

Living With or Without Access to Livelihood Opportunities? Reflections on Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh

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Structured Abstract

Purpose:

What kinds of arrangements the host government has, to deal with this additional population living in Bangladesh paying attention to human security as well as livelihood opportunities until their repatriation is the main purpose of the study?

Design/Methodology/Approach

The study is based on content analysis. The study broadly undertook a survey of important articles, books and other sources pertaining to the study topic.

Findings

Employment opportunities is the evolving challenges in the makeshifts where refugees are living. Refugees are not legally entitled to work in Bangladesh. Inability to survive without employment leads many refugees, particularly men, to seek employment illegally.

Originality/Value

This study deserves novelty as the findings will certainly complement the understanding of the relevant stakeholders including the host country to improve livelihood opportunities until their repatriation is completed.

Keywords

Rohingya Refugee; Ethnic Cleansing; Human Security; Employment Opportunities; Repatriation

Paper Type

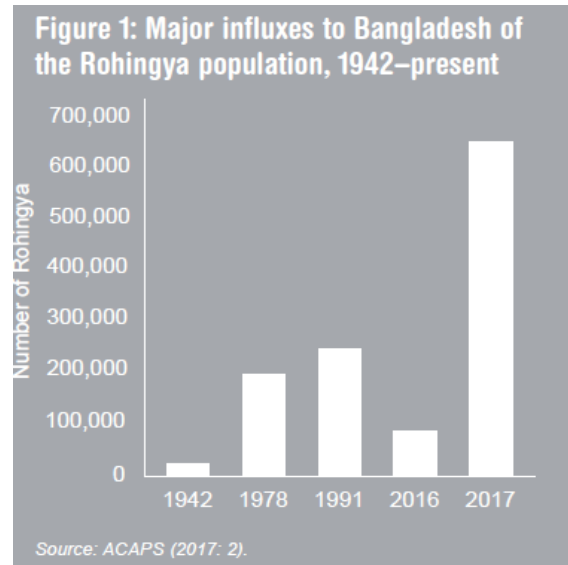
Descriptive Study

Introduction

Human security denotes human dignity. The term human security propagated by UNDP in the post-cold war era intends to focus on individuals coming across values and goals such as dignity, equality and solidarity. The Rohingya is an ethnic minority group in Myanmar that has due to persecution, crossed into neighboring Bangladesh over decades, laying uneven

pressure on the scarce resources of Bangladesh (Gain, 1992). Rohingya issue has been textbook example of ethnic cleansing navigated by the civil-military administration of Myanmar. Influx of Rohingya refugees has been in Bangladesh since the 1970s and their number has surpassed 700,000 (Islam, 2018). Strangely, Bangladesh is now hosting about a million Rohingya refugees those results in serious concern of human security.

Myanmar government from the very beginning was very reluctant to take back their nationals, the Rohingya despite the robust diplomatic endeavor of Bangladesh government across level. Although in the repatriation of Rohingya to their homeland will be ambiguous in coming days and at the same time, their stay in Bangladesh might be continuing for a longer period of time. Apparently, providing basic provisions of their life like food, shelter, and healthcare have been the utmost priorities at the moment and also for the rest of the period until the return of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh



to Myanmar. The Rohingya crisis has been emerged as potential threat to Bangladesh's internal stability. Bangladesh, therefore, has been in a great fix struggling to realise the national interests of the country, and uphold human security issues of Rohingya all at once (Ahmed, 2010). The Rohingya is an ethnic minority group in Myanmar has crossed into neighboring Bangladesh over the decades, laying uneven pressure on the scarce resources of Bangladesh.

Without doubt, human security has been the emerging paradigm for understanding global vulnerabilities whose proponents challenge the traditional notion of national security by arguing that the proper referent for security should be the individual rather than the state. The objective of human security is to safeguard the vital core of all human lives from critical pervasive threats, in a way that is consistent with long-term human fulfillments (UNDP, 1994). Human security takes its shape from the human being: the vital core that is to be protected. Institutions that undertake to protect human security will not be able to promote every aspect of human well-being.

Review of Literature

It is apparent that the number of Rohingya refugees has crossed half a million since the beginning of the crisis from August 24, 2017. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), Rohingya issue has been textbook example of ethnic cleansing navigated by the civil-military administration of Myanmar. Influx of Rohingya refugees has been in Bangladesh since the 1970s and their number has surpassed 500,000. Figure-2 showing Upazila wise Rohingya population sheltered in Cox’s Bazar district of Bangladesh after their influx from Myanmar

Upazila	Population (2011 census)	Estimated population (excluding Rohingya) (2017)	Rohingya population in host community (Jan 2018)	Rohingya population in camps (Jan 2018)	Total Rohingya population in both camps and host community (Jan 2018)	% Rohingya in total population (Rohingya and host community)
Cox’s Bazar Sadar	459,000	517,150	7,941	-	7,941	1.5%
Ramu	266,600	310,100	1,640	-	1,640	>1%
Teknaf	264,400	307,300	64,571	64,986	129,737	29%
Ukhia	207,400	241,100	4,609	756,450	761,059	76%
Total	1,197,400	1,375,700	78,941	821,436	900,377	39%

Note: Population figures are rounded off.

Source: Government Census 2011, IOM NPM Round 8; ISCG 07/01/2017, ACAPS, 2017: 3

Strangely, Bangladesh is now hosting about a million Rohingya refugees those results in serious concern of human security. Experience suggests that the Myanmar government has been very reluctant to take back their nationals, the Rohingya despite the robust diplomatic endeavor of Bangladesh government across level (Lewis, 2018). It gives the impression that the repatriation of Rohingya to their homeland will be ambiguous in coming days and at the same time, their stay in Bangladesh might be continuing for a longer period of time. What we could perceive, providing basic provisions of their life like food, shelter, and healthcare have been the utmost priorities at the moment and also for the rest of the period until the return of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar.

Mentioning stubborn Rohingya crisis as potential threat to human security, UN agencies working in Bangladesh have been in appeal to the international community for adequate fund to provide them basic supplies for survival. It is the experience of different countries which hosted refugees during many humanitarian crises that international supports lessen over time if the refugee crises continue (UNICEF, 2019). In this kind of situations, the decisive economic affliction of humanitarian support to the refugees falls on the host country. Given their living space mostly located in Teknaf-Cox’s Bazar areas, the refugee

earmarked areas are adjacent to the settlements of the local citizens. Once, many awkward incidences happened between them causing law and order situations. In the future, with increasing number of the refugees and sheltered close to the native citizens' settlements there is the likelihood of increasing happening of such incidences and aggravating the local social and cultural harmony among the local citizens and the Rohingya refugees. Bangladesh government has been accredited for providing them with various facilities, including shelter, food and medical care despite many limitations (Uddin, 2018).

Objective of Study

The main objective of the study is to perceive the current state of livelihood opportunities for the Rohingya refugees. Apart from this, the study aims at exploring the best alternative options for the Rohingya refugees to get access to the secured livelihood opportunities.

Research Questions

What kinds of arrangements the host government has, to deal with this additional population living in Bangladesh paying attention to human security as well as livelihood opportunities until their repatriation have been the central questions of this undertaking?

Methodology

The study is based on content analysis and therefore, the study broadly undertook a survey of important articles, books and other sources pertaining to the study topic. This review of the professional literature relevant to the study findings helped to contextualize the research.

Analysis

Apparently food insecurity within the displaced Rohingya refugee population is turning out in Bangladesh. This has been resulting in malnutrition with refugee population and if not the food situation improves on an urgent basis, there is likelihood that more Rohingya children could even meet life-threatening event. We should keep it in mind that, the country has to rely on the food grains for domestic consumption. Meanwhile, the government of Bangladesh took many steps for resolving the Rohingya crisis while various forces, including the Armed Forces, police, Border Guard of Bangladesh and Rapid Action Battalion along with the civil administration, public representatives and general people are providing necessary services to the Rohingya.

It is evident that, transnational human-trafficking syndicate committed serious crime against the Rohingya from 2012 to 2015. In a six-year investigation on human trafficking in Thailand and Malaysia, Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) and Fortify Rights, a

nongovernment rights body have found the evidences. The time series research findings also signpost that, during 2012-15, more than 170,000 people boarded ships from Myanmar and Bangladesh bound for Malaysia and Thailand, and the trade over Rohingya is estimated to have generated between \$50 and \$100 million a year (Daily Star, 2019). In the course of recent years, help offices have improved sanctuary conditions, constructed more secure foundation, and created storm readiness in the camps. Be that as it may, the philanthropic reaction remains fundamentally underfunded.

No matter how rapidly the Bangladesh government needs the repatriation, a more drawn out term plan with proper strategies is currently required to help the Rohingya populace. Any desire for an early emergency goals would be lost, in light of the fact that the Rohingya emergency has numerous parts to determine—for instance, their rights to come back with citizenship, fitting conditions in Rakhine for a protected return, preparation by the Rohingyas, geo-political power battles among neighboring nations, and the job of the universal network. It might take years, even as long as 10 years, to locate an equitable and practical arrangement. The present the present state of affairs encompassing the emergency shows the requirement for a long view requiring concurrent and extended commitment on numerous fronts for a feasible arrangement, including further help to the dislodged Rohingyas in the camps.

The 2019 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya helpful emergency has gotten just a third, or US\$301 million, of the \$920 million expected to address the issues of the Rohingya displaced people and host networks in Bangladesh this year. The Joint Response Plan takes note of that, "The safe house materials and catastrophe hazard decrease preparing gave to the outcasts in 2018 are lacking for assurance against unfavorable climate conditions." This speaks about the serious threats towards human security of Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh. It is revealed from the report produced by Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) on Rohingya Crisis and Response hosted led by IOM that, Bangladeshi Immigration and Passports Department has registered 971,627 people through biometric registration (UNDP, 2018). Given the terrible state of human security at the Rohingya refugee camps, Bangladesh is likely to face the serious challenges with the influx of Rohingya refugees in the following areas:

- Pressure on employment; depression of daily wage and cost of living

- Loss of school years (for locals and Rohingya)
- Health issues among Rohingya and locals (mortality and morbidity, chronic malnutrition, respiratory illnesses, etc.)
- Deforestation; loss of biodiversity and ecosystem and natural calamities (landslides)
- Unethical activities (drug and human trafficking, prostitution etc.)

What we have found in many cases, refugees are selling large quantities of certain in-kind assistance received as relief items. Rice, lentils and cooking oil are mentioned as being the most traded. Their purchases of other products, on the other hand, push prices up. Rohingya purchase several items, including potatoes, fresh vegetables, meat, fish and firewood, thereby raising prices on those goods. Conventionally, refugees are not legally entitled to work in Bangladesh. Inability to survive without employment leads many refugees, particularly men, to seek employment illegally. They are exposed to serious risks in doing so including unfair/unsafe work conditions, harassment, exploitation and extortion. A high proportion of refugee men, some assisted by their adolescent sons, resort to informal work to supplement humanitarian assistance. This includes work as unskilled labourers, fishermen, rickshaw pullers and salt and brick factory workers. Refugees working illegally are open to exploitation by local employers, to the great extent (Karim, 2000).

Their need for income, and insufficient means to earn it, has led many refugees to sell portions of their food rations what is mentioned above as well. Host community is not welcoming them as well to work with them. Many local residents have become used to this trade and are not eager to see refugees afforded more income generating possibilities for fear that this source of food from the humanitarian aid will be diminished. Meanwhile WFP have launched basic self-reliance programmes in the camps, aimed at improving the status of vulnerable refugee children and families. Food for Work initiatives have provided much-needed supplementary food in return for labour on social works (WFP Bangladesh, 2020). UNHCR's interventions have been another example to protecting refugees against such harsh penalties but in the absence of lawful sources of income, refugees remain susceptible to the abuse by local businessman, camp personnel and local residents (UNHCR, 2018). A broad package of vocational training and self-reliance programmes engaging all relevant actors

including the Government, is required if the long term self-sufficiency of the refugee population is to be achieved.

The Bangladesh government has been making diplomatic efforts in persuading Myanmar to repatriate the refugees over the months but in reality, it is highly unlikely the Bangladesh government will succeed in sending the refugees back to Myanmar in a shortest possible time. Myanmar and Bangladesh agreed in late 2017 to complete the return of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees within two years, notwithstanding international doubts that they will be held in forbidding detention camps that may result in another round of cruelty both physically and psychologically (UNHCR, 2019).

Conclusion

Considering the gravity of sufferings Rohingya refugees face, humanitarian, political, law and order, security, development and environmental concerns must be prioritized rethinking different phases of enforcement. The international community is working closely with the Government of Bangladesh and Myanmar respectively to assist them in working towards voluntary, safe and dignified returns. They believe, only harmonious returns can break the decades-long cycle of displacement Rohingya community is experiencing. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2018 between the Government of Myanmar, UNHCR and UNDP is intended to ensure that refugees receive information on the situation in their places of origin and this MoU keeps a provision allowing Rohingya refugees to visit their home villages and other areas where they may choose to return. It also stands for extending transit facilities in Myanmar.

Policy Recommendations

The Rohingya influx has placed on the host communities an extraordinary burden, compounded by the fact that these areas were already confronted with formidable challenges associated with relatively weak socio-economic development. Impacts have been particularly related to a fall in daily wages for labourers and extremely adverse impacts on public services and the environment. While emergency support was quick to arrive, long-term continual support is essential, particularly in view of the uncertain length of stay of the Rohingya refugees. UN agencies, international and national NGOs and government bodies are in a collective effort aiming at delivering protection to refugee women, men, girls and boys, provide life-saving assistance and foster social cohesion. If this problem lingers for a longer time, it may encourage creating pockets of radicalism and that may create problems

of uncertainty and instability not only for Myanmar and Bangladesh but for the entire region. Hence, allowing Rohingya to go back to their place of origin in Myanmar with freedom of movement and other basic human rights would be the best way of showing respect to human rights, we believe.

We are looking forward to the successful repatriation of the Rohingya to Myanmar and enable them to have access to different dimensions of human security. United Nations, which is found to be very emphatic for meaningful repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh must coordinate and communicate with donors and other relevant stakeholders to come forward to solve this problem permanently by putting pressure on the Myanmar government to take back its citizens by creating a safe and secured environment. We request countries in this region and beyond to show solidarity with Bangladesh and to support Myanmar to start creating conditions for voluntary, safe and dignified return of Rohingya refugee.

The Rohingya living in camps must be heard and counseled. Alleviation and restoration are insufficient; there ought to be approaches to investigate and oblige the necessities of the Rohingya as far as their yearnings, the fate of the kids just as their instruction and work both in the short-and long haul settings, including those of the host networks. This will require meeting, powerful correspondence and commitment with the Rohingya in all issues identified with the camps and camp administration. Further, the Rohingya ought to be viewed as partners in any worldwide discoursed for movement and repatriation.

Bangladesh and the universal network should put weight on Myanmar to make vital conditions in Rakhine for the repatriation of the Rohingya. There are unexpected dangers related with deferrals and playing with the Rohingya issue. As of late, Bangladesh raised the issue at a global discussion in China to a great extent to look for Chinese and other Asian countries' inclusion to determine the emergency for territorial harmony and steadiness. We urge upon the Government of Myanmar to take urgent action to address the root causes of the crisis which have persisted for decades, so that people are no longer forced to flee and the refugees can eventually return home in safety and dignity. UN at the same time must enforce the recommendation of Annan Commission by imposing diplomatic force on Myanmar. In this regard, UN Security Council must bring the resolution to facilitate the

investigation on violation of human rights and thus ensure an international supervision for safe repatriation as well as initiate a visit to the Rohingya refugee camps by the Security Council again to force the government of Myanmar for setting up “safe zones” for people of all backgrounds in conflict-torn parts of Myanmar as proposed by our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

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