DEBATING THE GRAND BARGAIN IN BANGLADESH

HOW ARE GRAND BARGAIN COMMITMENTS SHAPING THE RESPONSE TO THE FDM/ROHINGYA INFLUX?[i]

9 March 2018 – K. Van Brabant & S. Patel

This note is based on conversations and listening, in February 2018, to Government officials, UN, INGO, Bangladeshi CSO and donors, observation of various working meetings, and two feedback meetings.[ii]

THE GRAND BARGAIN: SOME BASICS

Grand Bargain: Its commitments derive from the observation of a growing gap in global humanitarian financing. It is imperative for all to find ways of enhancing cost-effectiveness. That means greater support for national actors, a reduction of the transactional costs of too many intermediaries, more cash programming, more joint needs assessments, a participation revolution, simplified and harmonised reporting etc. "*The status quo is no longer an option.*"

Localisation: (commitment 2)

- *"We engage with local and national responders in a spirit of partnership and aim to reinforce rather than replace local and national capacities.*
- *Increase and support multi-year investment in the institutional capacities of local and national responders, including preparedness, response and coordination capacities, especially in fragile contexts.*
- *Work to remove or reduce barriers that prevent organisations and donors from partnering with local and national responders, to lessen their administrative burden."*
- *Support and complement national coordination mechanisms where they exist and include local and national responders in international coordination mechanisms as appropriate and in keeping with humanitarian principles.*
- *An understanding inherent to the Grand Bargain is that benefits are for all partners, not just the big organisations.*
- *The Grand Bargain is a level playing field where we all meet as equals."*

Participation revolution: (commitment 6)

- *"We need to include the people affected by humanitarian crises and their communities in our decisions to be certain that the humanitarian response is relevant, timely, effective and efficient.*
- *We need to provide accessible information, ensure that an effective process for participation and feedback is in place and that design and management decisions are responsive to the views of affected communities and people."*

I.   The Setting

Unprecedented experiences: Bangladesh has tremendously improved its capacities to manage its frequent crises of cyclones, flooding etc. But in the past six months, it has been confronted with two unprecedented experiences: 1. A very rapid, large-scale influx of forcibly displaced from Myanmar (FDM) and 2. A very rapid, large-scale influx of foreign aid workers in response to it. The first responders were national and local authorities and army, Red Crescent Society, CSOs and INGOs already working in Cox Bazaar, as well as many 'citizen-led initiatives'. International assistance is acknowledged to have been needed. Having been a generous, humane

host, the situation also creates significant political and security challenges for the Bangladesh government & citizens.

Relative success – with quality problems: The FDM arrived in bad, life-threatening, condition. Avoiding large scale morbidity and even mortality and achieving a level of 'stabilisation' in five months is a major collective achievement and success. But there are significant quality problems e.g. short life span of the first round of toilets and shelter materials; a significant lack of geographical coordination and referral-based integration of services; the need to relocate some 100.000 FDM and several services from hazard areas; excessive separation of thematic components (health-nutrition-WATSAN; Communicating with Communities-feedback & complaints-GBV-PSEA); little effective engagement with affected populations; and at times sub-standard quality of services.

II.   Surge Modalities: Strategic choices shape the relation between international & national actors

Different surge modalities but dominated by international actors: Many Bangladeshi and international organisations already in-country responded first by deploying existing staff and hiring some new ones from other parts of the country and in Cox Bazaar district (CBD). Some international agencies present in country continue to work with existing Bangladeshi 'partners' or quickly engaged with others they already knew a bit from before. Others started working with totally new 'partners'. More 'local' Bangladeshi organisations tended to be displaced by 'national' ones. Several agencies without prior presence in Bangladesh also arrived. Several established organisations, whose country offices did not have the capacity to deal with this situation, relied on their global emergency response teams, or deployments from rosters, who came for short periods. The overall surge has been characterised by a rapid and large upscaling of UN and some INGOs, often going for direct implementation, even though several had been working (almost) exclusively with 'partners' before. Overall, the response is an example of the '*comprehensive'* model, with its known assumptions and shortfalls.[iii] Reportedly, this is partially conditioned by global policies and practices of donor HQs, who automatically allocate a significant percentage of their available relief aid to the UN and larger (or domestic) INGOs. For some donors then, as for some INGOs, strategic decision-making was taken over by the international HQ. But our conversations also indicate that some donor representatives in-country looked for those whom they believed could scale up rapidly, spend rapidly, and mobilise much expatriate expertise for oversight and quality control.

A recruitment bonanza: Many agencies scaling up (and needing Chittagong language speakers for better communication with the Rohingya) created a competitive recruitment frenzy. Government offices seem to have lost few existing staff, but several Bangladeshi NGOs active in the response lost many and were often heavily affected, diminishing their capacities to respond. INGOs also lost staff to the UN, while even between UN agencies movements continued to agencies paying more. Notice periods were not respected, 'release certificates' not obtained, references not taken, no 'compensation' discussed – even by INGOs signatory to the Charter-for-Change. No efforts were undertaken to somewhat harmonise salary scales. Many NGOs experienced inflationary salary pressures also on those who stayed. Bangladeshi CSOs call the overall occurrence 'unethical'.

Heavy reliance on international expertise. Early 2018 there were some 1200 international aid workers in CBD. Several thousand on short term missions must have come and gone in the months before. Some of the technical expertise, such as camp management, protection, large scale registration etc. may not have been sufficiently available in country. It is not clear how much added value other 'experts' bring: 'shelter' for what are simple shelter constructions, WATSAN in a country that exports such expertise?[iv] Clearly inexperienced staff were also deployed into positions of influence. Most worked in their own agencies, above rather than under national staff; some are deployed as advisors to Bangladeshi agencies. . Key Government agencies don't seem to have received much 'capacity-support'. Expatriates come with a high direct cost in terms of salaries, flights, accommodation. For various reasons, not only related to the visa problems, many came for only a few weeks or months, adding to the overall 'staffing instability'. Gaps in between post-holders meant lack of handover and continuity. While internationals quickly assert that national agencies are 'overstretched', there is an unfounded assumption that

> *"I have never seen so many foreigners in one place, I don't quite know how to deal with it."*
> *"Every time I return (from Dhaka) to Cox Bazaar, I feel out of date, because all the expats have changed."*
> *"The quantity and calibre of expat influx was entirely supply-driven and not demand-led."*
>
> (Bangladeshi CSO & INGO directors)

their own rapid - quantitative -scaling up has no quality consequences. Most internationals have no prior or in-depth experience of Bangladesh, are not familiar with Government policies and procedures nor with the Rohingya population or the host community and of course don't speak Bangla. Most have no idea of previous 'capacity-development' investments in disaster management and humanitarian action, or of the track record of Bangladeshi CSOs. This generates less visible, but no less real, indirect costs.

> *"everyone should understand the evolution of the NGO sector in Bangladesh over the past 30-40 years"* (director of a Bangladeshi grant making foundation, co-financed by international donors)
>
> *"if local CSOs did not have capacity, we would not have been stealing your staff"* (senior UN official)

Collaboration, coordination and planning: Many – perhaps too many- new coordination platforms have been created on the Government and international agency side, in Cox Bazaar and Dhaka. Inter-agency processes between relevant Government departments are slow and cumbersome. The UN was not perceived as operating 'as-one'. INGO and Bangladeshi CSO forums in Cox Bazaar exist in separation. There is a broad perception, also among many internationals, that the international agency coordination has failed so far to early and actively involve government and the Bangladeshi CSOs. Planning processes and products therefore are not as 'joint' as they should be. Bangladeshi CSOs are very clear about what makes the 'coordination environment' so disabling for them: multitude of English accents, fast spoken; too much jargon and acronyms; people coming to talk but not to listen; too fast without time for reflection or consultation. They want an '*enabling coordination environment'*. Like many internationals, they notice the very competitive spirit among aid agencies, and point out that the only formal authority is that of Government. Bangladeshi CSO understand that there can only be a limited number of them present in any given meeting: but want a proper process of selecting who 'represents' them.

> "*We are part of the WATSAN sectoral group. The group wants to develop common standards for the Ukhia and Teznaf areas. But the hydrology of both areas is different. We tried to point this out – but nobody listened.*" (Director of Bangladeshi CSO)

> **From a Grand Bargain commitments perspective – so far (after 5 months):**
- Overall more a 'replacing' than a 'reinforcing' of national and local capacities;
- Previous investments in relevant 'capacity-development' largely ignored and not build upon, and capacities of especially Bangladeshi CSOs generally undermined;
- Failure to include national and local actors in coordination mechanisms and enable their leadership;
- Benefits mostly to some already big UN agencies and INGOs.

III. Participation of and Accountability to Affected Populations

Understanding: Overall, there is poor understanding of the diversity and dynamics within and between 'affected populations': 'host community', registered and unregistered Rohingya from before August 2017, and new FDM arrivals. "*I've not seen before so little consultation with affected people.*" (international aid worker)

Lack of coherence: Our key observation is that accountability to affected populations so far has been ad hoc and inadequate. This can be understood, as the priority was to very rapidly settle almost 700.000 people and provide them with basic goods and services. Some were consulted in needs assessment, but it was obvious what the priority needs were – though the continued protection concerns of women by now should have been better addressed.

Attempts have been made at coordinating these activities through the Communication with Communities working group, however a shortage of truly experienced staff, ignorance about, and generalised stereotyping of the camp population have led to disagreement about the best ways forward. The focus has been on communicating campaign type messages rather than real engagement with the affected populations in decision making processes to ensure aid is responsive to their needs and views. Different agencies have attempted to

pilot projects or carry out research on communicating with affected populations. Some have set up their own information booths and complaints mechanisms, such as telephone hotlines for people officially not allowed to have a Bangladesh SIM card, and complaints boxes among a population with high illiteracy. These have not proven to be very effective. Concerning is the lack of coherence among those working on the issue, manifesting itself as disconnects between:

- The thinking and initiatives about 'messaging to' these populations, 'feedback and complaints' mechanisms, gender-based violence and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and other protections concerns, remaining largely segregated in sub-topics. These need to be brought together – then integrated in all programming;
- Those emphasising technology-based feedback mechanisms that can centralise data and easily establish 'trends', & those that pursue more quality-engagement in the context of their (individual agency) activities, e.g. with women in Women-Friendly Spaces, or with adolescents in 'youth clubs';
- Those who believe that a small number of registered complaints is an indicator that things are going well, and those who take it as an indicator that the feedback system is not really used;
- Those who use the 'majhis' (block leaders) as 'key informants' and begin to consider them as 'community representatives', and those who point out that they came into being when the Bangladeshi army needed focal points to help with the distributions, and that respected individuals and opinion-leaders have been side-lined.

Protection and safeguarding concerns: A high percentage of those who fled to Bangladesh are women and children, a significant number of whom suffered gender-based violence at the hand of the Myanmar army. We heard of women not wanting to go to the toilets outside at night, for lack of lighting. They, as well as children, are at risk of sexual harassment and abuse in the camp setting. Organised crime, including people trafficking, has a longer presence in the district. Stories are already circulating of Rohingya girls ending up in the brothels in Cox Bazaar. Meanwhile, there is a huge number now of staff and volunteers, a significant proportion of which has not done humanitarian work before, is new to their current employing agency, and was recruited in haste, without background checks or thorough induction. The affected populations have not been informed about the expected behaviour of aid staff, and there is as yet no common complaints and response system where misbehaviour can be alerted to. This leaves a situation of risk. Scaling up to meet these protection and safeguarding responsibilities been a challenge as the level of awareness and practical expertise on the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation (PSEA) is limited.

Trust: Individuals who have deeper connections to the Rohingya community underscore the vital element of trust in a community that has been discriminated and beleaguered for a long time in Myanmar and now had to flee for their lives. The tremendous service offered by the Bangladesh army and aid agencies is gratefully recognised but the relationship is now complicated by concerns about non-voluntary repatriation and whether aid agencies will support it? Rohingya will not easily raise a serious and sensitive issue through any impersonal mechanism – only with trusted individuals. [v]

Empathy & stereotyping*:* Many individuals, international and Bangladeshi, show real empathy for what the FDM have gone through. Yet others, international and Bangladeshi, hold negative stereotypes of them as '*illiterate, deeply conservative, unhygienic, unaware of any family planning, traumatised, aggressive, undisciplined*'. Such prejudices are an obstacle to a deeper understanding and constructive engagement with affected populations, and can lead to disrespectful behaviour to a population that has already experienced such for decades.

The host community: The smaller number of agencies that was active in CBD presumably maintains channels of communication with different parts of the host community. But the much larger collective that is now responding to the mass-influx, currently does not. Some host families that find themselves now in the midst of FDM camps, may have been completely overlooked for assistance, even though they lost their livelihoods and way of life.

Working with conflict sensitivity: So far, this responsibility has been largely neglected. Months of - understandable- focus on identifying 'the most vulnerable' among the Rohingya, means there is generally very little understanding about the deeper socio-economic and 'leadership' dynamics among the new arrivals. We

heard anecdotal references to tensions and open conflict among 'registered' and 'unregistered' Rohingya present prior to the latest mass-influx, but there is little wider understanding of this, nor of the dynamics between these 'older' and 'newest' groups. We heard mention that 'old' Rohingya got involved in crime, but also that they were taken in and cared for by host communities. There is a growing realisation that the negative impacts of the latest influx, and large-scale aid going primarily to them, is creating animosities among sections of the host community- something previously experienced in Rakhine State in Myanmar. But the 'host community' is not homogenous, and there are 'winners' and 'losers'. Market price surveys and social impact assessments are very relevant, but more fine-tuned insight is needed. More concerning is that those with 'technical' and 'delivery' expertise and experience, do not necessarily have the social and 'political' skills to analyse these dynamics, and find ways of engaging them constructively. Programming to 'save lives' is different from 'programming for social cohesion'. For work with the 'host community', Bangladeshi actors are -in principle- better placed than international ones and should not be side-lined or treated as subcontractors. A repeat of the fragmentation among actors and projects with the host community, is a recipe for more, not less conflict. So too an excessive concern with the rate of spending, even if the host community needs to see tangible benefits fast.

➢ **From a Grand Bargain commitments perspective – so far (after 5 months).**

▪ Some 'consultation' with FDMs in the 'needs assessment' period, when there was little difference of opinion about the priority needs. Perhaps not enough inclusion of affected host populations in the needs assessments?

▪ Currently lagging behind on more meaningful engagement for decision-making and two way-communication and responsiveness with both FDM and host communities. The all-male majhis cannot be considered the primary interlocutors; potential women leadership still insufficiently encouraged;

▪ More cash-programming is generally preferred by affected populations, but not allowed under current Government of Bangladesh policy. This also affects income-generating support and access to education, which the new FDM's are keen on;

▪ Bangladeshi CSOs don't constitute 'local capacities' from a Rohingya perspective. More effort must be made to find or enable social groups among the FDMs, that aid agencies can 'partner' with.

IV.   International Agency Relations with Bangladeshi CSOs

Quality of relationship: Several international agencies, typically smaller ones that do not have a major surge-capacity, continue to work with Bangladeshi CSOs in a 'partnership' spirit. Overall however, many Bangladeshi CSOs feel that in the response to the FDM, they have been turned into 'subcontractors'. Though many have been 'partners' of INGO and UN agencies in-country for years, have gone through several 'due diligence' exercises and 'capacity assessments', have their accounts audited annually, may have received direct funding from governmental and multi-lateral donors, may be handling significant amounts of money from savings and credit schemes, and have responded to cyclones, flooding etc., they regularly encounter generalised, negative prejudice about 'Bangladeshi NGOs' and behaviours revealing a sense of superiority, from internationals – and nationals now working for international agencies. Bangladeshi NGOs are generally judged to be easily 'overstretched', though conversations with staff of international agencies reveals they feel very much the same and struggle to have really good international staff with continuity.

Direct funding: The first receivers have overwhelmingly been a few UN agencies and INGOs. Only limited direct funding seems to have gone to Bangladeshi CSOs, with the exceptions of BRAC and the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society - although it cannot be assumed that all financial flows are centrally reported.

Quality of funding: There is a mixed picture: Some donors (or intermediaries) refuse to cover core costs or provide a flexible management fee to national agencies, others do though the amount of 'management support' cost can be disproportionately small to the budget the CSO handles.[vi] Sometimes Bangladeshi CSOs fail to ask for 'management support' and must be reminded. There are also variable practices regarding funding them for operational equipment and assets such as office rent, computers, motorbikes. Bangladeshi CSOs notice however that international agencies equip themselves properly, expenses that are accepted by the donors. And pay their former employee now three or four times the salary, for the same competencies and same type of work.

Simplified administration: There are hardly any donors or decision-making intermediaries that accept proposals or reports in Bangla. Some want to impose their financial policies (e.g. salaries, per diem rates) or procedures (e.g. receipts) in the projects they fund Bangladeshi CSOs for, rather than work with their existing financial systems. That creates inequalities between project and non-project staff that CSOs don't want. Though several Bangladeshi CSOs receive funding from different donors/intermediaries, not much seems to have been done to harmonise and simplify the reporting requirements – another 'Grand Bargain commitment.

Shared responsibility: Delays in project implementation may come from the donor/intermediary. Some take responsibility, others still leave the Bangladeshi CSO with sole responsibility to deliver agreed results on time.

Visibility: Though much work is being done directly by international agencies, a lot is also being accomplished by the Bangladesh Army, Government and CSOs. When international agencies work with and through Bangladeshi actors, but report to their donors and public, do they fully acknowledge the role and contributions of the Bangladeshi actors?

> *"We want partnership with dignity."* Network of Bangladeshi CSOs

How 'humanitarian' are Bangladeshi CSOs? Too many international staff not only express generalised doubts about their capacity, but may also wonder whether they are 'politicised'? The question is valid: just casting doubt by raising it and not pursuing the answers, is irresponsible. First, clarify the meaning of 'politicised; secondly: international agencies have been working for decades with Bangladeshi CSOs. There is insight, for those who want to seek it out. Bangladeshi CSOs on the other hand do need to develop organisational answers to the question: *"If there is repatriation that is not totally voluntary, and you are asked to assist it, what will you do?"* Different individuals gave us different answers: *"Of course we will assist, the country cannot sustain this, and we must support our government"* – *"We cannot support sending these people from one camp to another camp, they must be able to return to conditions of acceptance, freedom and dignity. There must be a sustainable solution otherwise we will have the same situation in the future"* The question is relevant, as Bangladeshi staff work from shared humanity but are also citizens in a country with many unmet needs, who in addition may be very aware of the negative impacts on the host community/ies.

> ➤ **From a Grand Bargain & Charter for Change commitments perspective – so far (after 5 months)**
> - A mixed picture in terms of genuine, 'equitable' partnership and a 'level playing field'
> - Little evidence of efforts to reduce the cumulative administrative burden
> - Little indication that Charter for Change signatories discussed and offered 'compensation'.

V.   Value-for-Money?

Enough value-for-cost? Is this a fair question to ask in such acute emergency response? Yes, because that is where larger sums of money are spent, and because at the current global pace of change Grand Bargain endorsers will not meet the 25% target by 2020. [vii]

The 'money' side of the equation is easier to determine than the 'value' one. On the surface, there has been an overall success (value) in stabilising an extremely challenging situation, even though the monsoon & cyclone season are likely to create new 'crisis' moments. On the other hand, this appears to have occurred at a high cost: There are significant direct costs in the deployment of so many internationals, especially for the short-term. Their ignorance of e.g. the histories of partnering, previous capacity-investments, understanding how government works etc. contributes to significant indirect costs from the disconnect between national and international coordination efforts, the lack of more salary harmonisation, in the undermining of CSO capacities, and the resulting relational tensions. This would be less the case if international expertise was more deployed to support national and local actors rather than international agencies, and less automatically in decision-making positions. Additional direct and indirect costs are obviously also created by the visa and work permit practices that may not be sufficiently adapted to the situation, and the lengthy delays and rigidity of the FD 7 approval processes. On the value-side, the continued multiplicity of 'coordination' forums, the very belated beginning of geographical coordination, the unequal quality of services provided, the confusion about participation and accountability to affected populations, and the weakness of working with conflict sensitivity, are important

downsides. Given the apparent belief that '*expatriate = quality*' and the number of expatriates deployed, this merits deeper inquiry.

Value-for-money: spending with investment: Some donors already acknowledge that "*the current set-up is too expensive for us to financially sustain*". Bangladeshi CSOs point out that, as world attention will go elsewhere, funding for this crisis will diminish. The heavy internationalisation of the response, and the deeply disturbing 'pressure to spend' - that makes managers prioritise 'burn rates' over quality- have rapidly consumed a lot of the available funds. With stronger reliance on national and local actors, this would have lasted longer. Can we increase the value-for-money by combining, from the outset, spending for short term results with investment in medium- and longer-term capacities, that will bring positive returns?

Real-time strategic (not project) evaluations are now urgently needed: Some of these need to focus on the money flows and determine exactly what money was spent where in the 'delivery chain' (Grand Bargain commitment 1 to greater transparency). Others need to explore why the coordination and standard-setting efforts were not more effective, and why emerging efforts to increase participation, accountability and conflict-sensitivity are still so confused and disparate. Reportedly, there are hesitations about this because "*it's very difficult to be accountable, where there was no leadership.*"

VI.   Where next?

The broader question of surge modalities: Notwithstanding the fact that Bangladesh, compared to many other countries, presents favourable conditions for 'localisation', the prevailing perspective among international agencies seems to be that there are only two modalities: reinforce existing capacities in small to modest crisis, and replace existing capacities in major ones. This then must explain why the recommendations from a key evaluation of the Indian Ocean tsunami are ignored.[viii] And in that case, the Grand Bargain is held to be not-applicable in the most expensive emergencies, which would defeat its central preoccupation with the 'financing gap'. Yet developments in Nepal following the massive earthquake in 2015 showed that, if obliged, international agencies can scale up in partnership with national and local actors.[ix] The discussion about alternative 'surge' approaches and the 'soft' core competencies of those on surge rosters, needs to take place at global level.

Internationalisation and localisation: The response to this influx of FDM is an unprecedented internationalisation in Bangladesh that is "not representative" of localisation trends in the country. Some however feel that it represents a significant set-back to that trend, as the supremacy of the international actors has now been firmly reasserted. Others point out that 'localisation' cannot mean an abdication of shared international responsibility for major challenges (refugees but also impacts of climate change) that Bangladesh is not the creator of.

Lack of knowledge & guidance: An obvious obstacle to applying Grand Bargain commitments in the FDM is the fact that many international and national actors -including donor staff and humanitarian advisors- on the ground cannot explain the Grand Bargain; don't know whether their agency has endorsed it (or is a signatory of the INGO Charter for Change); and have received no guidance from headquarters about what to do differently now. [x]This is a failure of international actors to connect their policy to practice. A network of Bangladeshi CSOs had to publicly campaign for many months to get it on the agenda. There are also actors who still argue that it is not clear what 'localisation' means and that the debate around it is not settled.[xi] As one Bangladeshi CSO director points out: "*The Grand Bargain is very clear on what it means, it's all written there*." The GMI framework with 'seven dimensions of localisation', has also been circulating in Bangladesh since mid-2017.[xii] Other individuals however dismiss the Grand Bargain, arguing the only reality of the relief industry is that of a 'market'.

The Strategic Question
How do we now fundamentally transform a very internationalised response to the FDM influx, that tended to replace national and local capacities, including those of the affected populations, into one that reinforces such capacities?

Transitioning again? Some INGOs that have longstanding presence in Bangladesh and used to work virtually exclusively with partners, but went operational in the FDM response, are now beginning to consider working more with partners again. For some, this seems a matter of principle, for others an anticipation of a decline in future funding for the FDM. This will not be an easy process: scaling down can be as challenging as scaling up, but meanwhile the capacities of many CSOs have been weakened and relationships soured. Staff that moved from national CSOs to international agencies, rarely returns to work with the former. Some donors are also beginning to encourage international agencies to present proposals with 'partners', or proposals led by a 'national entity' with an international 'partner' providing technical support. The terms of the relationship, including how the financing is allocated, need close scrutiny. There are also suggestions that national agencies apply in consortia, to reduce the number of individual applications. One donor pointed out that strong Bangladeshi organisations are needed for current implementation and vital for its future exit strategy. Reportedly the Joint Response Plan (March-December 2018) contains a very few references to 'localisation' - not enough to make it a strategic priority.

What would 'change success' look like? A useful exercise can be to describe what a successful transition would look like, not just in the relationship between international and national actors, but also in that between all assistance providers and the affected populations, and within and between those populations. Then to work backwards to identify who needs to change what, to achieve this outcome. This should be a central consideration in any future inter-agency planning. An *illustration* of what that may look like appears in the Annex.

> **Legacy Planning**
>
> **What legacy, in terms of strengthened organisational and inter-agency capacities, and more 'resilient communities' do you want to leave behind?**

Who needs to change? It was the donor governments and multilateral agencies, and now also some bigger INGOs, that have endorsed the Grand Bargain, and hence commit to its spirit and guidance for different practice. The primary responsibility for change therefore lies with them. There will be discussion and negotiation about the pace of change, and whether the national and local actors are able to handle the increased responsibility and leadership. But the direction of change is clear.

Constructive conversations & Grand 'Bargaining': There is apprehension that the necessary 'change debate' take on an adversarial tone rather than feel like a constructive dialogue. That is partially appropriate – but cannot be used to deny national and local actors the right to be critical. Imposing conditions on when and in what tone and choice of words criticism is acceptable, is an expression of power – which doesn't befit well those who normally design and manage programmes for the 'empowerment' of marginalised and subordinate social groups. There will be reminders that all have a common purpose and therefore common interest. This too is partially appropriate – but all real-world partnerships constantly fluctuate between 'convergence of interest' and 'divergence of interest'. More importantly, local and national actors have different perspectives and different sources of legitimacy from international ones. International actors must face up to the power they hold. Localisation is likely to be a 'negotiated' process (Ben Emmens) and at times also a 'disruptive' one (senior Bangladeshi INGO manager).

Quality negotiations have the potential to instil respect for the 'other party' and create mutual respect. Conversations are made constructive when they evolve from what Latin-Americans have described as '*de contesta a propuesta*' – from criticism and blaming ('contestation') to 'proposals' i.e. when participants come to the table with thoughtful proposals to address challenges and reservations.

Annex: Visioning Change Outcomes- an illustrative example.

By the summer of 2019, the ongoing response to the presence of large numbers of FDM is characterised by:

- **FDM Pooled Fund:** 75% of international governmental funding is managed by a dedicated pooled fund. Like country-level Peacebuilding Funds, the pooled fund has a strategic committee, made up of the government, UN, INGOs and Bangladeshi CSOs, responsible for strategic analysis, policy and positioning. Project and programme proposals are assessed by a similar, mixed, technical/thematic committee. In principle, representatives of the displaced and the host community, identified through a proper process to ensure their legitimacy for a constituency, are part of this committee or must be consulted. The pooled fund accepts proposals for the displaced or the host population, or for both together. Proposals and reports can be presented in Bangla. Proposals that have programmatic coherence, are strong on participation and accountability to affected populations, demonstrate competency in working with conflict sensitivity, and strengthen the capacities of affected populations and the local/national governmental and non-governmental actors, will stand out. Core costs of grantees are covered correctly, without differentiation between international and national/local agencies. The pooled fund periodically commissions more system-wide real-time evaluations, by mixed teams of Bangladeshi and international evaluators, that will also trace finance flows & extensively engage the affected populations. The Fund management can offer training on proposal writing.
- **Coordination efforts combine geographical, sectoral/thematic and social considerations.** 'Social' considerations in coordination refers to the fact that there can be 'social' differences between different groups of 'intended beneficiaries'. Leadership of the coordination efforts is first and foremost with the Government, providing it also with the necessary authority. If needed, training is provided to all key participants on how to run effective and enabling meetings, that ensure proactive coordination rather than a mere exchange of project plans and -updates. Coordination meetings are always informed by up-to-date feedback from the FDM camps and host communities. Key members of coordination groups themselves regularly engage with affected populations.
- **Engagement with affected populations:** Takes place via various approaches, not only via formal authorities. Women, youth and other social groups in displaced and host communities are engaged directly. Cross-cutting principles are inclusion, involvement in decision-making, effective feedback and complaints, and social cohesion. The approaches integrate protection, conflict-sensitivity and accountability to affected populations responsibilities.
- **The prevailing modus operandi:** Is one in which international agencies (UN and INGOs) have significantly scaled down their direct implementation, except where there is a demonstrable need to continue doing so. Where direct implementation continues, the international agencies simultaneously have a 'resource & learning' facility, to ensure the spread of knowledge and competencies otherwise in short supply, to local and national actors that are there for the longer-term. International agencies also actively support Bangladeshi organisations to continue to be, or become, 'resource centres' for all.
- **International expertise:** Remains welcomed but is now demand-led and not supply driven. The expertise is assessed (minimally from a CV) prior to and during deployment. Sharing and transferring knowledge and expertise to local/national actors is an explicit expectation of all international staff. All staff – foreign and Bangladeshi- have to go through a mandatory contextual briefing and learning process, about disaster management policies and capacities in Bangladesh; the evolution and current landscape of local and national civil society; relevant government structures, policies and procedures; the socio-economic dynamics in Cox Bazaar district; the recent history and socio-economic profiles of the Rohingya population in Myanmar. Staff will also be informed about expected behaviours.
- **More women leadership:** Overall, among the aid agencies and from the affected populations.
- **Capacity-development:** The overarching philosophy is 'legacy planning', within the spirit of the Grand Bargain to reinforce and not replace local/national capacities. Preference will be given to approaches that are based on a more strategic assessment of capacities and capacity-gaps; that favour organisational rather than individual staff development; that build on earlier capacity investments & actively seek synergies with other capacity-development initiatives; and that first seek to support existing capacity-providers rather than bypass them. All capacity-development initiatives will operate

with clear objectives, that can be evaluated and, when successful, should lead to changes in roles, especially between local/national and international agencies.

END NOTES

[i] The Government of Bangladesh refers to the new arrivals as 'Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals'. Others argue this ignores that Myanmar does not recognise them as 'nationals', that the terminology fragments a 'Rohingya community' into groups with different labels and may lead to a denial of international protection. For the time being, we use here 'FDM', as a merely descriptive term for people 'forcibly displaced from Myanmar'.

[ii] These consisted of individual or group conversations with 4 government entities (including the Army), individuals from two key UN agencies (including also at the international HQ of one), 19 INGOs (including also some interlocutors in the HQ); 2 INGO networks; 17 national/local CSOs and 3 N/L CSO-NGO networks; 2 'dual identity' agencies (Bangladeshi but part of international networks), one 'southern INGO', 5 interagency coordination groups; and 4 donor agencies. We also observed 6 working group meetings, had an initial feedback event and shared this again at a major conference in Dhaka. The picture that emerges from our conversations corresponds, in its broader highlights, with that of an earlier rapid assessment **"When the Rubber Hits the Road. Local leadership in the first 100 days of the Rohingya crisis response." (**Humanitarian Advisory Group & Nirapad). This work goes deeper into questions of impact and pays attention to the engagements with affected populations. Though we used a similar methodology, we did not find evidence for certain assertions made in that report – which at times is ambiguous in its key messages. We find that mind-sets and perceptions, as well as institutional interests, are often more determinant of strategic choices and decisions than 'metrics'. We are doubtful that 'complementarity' can be identified simply a 'mapping of respective capacities' as there will be disagreement. We agree that space is needed for constructive dialogue, possibly with third party facilitation.

[iii] B. Ramalingam & J. Mitchell 2014: **Responding to Changing Needs? Challenges and opportunities for humanitarian action.** The model is based on the notion of limited or no national capacity and a central role for international agencies in managing, coordinating and delivering assistance. It tends to be insensitive to context, lacks engagement with local and national actors, and has a tendency to be supply-driven. (pp. 29) https://www.alnap.org/help-library/responding-to-changing-needs

[iv] We heard different justifications for this: One that indeed the technical expertise is there but not the management experience for large scale emergency WATSAN project and programmes- which would be surprising in a country like Bangladesh; another that the quality of WATSAN infrastructure put up by national organisations in the first response was substandard. Ironically, this often referred to one large organisation that was heavily funded by donors for its ability to scale up.

[v] Observations confirmed in the survey-based report 2018: **Accountability Assessment Rohingya Response Bangladesh**, commissioned by Christian Aid and Gana Unnayan Kendra

[vi] See rapid, initial, research on donor policies by R. Rana 2017: **Provision and Conditions of Core/ Overhead/ Indirect Costs to Local/National Humanitarian Actors**. Commissioned by Norwegian Red Cross & IFRC

[vii] Els, C. 2017: **Can Grand Bargain Signatories Reach the 25% Target by 2020?** Local2Global. https://www.local2global.info/wp-content/uploads/L2GP_GrandBargainSignatories_commitment_full_Report_FINAL.pdf

[viii] E. Schepers, A. Parakrama & S. Patel 2006: **Impact of the Tsunami Response on Local and National Capacities. Tsunami Evaluation Coalition** (http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdacn514.pdf)

[ix] A. Featherstone 2016: **Opportunity Knocks. Realising the potential of partnerships in the Nepal earthquake response**. ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Tearfund (https://www.care-international.org/files/files/2016OpportunityKnocksFULLreport.pdf

[x] Equally unknown is guidance produced by e.g. the Grand Bargain workstream on 'participation' https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57ffc65ed482e9b6838607bc/t/5975c0022e69cf20a289e05d/150088909 3313/20170718+FINAL+Participation+Revolution+workstream+Recommendations.pdf or from the Global Cluster Coordination Group http://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/localizationtipsandgoodpracticesfinal.pdf

[xi] Poor understanding of the Grand Bargain and of localisation in particular, among both member agencies and the evaluators, was also noted in the 2017 evaluation of the Dutch Relief Alliance. For a reflective overview of the debate about 'localisation' see Van Brabant, K. & S. Patel 2017: **Understanding the Localisation Debate.** Global Mentoring Initiative. (https://www.gmentor.org/localization/)

[xii] Patel, S. 2017: **Going the Extra Mile.** Start Network & GMI https://startnetwork.org/resource/going-extra-mile-bangladesh-localisation-review)