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A Nexus between Practitioners and Academics is Fundamental for New Narratives on Localization

1. Background: Who We Are and What We Do

Before delivering my statement I would like to introduce myself. I am managing COAST Trust, a non-government organization in Bangladesh (www.coastbd.net).We have been working for around two decades for sustainable development of the coastal poor of the country. Our aim is to be strong in both service delivery and advocacy, with greater emphasis on institutional strength. We do not intend to be too big so as to lose the connection with the community, nor too small to be able to gain sustainability and be counted when does it come to policy influence. In respect to institutional strength, we stress on participation, accountability, transparency and human rights in governance. In recognition of our continuous efforts to maintain high management standards, COAST Trust has been rewarded accountability and quality management certification by Geneva-based HQAI (www.hqai.org). We have been tireless in our involvement with formal and informal alliances, both short term and long term as necessary.

We always try to be the first responder in a humanitarian crisis and have been able to create a ready fund for this purpose. However, as a development organization, we emphasize on addressing the root causes as well as on advocacy. We continuously strive for building capacity for communities that are sustainable. Our main source of income is the progressive micro finance programme integrated with RBA (Rights-Based Approach) as defined here: http://coastbd.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Integration_-RBA.pdf. Micro finance is our core programme that aims to support people's organizations set up by the community members and to create leadership from among the poorer section of the society and thus create an alternative power structure. Under this programme, we also mobilize assistance for the community organizations in the area of legitimate demand mediation and social justice, primary healthcare, disaster management, technological expansion, community radio and institutional development at local level. Apart from these, we have numerous non-core programmes based on donor grants, including for education, Rohingya response, climate adaptation, campaign on climate justice, tax justice and localization, motivating youths against extremism and so on.

Our present portfolio (2017-18) consists of a 1,297-strong staff, a core programme revolving around a credit fund of USD 23.01 million and donor grants worth USD 2.57 million. Last year, our operation cost stood at USD 5.76 million. As many as 111,000 families are the direct beneficiaries of our programme.

We have been involved with the GHP (Global Humanitarian Partnership) process that prepared the Partnership Principles in 2007 and signed by almost all major humanitarian actors. We have been also involved with the WHS (World Humanitarian Summit) process since the beginning, led the country process and tried to contribute to it. Finally, after the Istanbul Summit (WHS, May 2016) COAST Trust engaged in mobilization at the national level with a number of demands in view of Grand Bargain commitments, and developed a charter of expectation signed by more than 50 NGOs which was presented in a public forum on 19 August 2017 in Dhaka (http://coastbd.net/our-common-

space-our-complementary-roles-equitable-partnership-for-sovereign-and-accountable-civil-society-growth/). We encourage positive engagements and dialogues with donors and INGOs (International NGOs) instead of engaging in a blame-game. We took the Rohingya response as a test for promoting localization with our alliance CCNF (Cox's Bazar CSO NGO Forum, www.cxb-cso-ngo.org).

We always believe in striving for excellence in our service delivery, advocacy and institutional strength. This is why we give importance to develop our staff as resources in the community. We equip them with ICT (Information Communication Technologies) tools and continuously train them so they are up-to-date on issues that concern them as well as the community they work for. We spend considerable amount of time in training, experience sharing, documentation and improvement of ongoing planning. We have two academics on the seven-member trustee board.

We believe academics are essential part of our knowledge management (training, monitoring, experience and process documentation, evaluation and research). They are our driving force in respect to creating "knowledge for change". We strongly believe that monitoring, evaluation, research and relation to academics and academic institutions are our driving forces toward our action for changes and striving for excellence. We believe that it is an indispensable part of our organizational development.

2. **Experiential learning in organization and sector development: A correlation of academics in advocacy and knowledge management.**

Bangladesh is a country of booming civil society and NGOs. It is indeed a necessity for the society too, as its people have a strong urge for democracy and social justice based on human rights. The people of Bangladesh fought for this in the 1971 liberation war and they are proud of it. However, these rights face a great challenge in the wake of fundamentalism, extremism and the state efforts to limit democratic spaces. More worrisome is the emergence of a theory/notion being propagated these days is that development first and democracy later. The civil society/NGOs are being developed as the third sector after the state and the market. We consider political parties as part of the state. Like in some other parts of the world, political parties in Bangladesh face certain challenges in responding to the real
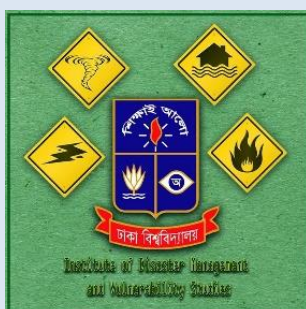
University effort for disaster management human resource and advocacy on campaign against genocide

Bangladesh is commonly known for the natural disasters. Around 5% of world's total disasters happen here causing around 80% of the total disaster damages. Historically the people of the affected areas of Bangladesh have developed their own way of resilience with the help of government and the NGOs and CSOs. University of Dhaka is motivated to capture this folk knowledge and integrated it to the relevant global knowledge and initiated the 'Institute of Disaster Management and Vulnerability Studies' (http://www.idmvs.edu.bd/). Some of the prominent humanitarian practitioners teach there. The institute is the major source of human resource in Bangladesh for the humanitarian sector.

Centre for Genocide Studies (https://cgsdu.org/) is the other initiative of the University of Dhaka. After the Rohingya influx in August 2017 the centre came to the main focus of attraction of the CSO activists who want to prepare their advocacy to hold Myanmar junta accountable to the International Criminal Court and other international forums. International and UN experts have shown interest on this centre as it organised international seminars on the situation recently.

needs of the electorates. The civil society and NGOs work in their own right to make a balance with the state and the market to respond to the need of the public in their efforts to build a democratic society based on human rights and justice.

NGO service deliveries are developed to fill the gaps of services of the state institutions, including humanitarian response. After independence, most NGOs grew up distributing reliefs in the 1970s. In the next decade, many turned to micro finance and strived for sustainability without foreign funds. Then in the 90s, integration of RBA and advocacy were included as interventions. This is how two dimensions of development interventions are identified now i.e. a group of NGOs reorient their services toward market forces and the other group goes for a more civil society approach (integrating advocacy and rights-based approach). Most of the mid-level organizations like COAST have taken civil society approach. Please note that there are many civil society organizations in Bangladesh like COAST; they hardly depend on funds from donors.

If we look at the organizational development of BRAC, the biggest NGO in Bangladesh and in the world, we see that it invested a significant amount of fund in knowledge management (I perceive the total cycle of monitoring, evaluation, research, and experience and documentation process could be called knowledge/learning management). Sometimes, BRAC's research department annual budget is larger than that of some big INGOs operating in the country. Another big NGO, PROSHIKA (acronym for training, learning and action) also used to have such a knowledge management. There are at least 50 vibrant mid-level civil society

organizations and NGOs in Bangladesh, having the same size and portfolio as COAST, and whose leaders have a strong commitment to knowledge management, strong monitoring and evaluation. They also maintain strong relations with the academics. Periodically, they invite academics for evaluation and research in their organizations.

Advocacy could be defined as influence for change in policies and practices. Sometimes, however, changing policies and practices is difficult as it challenges the establishment. However, by building strong relationship with the media, advocacy organizations can have a huge impact on the society that can create critical awareness among the mass. Advocacy is the most dominant working area of civil society

While Academic and Expert expedite advocacy

COAST conducted a study on the impacts of Rohingya influx on the host community in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. The study found a huge damages in the natural resources and recommended for expert advice on how to overcome the next monsoon crisis. Taking this into account as well as to ensure the acceptability of the advice to both local government officials and international community, COAST organized a public dialogue in Cox's Bazar to share the study findings and invited two of the renowned academicians and internationally recognized experts Dr. Ainun Nishat and Dr. Atiq Rahman. They have visited the camp areas prior to attend the public dialogue and given practical advice on short and long term perspectives. Our small effort to involve them into the issue motivated them to carry on the advocacy on the issues at both national and international level. Their involvement helped us to effectively spread our words.

organizations and NGOs in Bangladesh now, although sometimes they face the challenge of a shrinking space. In most cases, advocacy is backed by solid research by academics. The TIB (Transparency International Bangladesh), for example, plays a strong role in this regard. Mid-level national networks such as EquityBD (www.equitybd.org), hosted by COAST Trust, also play a great role in this by publishing policy papers based on empirical research based on facts and figures collected from primary sources. Since the Rohingya influx in August 2017, the CCNF (Cox's Bazar CSO NGO Forum, www.cxb-cso-ngo.org) is also playing a role in campaigning for localization. So far, they have organized four public events, five grassroots mobilization and handed over at least three memorandums to high officials of UN including to UN Secretary General. . In this short period of time, CCNF published five briefing papers on public events. Recently, it published a brief paper on empirical observations and review with a host of futuristic proposals in respect to localization of Rohingya response. Please find the paper here: http://coastbd.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Localization-Approach-for-Rohingya-Response.pdf.

3. **Five challenges for CSOs as a third sector in southern countries that need academics' attentions**

   There are five challenges for CSO/ NGOs to grow as the third sector in southern countries, where they need support from academics in their activism. The challenges are as follows:

   (a) The southern states are showing signs of a shrinking the space for the CSOs who play a significant role in building a democratic and pluralistic society. Because they challenge the establishments that try to limit democratic spaces like freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and right to information and so on, in some countries there is a love and hate relationship between the CSOs/NGOs and the state actors. I consider political parties as part of the state whether they are in the government or in opposition. For a greater acceptance, the CSOs play a non-partisan but political role in most countries but do not participate in elections. They also consider positive engagements, especially with the state actors, but without compromising their critical perspectives.

   (b) The theory/notion preached mostly by some state politicians is, "Development first and democracy later". The idea is that there should be a limit to some democratic rights in exchange for some development programme. But history shows that development and democracy must go to gather, otherwise none of it would sustain. Democracy should be considered indispensable for human resource and institutional development.

   (c) Fundamentalist forces consider the CSOs/NGOs as their main enemy as they work for a democratic and pluralistic society, which they oppose. In most countries, CSOs are their main target. It's a double burden for CSOs. They are targeted by the state when they talk against autocracy and shrinking democratic spaces and targeted by the fundamentalists when they promote a democratic, rights-based and inclusive society.

   (d) In countries like Bangladesh, there is a strong urgency among some NGOs to become operationally sustainable through micro finance. This leads them to go for commercialization. There is disinclination among NGOs to be developed as CSOs and integrate rights-based approach in their interventions. NGOs should know their genesis. They should not rest with mere NGO activities, filling in the gaps in public services. They should also engage in addressing the denial of rights by mobilizing people and doing advocacy at all levels.

   (e) There are some NGOs who want to limit their humanitarian response operations. Even there are some humanitarian NGOs who hardly want to get involved in humanitarian

advocacy. Red Crescent and Red Cross movement might be needed to rescue people from a conflict situation. But in a peaceful situation there is a need for NGOs/CSOs to address the root causes through humanitarian advocacy and other activisms.

Country perspective might vary, but I believe in most of the southern countries we face such challenges that should be addressed through positive engagement of state parties and NGOs/CSOs. This is where we need assistance from academics both in classroom where they teach and also outside the classroom when they carry out research and review. They need to set good examples and offer evidence to convince all the forces that NGOs/CSOs have to be indispensably integrated to build a democratic and pluralistic society based on human rights, which is the base for peaceful living not only in a certain country but in all countries around the world.

4. **New narrative of localization needs attention of academics to create knowledge for change management.**

In 2007, after discussions at global level, the Principles of Partnership was agreed upon by almost all INGOs, UN agencies, Red Crescent Movements and World Bank. The Principles include Equality, Transparency, Result-oriented approach, Responsibility and Complementarity. But there are little follow up on its progress. There are no efforts for its multiplication and implementation in the field level either.

From 2014 to 2016, a rigorous process of World Humanitarian Summit took place around the world. It was a process of research and discussion from ground level, the culmination of which was some serious pledges and commitments at the global level, which was reflected in Grand Bargain commitments in Istanbul in May 2016. There are 10 streams and 51 indicators in Grand Bargain commitments. It has been signed by almost all major donor countries, all UN agencies and major INGO networks.

The major line of actions proposed in the Grand Bargain commitments is localization, i.e. stream no 2. In a simple way of descriptions first, it is for sustainability of the humanitarian and development efforts, and even if there are no or little funding, development or humanitarian efforts should be spearheaded by locally originated institutions whether they are NGOs/CSOs or local government or community organizations. It is for accountability towards the affected community. Such efforts will reduce operational costs too.

But around two years on, it is business as usual. In my analysis, donors and INGOs, who are mostly from northern or developed countries, have been suffering from insecurity, and in one way or another they hardly want to relinquish their power. But there is nothing to be worried about relinquishing power. In absolute term, it is in fact a turning phase from "control by money power" to "influence by knowledge power". After four years of active participation in this process and finally two years of mobilizing demand side for localization in Bangladesh, I feel there should be the following changes:

(i) Donors and INGOs need to go for **FACILITATION** rather than operational role.

(ii) Need to devise how to ABANDON the leadership role progressively and create **SPACE for LOCALS in leadership positions.**

(iii) Dependency should be primarily on **PHILOSHOPY** rather than on TECHNINAL skills and knowledge. Embark where the leadership embodies **Human Right PHILOSHPY, with INCLUSIVE and TRANSPERENT LEADERSHIP** skill.

(iv) **ACCOUNTABILITY** has to be given much more importance rather than on ACCOUNTS-ABILITY. If a local leader or local organization devises accountability

first and on a priority basis then in course of time "accounts-ability" will grow naturally, even without any external inputs.

(v)   There should be no more patron-client-based partnership with southern organizations, which might secure individual leadership, but in the end it does not help grow sustainable institutions. So the **PARTNERSHIP RELATION** should be based on **POLICY, CRITERIA**, and I**MPLEMENTATION** should be **TRANSPARENT** and **COMPETATIVE.**

(vi)   **RESPECT and LEARNING from LOCAL CULTURE** rather than introduction of own culture.

(vii)   Prepare **POLICY** to make staff free from conflict of interest and **DEVISE OPEN and TRANSPARENT MECHAHNISM for COMPLAINTS REPONSE.** Southern NGOs need to make their culture as an **OPEN ORGANISATION.**

In the last two years, especially after the Grand Bargain Commitments, some local NGOs, including COAST, in Bangladesh tried to mobilize demand side expectations (http://coastbd.net/our-common-space-our-complementary-roles-equitable-partnership-for-sovereign-and-accountable-civil-society-growth/). We need attention of academics to create knowledge for a change in management toward transformational agenda as envisaged in Grand Bargain commitment. Otherwise, I fear, in a few years we will have to repeat the process like in the case of WHS, and we will have to invent the wheels again. We need to devise an aid structure free from "exploitation and self-service" which will encourage creation of locally sustainable institutions.

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