Metta Resourcing Hub for Civil Society (Positioning Paper)

1. Introduction

Metta Development Foundation is a non-governmental organisation, established in 1998, to assist communities in Myanmar to recover from the devastating consequences of conflict and humanitarian emergency. The primary objective of Metta is the evolution of self-reliant ecologically sustainable and peaceful societies through social and economic growth. Metta believe in the fundamental value of self-reliance and support initiatives that lead to an increased ability of people to develop their own resources and determine their own futures.

This global outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has impacted globally including Myanmar from various dimensions. With the current trend, the health impact is dramatically increasing in Myanmar and the socio economic impact is greatly affecting the most vulnerable groups such as women, disabled people, migrant worker returnees, factory workers, small holder farmers, internally displaced people and IDPs etc.

With this changing context, Metta has foreseen that responding to COVID-19 will dominate our personal and work lives, our programmes and our organization for the coming 3 years. Everything will need to be reconsidered and re-worked. Therefore, Metta came up with an operational strategy responding to COVID-19 in line with the government and other stakeholder contingency plans. Metta is committed to work together, with civil society organisations, community based organisations, faith-based leaders, local leaders, government and multi-stakeholders across Myanmar in prevention, mitigation and response to the impact caused by COVID-19. Metta’s also come up with its framework for engagement with CSOs under COVID-19.

Important Role of CSOs in given context: Civil society has been playing a critical role in the current response to this pandemic. This is all the more so because drastically reduced international travel and supply lines make large scale international mobilization impossible. Many international actors are also dealing with their own operational disruptions and domestic COVID-19 crises. Myanmar’s civil Society is well aware that this will be not only a public health, but also an economic and social crisis. We predict a rise in ethnic, gender based and domestic violence. We foresee social unrest among daily wage earners and people working in the informal sector who will face loss of jobs, income and food security. All local and national capacities need to be mobilized to mitigate these impacts.

The greatest challenge is whether Myanmar society will respond to this threat by largely turning inwards, or will mainly look outwards. The choice we as CSOs collectively make will be mirrored at all levels: from the village to regional and international relations. The role of civil society is key. If Myanmar manages to maintain an outward-looking perspective it will be because of the leadership of civil society. This choice, this year, will shape the next two

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decades. While the choice will be powerfully influenced by social, cultural and religious forces, these forces and their symbols can be mobilized for either isolation or for social solidarity. Defending civil society, democratic rights, and our fundamental freedoms can be challenging, let alone having to do it while under “lockdown” practicing social distancing in the midst of a global health crisis spreading rapidly across the world. In times like these, solidarity and social compassion play the most important role.

**Metta will establish a national Resource-Hub (the Hub) for civil society on financial, technical and material resources.**

A. By the end of 2020, The Hub will provide this support for civil society to assist in the response, mitigation and recovery from the current health and livelihoods crisis. Beyond 2020, the Hub will provide similar resources and support for local civic actors to achieve the visions of their constituent communities.

B. A main objective of Metta’s Strategy\(^3\) is to establish a national Hub for civil society and its networks. The Hub will provide strategic support including financial, material and technical resources to local civil society partners, groups and networks.

C. Establishing a Hub is based on our belief that Metta’s acquired expertise will have most impact for disadvantaged communities when Metta acts as a broker, a convener, a resource and as an umbrella for local civic action. The Hub will have strong implications for Metta’s structure and staffing.

**Metta’s Hub will complimentary with current Metta’s positioning on partnership:** Metta accepts that a partnership is a relationship of mutual respect between two or more autonomous organisations that is founded upon a common purpose with defined expectations and responsibilities. Partnership requires defined mutual roles and responsibilities - as covenants, not contracts. Quality partnerships are based upon trust and mutual respect. Metta puts value on equitable partnership. Furthermore, Metta recognises that partnerships operate in complex situations and contexts by adopting long-term, flexible and organic approach. Shared goals and aims, understood and accepted as being important by each partner, lead to improved coordination of policy influence, service delivery and, ultimately, better outcomes.

**2. The opportunity and the challenge on the establishment of - the Hub.**

**The BIG opportunity** is for Metta to establish a Hub that is not just another sub-contracting machine. The Hub can be the torch-bearer for a reinvented Foundation. SO4 is not another Metta project. It cannot be absorbed into Metta’s current systems and Ways of Working. Metta will not lead the Hub, the Hub can lead Metta. It can lead a new way of working in and with civil society.

**Metta’s Hub will greatly contribute toward localization agenda:** Localization, to our understanding, is a transfer of power, including decision making, operating environment and flexible terms and contracts as well as risk sharing. Through Metta’s Hub, the civil

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\(^3\) May 2020-March 2023
society will be able to set their agenda to achieve the visions of their constituent communities. The Hub will lead Metta means CSOs will lead the Hub and it will be demand driven approach.

The BIG challenge is that Metta operational procedures have already become very heavy and we might have forgotten other ways of working. Many of the external stakeholders will at first feel confused about this Objective. They will become anxious because it also challenges their own Ways of Working. Some will withdraw their support – including some funders.

The Hub team, and Metta staff in general, will need to be crystal-clear about what the Hub is, and what the Hub is not. The key difference is that local communities and networks will lead, and Metta will follow, accompany and support.

3. Operationalising of the Hub

A. “The Hub will provide resources and support for local civic actors to achieve the visions of their constituent communities”.

a) “Hub” is not the right term. It implies the centre (of a wheel) with everything else revolving around it. SO4 places communities and civic actors at the centre. We need a new word.

b) Downward and horizontal accountability will be more important than upwards accountability (government, funders).

c) The Hub will only support organisations, groups and networks which have clear constituency.

d) Maximum community/constituency participation in grant design. Hub grants will not be sector-based.

e) This will require the Hub team, and other Metta staff, to have many co-conversations with community/constituents about needs, dreams, ideas etc. Initial accompaniment support will also consist of conversations with civic actors to articulate their own vision, and how to achieve it.

B. “The Hub will provide strategic support including financial, material and technical resources to local civil society partners, groups and networks”. Strategy (p10)

a) Demand-driven support is key to downwards accountability.

b) A skilled “project officer” (or finance or M&E officer) can deliver project-driven or donor-driven support, but cannot deliver demand-driven support. Metta will need to create new positions (facilitators?) in the Hub and a new job description. The desire to “do development differently” will be a priority criteria for Hub appointments.
c) Metta/the Hub should not hold the “services” components of grants e.g. capacity-building, core-cost and consultancy budgets. Local partners should be free to decide how they spend these funds.

C. “The Hub will have strong implications for Metta’s structure and staffing”

a) An initial Hub team of (?). It will take 3-6 months to recruit and orient them.

b) A principle of local autonomy (or self-determination or decentralization) is that decision-making is located as close to the communities as possible. The Hub can deliver very few of its services from Yangon, or from Yangon-based staff.

c) It’s important that the Hub team-leader/co-ordinator could be based closer to CSOs and not only based in Yangon.

d) Hub positions must be dedicated

e) Metta has current staff who want to “do development differently”. There are also staff of other development organisations who would jump at the chance to work for SO4.

(end of positioning paper)