local level or not.

Moreover, we are in favor of systematic and optimized contribution of the expatriates, their job description primarily should embody knowledge and technology transfer to the local colleagues. INGO and UN agencies in Bangladesh set a lot of good examples in this regard.

It is also observed that, there are deployment of fresh graduates as expatriates in Bangladesh and the complaints raised that the local staff needs to give extra time to train the fresh expatriates, which is costly. So, there is a demand of experienced expatriates to be placed in executive positions.

17. Why are you against the free migration of staff from local NGOs to INGOs and UN agencies?

First of all, we are not against such a migration, if INGOs and UN agencies accept the following;

- Local NGOs invest a huge resource to develop a staff member, to turn a fresh graduate into an expert. Considering the investment, INGOs and UN agencies could compensate the local NGOs in exchange of having a ready expert at the local level, that might save their resource. It is agreed in Charter 4 Change especially by INGOs, though they hardly comply with it.
- Most of the time such a migration happens through non-transparent head hunting process and without a minimum notice period, or a reference check. It has happened in Rohingya response. Due to this kind of staff poaching, some of the local NGOs has bogged down by losing their capable staff on whom they have been investing for decades.
- This kind of migration or brain drain happens because local CSO/ NGOs are hardly able to pay the level of salary UN agencies and INGOs offer. It is true that UN agencies and INGOs hardly pay equal level of salary for equal level of competencies during the partnership with local NGOs, as they pay to their own staff.

18. Why are you demanding a common salary framework and reduction of salary level especially while you are raising voice for localization in Rohingya response?

We are very clear on demanding a common salary framework, not a salary structure, i.e., a range of minimum to maximum level for different categories of education and experiences.

Yes, we are raising voice for reducing the present level of salary structure in Rohingya response. Because of the surge response, the salary level might have been offered at a higher level, which is quite higher than the existing NGO salary practice and moreover, due to dwindling situation of aid for Rohingya response, it is hardly maintainable and sustainable.

We are also raising voice that, donors (whether UN agencies and INGOs) should give freedom and technical assistance to local NGOs to frame their own sovereign salary structure with a long-term vision. INGOs should not impose their own salary framework in a locality where they might not stay for long time and after their interventions, the local NGOs will have to continue.

It should be also noted that in Cox's Bazar, there were demonstration from local civil society actors against price hike, especially against ever escalating house rents. The alliance of Private sector employees and fixed-income people submitted memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner, to mitigate the higher claims of local house owners and price hike in the city, which is claimed to be a direct effect of unsustainable and unmatched high salary suddenly offered by the international organizations. These are bubbled up economy and the price hike is 25 to 40% higher than that of other cities.

We believe the salary structure should give long term benefits to staff rather than one time monthly cash to take home, which leads to an extravagant consumerism culture. In fact this is not a healthy management practice that creates a stable human resource base.

19. Some of the INGOs and UN agencies do almost 100% implementation through local partners (NGOs), then why do you demand partnership policy?

Most of these existing partnerships are: (i) "project after project approach" having no long term vision for institutional development for sustainability, (ii) they have been considered as only "Implementing partners" not as "decision-making partner" (iii) INGOs and UN agencies, in most cases, hardly gives overhead or management cost. Sometime they demand contribution, which is a sort of undue pressure on local NGOs, and (iv) there are hardly any code of conduct, complaint response mechanism, participation and accountability framework so that the partners or affected people have the space to participate.

In fact, these are repetition of "Sub contracting and sub ordination culture". Moreover, most of the partnerships are not made through a transparent and competitive process. Instead, there is a practice of handpicked and personal interest biased.

These kind of practices are diminishing the possibilities of development of the sovereign, accountable and sustainable local NGO CSO in the long run. Rather it is misappropriation of a level of energy and spirit by a time bound operational management. We know that most of the local NGOs CSOs are being exhausted in this situation.

So, we are demanding a Partnership Policy from INGOs and UN agencies in view of present paradigm of localization, (i) which should be criteria-based, (ii) should embody long term approach with milestone achievements aiming to sovereign, accountable and sustainable local institutions and (iii) the policies must be transparent and competitive in practice.

20. Why do you expect too much of practice in respect of localization from INGOs?

There are several factors in respect of this expectation, especially from INGOs.

First, it is the INGOs who have prepared and signed the Charter 4 Change during 2015 even before of Grand Bargain commitment which is signed on May 2016.

Second, there are several projects run by INGOs, especially two globally well-known projects in respect of localization, i.e., 'Shifting Power' led by Christian Aid and 'ELNHA' led by OXFAM.

Apart from these, remarkable reports of analysis and action research have been produced by INGOs. Some of the reports are mentioned here in chronological order, e.g.,

- (i) **The Start Fund, Start Network and Localization** (April 2017) which first mentioned the seven dimensions of localization. Start Fund is the biggest network of INGOs in respect of humanitarian assistance.
- (ii) **Localization in Practice, Emerging Indicators and Practical Recommendations** (June 2018) by ACF, Start Network, UKAID and CDAC Network).
- (iii) **Accelerating Localization through Partnership** (February 2019) by Christian Aid, CARE, Tearfund, Action Aid, CAFOD and Oxfam. This is an excellent practical guide in respect of localization enriched with experiences from four countries.
- (iv) **NGOs and Risk-Managing Uncertainty in Local– International Partnership** (March 2017) done by USAID, InterAction and Humanitarian Outcomes, with the assistance of CARE, Concern Worldwide, Danish Refugee Council, International Medical Corps, Mercy Corps, Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children, and World Vision.

So, the natural expectation is, we do like to see reflections of those projects and reports in Bangladesh and especially in Rohingya response.