

# INGO Forum, Bangladesh

## Information Disclosure Policy

### Introduction

Members of the Forum of International Non-Government Organizations working in Bangladesh (INGO Forum) are committed to uphold in their operation and work in Bangladesh the highest international standards of transparency, accountability and integrity. They are also committed to comply with the applicable laws, rules and regulations of the Government of Bangladesh.

### Guiding Principles

2. The INGO Forum Members (FM) believe that access to information is indispensable for transparent decision-making, to empower people, for institutions to promote good governance and be accountable. The work of FM is, therefore, based on principles of transparency, accountability, integrity, justice and democracy. Accordingly, INGO FM are committed to:

- i. be open, honest and accountable in their relationships with everyone they work with and with each other;
- ii. provide accurate and timely reports of their activities to respective stakeholders when reasonable requests are made;
- iii. comply with the Right to Information Act 2009 and Whistleblower Protection Act 2012 of the Government of Bangladesh;
- iv. report, publish and disclose relevant information at their disposal proactively and periodically via their respective websites and other possible and practical means meeting best possible national and international standards;
- v. provide information at their disposal to any individual upon request in the due process by relevant and applicable means;
- vi. disclose, publish and report all information subject to specific exceptions as outlined further below in this policy.

3. This Disclosure Policy of INGO Forum Members is based on the above principles and relates to public disclosure of information at their disposal.

### Scope & Limitation

4. This Policy covers all information that is held by FM in their premises and on the servers that they use, and outlines the criteria and processes determining public disclosure of such information.

5. Information pertaining exclusively to the activities of third parties with whom FM may cooperate, partner, network and interact in any other manner remains property of those third parties and are not in the jurisdiction of this policy.

### Proactive disclosure

6. FM are committed to disclosing information including such documents as listed below as Annex (Disclosure List). This list will be regularly reviewed. In some cases a document, or a part thereof,

otherwise subject to routine publication may fall within the scope of the regime of exceptions (described below), which may not be disclosed.

## **Disclosure on request**

### ***a) Request Process***

7. Anyone may request information from FM in writing with explicit reference to this policy by email, fax or by conventional mail.

8. Request for information can be sent to: respective Designated Information Officer of FM addressed to their head office in Dhaka. Information can also be sought from DIOs in all offices of branch offices outside Dhaka, if and when applicable, contact details of which are disclosed by website.

9. In case a request is not clear, the Designated Information Officer or any other staff member will ask for further clarification and, where necessary, provide assistance to the requester in properly formulating his or her request.

### ***b) Time Limit***

10. Forum Member will respond within 15 working days from the date of the receipt of a request, with a 15 day extension if the regime of exception has to be considered.

### ***c) Designated Information Officers***

11. Designated Information Officers (DIO) are assigned by the Country Director/ Country Representative/ ED/ CEO of the FM to ensure due implementation of this policy. There will always be as many DIOs as the number of branch offices.

12. The DIO will submit to the CD/CR/ED/CEO on a yearly basis a report on the implementation of this Policy including a register of formal information requests and responses provided. DIO may also advise the CD/CR/ED/CEO about potential review of the policy.

13. FM policy may require DIO's to seek CD/CR/ED/CEO approval prior to the release of any restricted information.

### ***d) Forms of communicating information on request***

14. FM are committed to honour requests for information in any form (usually electronic or print) in Bangla and/or English language in which the information is held at the FM disposal, or can generate such information through an automated process (e.g., printing out from a database or an electronic document).

### ***e) Information seeker needing special assistance***

15. Where the information seeker needs special assistance including persons with disability, the DIO will make special effort to assist him/her to access the relevant information in relevant and available form.

### ***f) Process of handling requests***

16. DIO will seek support and cooperation from relevant members of the staff in order to reply to the requester. In case a denial is applicable this should be confirmed by the CD/CR/ED/CEO. Any reply denying disclosure of information shall outline the reasons for denial with reference to this policy. The DIO will keep a register(s) of requests for information and of responses provided.

### ***g) Charges***

17. FM will not charge any fees to process requests which it will provide via email. Fees to recover actual costs for copied or printed documents and for postage, parcel or courier costs must be agreed with the FM before release. If a Forum Member provides a document for sale, the relevant price may be charged. In all cases where charges will be applicable, the requester will be informed in advance about any costs.

## Exceptions

18. In conformity with national and international best practices and standards, the commitment of FM to the principle of maximum disclosure recognises the following legitimate grounds for not disclosing information: a) protection of privacy, b) confidentiality, c) legal privilege, d) protection of individuals providing data/information for research and e) FM ability to operate effectively.

### *a) Protection of privacy*

19. FM will not disclose personal information of members of the Board, staff, members, and of any other third party involved with FM which would breach his or her privacy or a legitimate private interest unless that person concerned has consented in writing after being clearly informed the information provided may be made public.

### *b) Confidentiality*

20. FM will not disclose information in case such disclosure may constitute an actionable breach of confidence or a related commitment or legal obligation, or would put the safety of the members of the respective Forum Member's Board, staff, members, of any other third party involved with the relevant Forum Member.

### *c) Legal privilege*

21. The FM will not disclose information which is privileged from production in legal proceedings unless the person who is entitled to the privilege waives it. The Forum Member will waive its own legal privilege unless to do so would put it at a disadvantage in legal proceedings or breach one of the other exceptions in this policy.

### *d) Protection of individuals providing data/information for research*

22. In conformity with national and international practice, FM will not disclose identity of respondents, informants, experts or other individuals or institutions who may provide data, information or opinion in connection with research, surveys or any other type of studies conducted by Forum Member. Forum Member will not disclose incomplete or draft research report or documents related to on-going research and raw data of unpublished research.

### *e) Ability to operate effectively*

23. FM will not disclose information where to do so would damage its ability to operate effectively, harm its relations with a third party, or inhibit healthy functioning of the organisation or put the safety of anyone involved with FM at risk.

24. In addition, the FM will not be obliged to disclose or submit additional documents Government of Bangladesh regulatory processes which are not predefined in the application process themselves.

25. In addition, FM will not respond to vexatious requests. A request may be vexatious if it:

- a) seeks information of a frivolous nature,
- b) is likely to cause distress or irritation without justification; and/or
- c) aims at disrupting FM's work or harassing its staff members.

## Appeals

26. Anyone who believes that a DIO or any other staff member has failed to properly apply this Policy to their request for information may appeal to the CD/CR/ED/CE. Any such appeal shall be decided within 30 days. If after that appeal, the requester still believes that this policy was not properly applied, the requester can further appeal to the Ombudsman of FM, where applicable, of the FM's Board. Any such appeal shall be decided within 60 working days.

## Effective Date & Amendment

27. This Information Disclosure Policy is adopted on July 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 and shall be in force with immediate effect, provided that the same or any part thereof may be altered, modified, omitted or added to from time to time.

### **Annex (Disclosure List):**

The following categories of information and documents **may be** proactively disclosed through the FM website, where such policies and documents are maintained by the FM and where disclosure does not contravene the FM's broader organisational policies and/or governing laws.

1. Organizational introduction including vision and mission statement
2. Governance Structure
3. Code of Ethics
4. Annual reports
5. Budget, audited accounts and source of funding
6. Organisational Structure
7. Current list of Board Members
8. Register of (financial) interests
9. Board & Staff Directory with business contact information of staff.
10. Information Disclosure Policy
11. Procurement Policy
12. Gender Policy
13. Internship Policy
14. Fellowship Policy
15. Partnership Policy
16. Current Job Announcements
17. Newsletters and other regular publications
18. Published research reports
19. Programme and Project Information
20. Publications
21. Press releases & media statement

The following are available on request but are not proactively disclosed through the FM website

22. Operations Policy
23. Human Resources Policy