



28 July 2020

Press Statement of Cox's Bazar CSO-NGO Forum (CCNF)

## Local NGOs Flagged UN Practice of Shrinking Inclusiveness contrary to their Own Commitment

1. Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is created for emergency humanitarian relief activities led by the United Nations in consultation with international, national and local NGOs. This fund will be channeled through the governments, international, national and local NGOs. The present CERF fund was established in March-April this year (2020) to address the COVID19. Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) prioritized to deal with the pandemic. At first, the fund was allocated only for the Rohingya's response, not the whole of Bangladesh as a state. Subsequently, Bangladesh was included as a state in response to requests from several NGO-CSO networks in Bangladesh, such as CCNF, NAHAB, BDCSO Process.
2. Needless to say, local NGOs are always the first and fast responders to any disaster. In August 2017, local NGOs were the first to jump in to help the Rohingya with their own resources. At the initial state of COVID 19 they worked in the entire Cox's Bazar district and in the Rohingya camps even before of the arrival of foreign aid to address the pandemic. But now it seems that the local NGOs are the ones who are gradually being neglected in all activities of Rohingya aid.
3. At first the fund announced 3 million dollars (approximately Tk. 25 crore) allocated only for Rohingya response on June 30. The last date of project proposal submission was set July 2, giving only 2 days for preparing the proposals by the NGOs. In Addition, it imposed some more conditions of the application, such as- (i) the applicant NGO must have an independent project. It is to be noted that, a national or local NGO needs FD7 approval from NGO Affairs Bureau to implement a project in Rohingya camp for 6 months at a time. But an NGO who works with UN doesn't need this approval and the length of the project are more than 6 months. (ii) NGOs should have an ongoing project under JRP (Joint Response Plan) and (iii) Applicant NGO must have projects in Health and WASH sectors. In our opinion, the short timeline and other terms for application were intentionally set to exclude the local NGOs except the international and large national NGOs.

It should be noted that, there are little mentioning of the term local NGOs in the UNRC / ISCG circular, it is mostly the term they have used national NGO, while in Grand Bargain commitment and also in IASC guidelines there are clear mentioning of local and national NGOs.

On the afternoon of June 30, we sent a letter to the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) to reconsider the imposition of such conditions. The letter states, (1) Where will the local NGOs get the funds to carry out independent projects? Although many of them have done a lot of work in their area to combat the coronavirus on their own money. (2) ISCG and JRP are quite complex processes. Interpreters are needed because of the linguistic differences, and therefore local NGO representatives cannot access it. Many local NGOs has joined the ISCG process but in some stage they had to leave later due to a lack of conducive environment. (3) Before February 2020, no one knew that the coronavirus would be transmitted in Bangladesh. Since the arrival of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh in 2017, local NGOs in Cox's Bazar have been working with Health and WASH. Many have done basic but important work in this sector with their own money. Later they left it as the need was gone. But under the changed circumstances, neither they nor any new NGO could enter these two sectors.

CCNF has issued a press statement in protesting those imposition of conditionality which was contradictory to their Grand Bargain commitment and latest (May 2020) IASC (Inter Agency Sectoral Standing Committee) interim guideline on localization during COVID 19.

4. In reply to our letter, UNRC said on 4th July, they cannot move from their position. We, the local NGOs, should have been involved in the JRP (Joint Response Plan) addendum, especially through the Strategic Executive Group (SEG), the Deputy Commissioner and the Commissioner for Refugees, Relief and Repatriation," UNRC mentioned. We replied that SEG was just a platform of information, there was no opportunity to participate. Opportunities for local NGOs to contribute to ISCG meetings with the Deputy Commissioner and the Repatriation Commissioner are very limited as there are no access of local NGOs in such meeting.
5. Then we came to know again that a few more states, including Bangladesh, have been allocated another 25 million dollar (about Tk. 220 crore) in CERF. We request a meeting with the UNRC. UNRC gave us time on July 15th. We requested allocation of 30%, 35%, and 35% of the funds for locals,

national, and international NGOs respectively. But sadly, we were informed that the entire fund was allocated to international NGOs and it is already decided in top level. We, there, call for reform of the entire ISCG process and also for the access of local NGOs and local governments.

6. According to a press release issued by the ISCG, we have learned that three national and two international NGOs have been allocated from the fund. We call the entire thing a top-down process and an effort to keep local NGOs away from it. And we see this as contrary to the principles, transparent process, and ethics of the United Nations.
  - The Grand Bargain commitments signed by the United Nations and international organizations clearly prioritize funding to the local NGOs which is the best possible way to facilitate the sustainability, economy, and accountability in humanitarian and development efforts.
  - The Interim Localization Guidelines of Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), announced in May 2020, recommends giving priority to the local NGOs and local government, they have clearly differentiated it from national and international NGOs. The guideline framed with the reality that it is only the local NGOs and local governments workers are in the field during this time of COVID 19.
7. Senior UN officials have made many promises about localization. They have formed a localization task force for the Rohingya response, but it has been very lax over the last two years. They have hired the Center for Peace and Justice at BRAC University to prepare a roadmap for localization. But despite our repeated requests, they are not speeding up it. We are forced to think they want to forget the process of localization over time.
8. Each time of preparing the JRP, we wanted to take part in the process at the initiative of CCNF, we solicit face to face to meeting with ISCG in Coxsbazar. We offered to organize meeting with local government representative in Coxsbazar on JRP process, but present ISCG leadership repeatedly denied our access and express reluctances to sit with local government representatives.
9. We have been continuously raising the bellow recommendations through seminars and press conferences in Cox's Bazar and Dhaka since September 2017: (1) Reducing management costs and demanding aid transparency with disaggregated manner especially with what it management cost, expatriate cost and what is direct input cost to refugees, (2) Providing demand-driven expatriate rather than supply-driven, technology and know-how transfer to the locals in planned manner, (3) Strengthening the position of Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner through single line of authority and single pot fund management, (4) Introduction of Bangla as a language medium in all ISCG / Rohingya response management especially in Cox's Bazar level so that which will facilitate participation of locals, (this was a recommendation of the Grand Bargain Mission in Bangladesh in September 2018). (5) The inclusion of local NGOs and local government in the management of Rohingya response / ISCG, the participation of representatives of the Rohingya community too, and above all (6) international NGOs should not apply for the fund which is available in Bangladesh and in Coxsbazar for the affected population / Rohingyas, as it is the local NGOs can facilitate the response in best possible sustainable and accountable manner, rather they should collect funds from their respective countries of origin, (7) Only local NGOs' should have right to apply should be considered in the fund available in Bangladesh and Coxsbazar.

With all these requests, we want to introduce a system of 'Empowerment through Aid' instead of 'Aid Business'. We think that these are the best process will empower the local people and the affected people as it was agreed in Grand Bargain commitment which was signed by UN agencies and major INGOs and also reiterated in IASC guideline on localization which was announced in May 2020.

Sincerely,

**Cox's Bazar CSO-NGO Forum**

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[www.cxb-cso-ngo.org](http://www.cxb-cso-ngo.org)