A FRESH APPROACH TO BROKERING A REMOTE PARTNERSHIP

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Horizontal Partnership

Horizontal partnership is defined here by the interrelations amongst the local and national actors working in Bangladesh to advance their mutual interest.

The Local Organizations share information, knowledge and intelligence with each other before, during or after crisis period.

These agencies come together for a shared humanitarian agenda, collaborates with each other through meaningful understanding and continue to work for saving lives.
Horizontal partnership experience (partnership brokering Remotely)

- **Context:** A complex relationship remains among local and national organization in Kurigram, a disaster prone District of Bangladesh. The relationship is competitive, further complexed by the actors and relations. Resulting in less coordination and collaboration amongst the local actors. For this remote partnership piloting I put specific focus on Kurigram district.

- ** Actors:** District Administration, Local and National Organizations, INGOs, UN bodies. All the actors interplay in the relationships amongst the LNHAs

- **Factors:** Limited resources compared to demand, Donors and INGOs prefer to work with Local organizations with lesser risk, District coordination by the Government creates coordination only at the central level giving limited scope for the very local or community based organizations
Working area: Kurigram

- Working with LNHAs in Kurigram
- Connecting through SKYPE (Bimonthly)
- Could do 1 Skype call during the partnership challenge
- Have held phone calls and conversations
- Distance from Dhaka to Kurigram: Almost 250 Km
- A disaster prone district with vulnerability to river erosion, flood, flash flood and earthquake
Why Brokering partnership at Kurigram???

- To ensure Local Organizations have discussions among themselves about working together
- Initiation of collaboration/working together through formal agreements (This will cover the financial benefits, ways of working, mutual respect and accountability etc.)

**What will Change????**
- LNHAs through collaboration and complementarity with each other will gain greater efficiency for saving lives. Strengthened coordination among the LNHAs, greater share in the humanitarian agenda will make the government accountable to its people. The LNHAs will have interrelationships built on trust, mutual respect and shared humanitarian agenda for greater impact.
Steps for change

Shamnaz as the Influencer with the Program team (What is partnership?)

Step 1: Putting the discussion on partnership on the Table with Working partners

Step 2: Having small discussion within Oxfam senior leadership and partner organizations. Senior leadership (mostly informal)

Step 3: Initiation of Partnership discussions by the Oxfam Senior leadership and launching an internal analysis of Partnership

Step 4: Oxfam senior leadership starts to have before partnership conversations (happened after 1 month of internal analysis of Oxfam)

Step 5: Senior leadership of partners ask for more information on Partnership approaches its principles and how it works!
My key approach was to observe, trying to understand the root cause (asking why), what can be done, with whom?

After each action I reflected and learnt. Then again, went through the cycle of observing.

In addition, I also sought support from my global team to fine tune my ideas.
Challenges identified

- Partnership (true/real ones) requires more time to build than the usual practice (Almost 3 times more)
- The partnership policy in the Local Organizations is steered by the most senior leadership (Executive director)
- To change one of the Local organization policy requires time, need to have greater consensus amongst Senior leadership people, requires investment and resources
- The local organizations do not/have limited access to donors, rather have a dependency to have funding from INGO/UN bodies. Having a partnership policy will leave them with limited options for future engagement.
- The Concept on equitable partnership based on the local humanitarian leadership is not yet clear. The fear of unknown is also challenge.
- Branding risk: If the Local organizations act as per the “real” partnership approach this might risk their workability relations with INGO/UN
- Competition among the LNHA's in a District, with same/similar expertise for limited funding
- Government led coordination gives very little opportunity for the Local organizations to coordinate and collaborate among themselves
How to overcome the challenges (pathways)

◦ Facilitating “Opening up (Speaking out about the challenges to work in Kurigram)” among the LNHAs
◦ Building trust and understanding among LNHAs
◦ Formal sharing and seeking support from the senior management of Oxfam but also with executive directors of LNHAs
◦ Linking the Localization project, ELNHA to invest in strengthen interrelationship among LNHAs
◦ Connecting the Senior leadership of Oxfam with Executive directors of LNHAs on value of collaborative relationship on trust
Leadership vs ego
Strengthen relationship

What is in the history (Context)?

Catalysing Change

Opportunities

How to connect these people?

Values and Interests...

Trust

Understanding each other

Reflections

 WHICH ARE THE COMMON INTEREST AREAS?
Looking for all those answers I felt...

I'm so excited

And I just can't hide it

Power dynamics

Branding Risk

Conflict of established interest/different priorities

Coordination

Trust and understanding

Competition

Partnership
After that...

- Conversation between Oxfam Senior leadership and Executive Directors, LNHA during a meeting in Dhaka showed the light to success. They were open to the concept of “Partnership” more.

- Made me hope that this can work if I continue to nudge the relationship.

- Found out way to fund collaborative initiatives proposed by LNHA together as a capacity building methodology.

- This idea of funding/investment pushed LNHA to speak with each other more frequently than ever.

- A Skype call during Bimonthly meeting held between LNHA and myself.

- Saw a flickering light of success when these LNHA made Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a shared budget.

- I felt this is the foundation to a formal partnership (Only long term hope).

- While working together, I had to resolve confusions about program implementation but to my surprise, no conflicts!!!
continued...

- These LNHAs are still working together to implement the activities under the MOU till now with technical backstopping from me
- With time I see their interrelationship getting stronger, communications becoming open
- More sharing of information
- Change in the attitude of LNHAs
- Change in ways of working (silo approach) to combined effort
- Complementarity among LNHAs for achieving greater impact of joint activities
- Greater ownership by LNHAs benefiting the vulnerable people
Plan vs reality

- When I planned the idea I found it very complex
- After starting to implement I was lost, puzzled and confused!!!
- Then I set aside my plan and tried to be as natural as possible
- Said to myself “even if I fail, I will accept it”
- My greatest challenge was to win my “fear” of “failure”
- I failed to broker partnership among LNHNAs, but were able to make LNHNAs to converse with each other
- And that made me strong, to allow the relationship among LNHNAs to grow organically
Partnership and partnering relations is the plant that we see on top of the Soil.

It’s the roots (trust, relationship, openness, mutual respect, accountability, shared purpose) that keep the tree standing...
Looking at the future...

- Partnership requires patience, compassion, willingness to understand each other and being open
- As a partnership practitioner remotely, listening is very important
- Asking critical questions and making reflections are one of the ways for open conversations
- Dealing with challenges can be made easy with opportunistic approach
- Positivity and creativity can bring relativity to the context and people!
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