



POLICY BRIEFS

A Roadmap for Sustainable Solutions to the Rohingya Crisis



These Policy Briefs are the outcomes of a two-day international conference jointly organised by NSU and UNHCR

Policy Briefs

A Roadmap for Sustainable Solutions to the Rohingya Crisis

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About the Policy Briefs

Bangladesh has received the largest number of forcefully displaced Rohingya since 1978. The four phases have been before the 1990s, after the 1990s, post-2012, and post-2017. In the aftermath of the post-2017 Rohingya crisis, the government of Bangladesh permitted over 700,000 Rohingya to take shelter in Bangladesh. Altogether more than 1.2 million Rohingya are currently living in 30 camps located in a southern district of Bangladesh called Cox's Bazar. While it has always been expected that the condition for repatriation to Myanmar would improve, and the forcefully displaced Rohingya would voluntarily return to their homes, these conditions have not yet happened. As a result, Bangladesh has been facing multifaceted challenges associated with the Rohingya influx in the areas of peacebuilding, health, environment, economy, gender and so on. Under this backdrop, North South University, in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), organized an international conference on "Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh: Challenges and Sustainable Solution" at North South University in July 2019. The findings of the conference have led to the formulation of six policy briefs, which are included in this volume.



POLICY BRIEF

THE ROHINGYA CRISIS: A ROADMAP FOR SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

This Policy Brief is one of the outcomes of a two-day international conference jointly organised by NSU and UNHCR



The Rohingya Crisis: A Roadmap for Sustainable Solutions

The Rohingya crisis is a grave concern for Bangladesh. It currently hosts more than 1.2 million Rohingya, who have been subjected to genocide, ethnic cleansing and systematic discrimination for years in Rakhine, Myanmar. Despite international agreements and instruments such as Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the United Nations (UN), regional bodies and major powers fail to play their collective roles to protect these ill-fated people. The Rohingya are one of the most persecuted ethnic minorities in the present world. Although the focus of the crisis seems to be on the threat for the host country, this could affect regional peace, security and stability in the rest of South and Southeast Asia. Despite being a small economy, for its commitment to global peace and security, Bangladesh has extended its whole-hearted assistance to millions of ill-fated people fleeing from death. Albeit the humanitarian assistance provided by the international

an indefinite period of time. The presence of a huge number of frustrated Rohingya in the confined makeshift camps without basic needs and rights has already become a socio-economic concern for Bangladesh. There has been a demographic imbalance in the sub-district of Ukhia and Tekhnaf where the number of Rohingya outnumbers the entire population combined. In addition, due to the complex nature of the crisis, the ground reality is changing rapidly. Thus, this grave humanitarian crisis requires urgent attention of the national, regional and international communities and stakeholders for effective repatriation of Rohingya from Bangladesh.

community, the country has been providing the key financial and logistical assistance for their basic needs. Bangladesh would require \$1,211 million in one fiscal year (2018-19) to support the Rohingya ¹.

The contribution of the Bangladesh government towards the Rohingya could be a model in the history of humanitarian assistance. Nevertheless, Bangladesh has been facing numerous development challenges of its own and cannot continue to support over a million extra people for

Under this backdrop, North South University, Bangladesh, convened an international conference on 'Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh: Challenges and Sustainable Solutions' in July 2019. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was also part of this initiative.

1. Khatun, F., & Kamruzzaman, M. (2018). Fiscal Implications of Rohingya Crisis for Bangladesh. CPD Working Paper 120. Dhaka: Centre for Policy Dialogue.

Recommendations

Rohingya Repatriation

1. Rohingya repatriation should follow the Five-Point Solution presented by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, at the UN on 21 September 2017 including all civilians, irrespective of religion and ethnicity, who must be protected in Myanmar; that "safe zones" be created inside Myanmar under UN supervision; assurance of a sustainable return of all forcibly displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh to their homes in

6. Under the guidance of the UN bodies, the regional and global powers (including China and India) must pursue Myanmar to ensure that citizenship and other rights are granted to the Rohingya before or during their repatriation.

Myanmar; and the recommendations of Kofi Annan Commission Report be immediately implemented unconditionally and in its entirety.

2. The legitimate concerns of the Rohingya must be taken into account for a permanent and successful voluntary repatriation.
3. The foreign missions of Bangladesh should accelerate their campaigns regarding the ongoing Rohingya crisis to raise awareness to the relevant States who could act as a pressure group for ensuring human rights of Rohingya.
4. The regional and sub-regional forums such as SAARC, ASEAN, BIMSTEC as well as OIC should make collaborative efforts to resolve the Rohingya crisis.
5. The UN must act as a guarantor for a peaceful and dignified repatriation of Rohingya to Rakhine.

Interim Measures Prior to Repatriation

The repatriation of the Rohingya people is a complicated process. Therefore, the government of Bangladesh and international agencies need to ensure the following issues until the repatriation takes place:

1. Security in and outside of the camps and combat trafficking.
2. Nutrition and education of the Rohingya children in the camps.
3. Population control in Rohingya camps.
4. Restoration of the environment and preparedness for disaster risk reduction.
5. Provision of ID cards to all Rohingya.
6. The needs of the host communities.

Way Forward

The key challenges to a permanent solution of this crisis seem to be: (i) Myanmar's constant denial of international declarations and conventions on human rights (ii) the failure of UNSC and major powers to use their legitimate instruments to protect helpless people from genocide (iii) geo-strategic interests of regional powers that have victimized humanity (iv) the lip-service of the regional bodies such as ASEAN and OIC to end the crisis.

Nevertheless, peaceful and sustainable solutions to this crisis could be realized in the following ways:

1. The government of Bangladesh can create a global consensus to influence the Security Council to put sanctions (economic and military) on the Myanmar government for committing crimes against humanity in Rakhine.
2. The legitimate concerns of the Rohingya must be reflected in any bilateral, multilateral dialogues, negotiations and agreements, otherwise the voluntary repatriation process will fail. The legitimate concerns are guaranteed citizenship for Rohingya in Myanmar, recognition of their ethnic identity as Rohingya, unimpeded civil rights, religious rights, return of lands, and assurance of safety and security after repatriation.
3. The UN and the government of Bangladesh together can pursue the major powers including the U.S., China and India to place appropriate pressure on Myanmar – as they have leverage to implement the recommendations provided by the Annan Commission.
4. The government of Bangladesh can pursue key countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia in ASEAN and Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt and Iran in OIC to start a series of dialogues in Dhaka and other capitals for pursuing a sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis.
5. The international community, in particular the UNSC, cannot deny their obligations to the R2P signed in 2005 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. Therefore, the UN must guarantee a peaceful and dignified repatriation of Rohingya to Rakhine State in Myanmar. The UN Peacekeepers can observe the safe and dignified repatriation process and the resettlement of Rohingya in their homeland for at least the first 3 years.

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POLICY BRIEF

THE ROHINGYA CRISIS: THE WAY FORWARD THROUGH PEACEBUILDING & CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Background

In the wake of continuous influxes of large numbers of Rohingya, the Bangladesh government has long been pursuing Myanmar for a lasting solution to the crisis. The bilateral initiatives with Myanmar have not been effective in dealing with a peaceful and sustainable repatriation, mostly because of the Myanmar government and economic and strategic interests of regional and global powers. If no peaceful solution is found, the wider South Asian region could be in jeopardy.

Challenges

- In the 1982 Citizenship Law, only the Rohingya were not given citizenship, whereas the other types of Muslims living in Myanmar were given citizenship.
- The Myanmar military uses ethnicity to incite people into committing acts of violence against the Rohingya. They label the Rohingya as outsiders, outcasts and Islamic extremists who are a threat to Buddhist and Burmese identity and Myanmar as a country.
- Geopolitics and economic interests are taking precedence over human concerns. The Myanmar military targets the land of Rakhine to attract foreign investment; so, the Rohingya needed to be ousted.
- Considerations of national interests (access to cheap gas in the case of India and the implementation of BRI in the case of China) motivate both India and China, the two regional powers, to side with Myanmar on the Rohingya issue.
- The international community (including UN, ASEAN, OIC) is yet to play an active role in curbing the Rohingya refugee crisis.
- Long-term stay of the Rohingya in Bangladesh has generated tensions with the host community.
- National and cross-border security issues, such as human trafficking, prostitution, drug trade, forging Bangladeshi passports by the Rohingya, and the chance of radicalization may affect regional stability.

Recommendations

- There should be dialogues between the concerned countries, which should include issues of burden sharing.
- Recommendations of Kofi Annan's Advisory Commission– voluntary repatriation, local Integration, and resettlement– should be upheld.
- Safe zones could be created for the Rohingya within Myanmar.
- The Security Council should offer its guidance in order to resolve the crisis by taking initiatives for a negotiated settlement.
- China can act as a peacemaker between Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- The issue of Rohingya genocide can be taken to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and International Criminal Court (ICC) to ensure state responsibility and accountability through international law as provided in international treaties and customary laws.
- Bangladesh can lobby for economic sanctions on Myanmar by the international community to enhance pressure on it.
- Camps should be potential places to restore the human rights of the displaced Rohingya and heal their trauma. Through training, they can be transformed from a perceived burden into human resources, which would enhance the dignity of the Rohingya.
- The Rohingya should be consulted regarding the creation of an effective repatriation plan that includes citizenship, identity, freedom of movement, religious rights, land rights and security.



POLICY BRIEF

THE ROHINGYA CRISIS: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS FOR WOMEN

Background

More than half of the Rohingya people living in the camps in Bangladesh are women. Many of them are economically unproductive and are subjects of vulnerability and abuse. Rohingya women's vulnerabilities include: child and forced marriage, polygamy, physical and sexual assault, etc. These problems are further aggravated in the camps due to the breakdown of conventional legal and social control systems, which require serious consideration to protect Rohingya women's rights and dignity in the camps.

Challenges

- Rohingya women experience slapping, battering, hitting, rape, trafficking, prostitution, sexual abuse as common forms of violence.
- Girls, representing a larger proportion of the vulnerable group, are at risk of child marriage, sexual harassment and assault, threat, neglect and bullying.
- Unsafe housing aggravates the risks of sexual violence.
- Half of Rohingya women and about two-thirds of adolescent girls cannot meet their menstrual hygiene needs.
- All majhis– Rohingya leaders– are men, which leaves little scope for women to make their voices heard.
- There is a lack of female health care service providers in the camps, which limits Rohingya women's use of the services.
- High levels of illiteracy, prejudice about religious teachings and traditional norms often make women victims of gender discrimination.
- One in six families are headed by single mothers, yet they do not have access to necessary resources.
- Rohingya women tend not to report violence and abuse due to fear of social stigma and the breakup of marital relationships.
- Legal services are limited and/or inadequate for the abused Rohingya women.
- There is a lack of knowledge among the Rohingya women about the legal services available to them.

Recommendations

- Rohingya men and young boys must be included in gender equality training for the purpose of raising awareness about harmful cultural practices that cause violence against women.
- Women's access to basic services, such as reproductive and general health care, must be ensured.
- Development agencies should recruit a sufficient number of female employees for the services and assistance being provided to the Rohingya women.
- Women's representation should be ensured in the community management structure in the Rohingya camps.
- Needs specific to women and girls, such as menstrual hygiene and safety, must be emphasized.
- Community leaders, religious leaders, traditional healers, teachers, midwives and women Háfes must be made aware of the needs and rights of women.
- Child and forced marriage within refugee camps must be banned and any such violations must be strictly regulated.
- Government and development agencies must ensure the availability of community-based protection services, adequate and safe shelter, and comprehensive awareness about gender-sensitivity and women's rights and dignity.
- The Rohingya should be consulted regarding the creation of an effective repatriation plan that includes: citizenship, identity, freedom of movement, religious rights, land rights, and security.



POLICY BRIEF

THE ROHINGYA CRISIS: ECONOMIC IMPACTS AND SOLUTIONS

Background

The presence of a large number of Rohingya has posed economic challenges for Bangladesh both locally and nationally. Providing a decent living for 1.2 million extra people is a big financial commitment for Bangladesh. Moreover, while the Rohingya had been economically unproductive or underproductive initially, they are gradually becoming more engaged in local income-generating activities. Moreover, the Rohingya are receiving extensive support from development agencies which is creating tension between them and the host community. Besides, some Rohingya are adopting unfair means of livelihood which is disruptive to local resources, the environment and social order. It is also critical to pay attention to the economy of Cox's Bazar, the tourist capital of Bangladesh, which has been affected as a result of the Rohingya influx.

Challenges

- Bangladesh required \$1,211 million in one fiscal year (2018-19) to support the Rohingya¹.
- The economic burden on Bangladesh is likely to increase in coming years, if the commitment from international community declines.
- Local labor wages have decreased due to the availability of cheap labor from the Rohingya.
- Job opportunities of the host community are shrinking as the Rohingya are increasingly becoming involved in small businesses and other economic activities (e.g., transport sector, construction, farming, fishing and restaurants) in local areas.
- The cost of living is increasing in the local area due to rising prices of consumable products and services (demands are high due to the excessive population).
- There are cases where the Rohingya are engaging in smuggling, human and drug trafficking and so on.
- Exploitation of natural resources by cutting down trees and razing of hills for conversion into cultivable lands are creating resource shortages and negatively impacting tourism in Cox's Bazar.

Recommendations

- Myanmar should compensate USD 6 billion for the economic losses incurred from the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh².
- The government should develop regulations about recruitment by the NGOs, so that the local people do not suffer from discrimination.
- Measures should be taken to prevent the Rohingya from entering the local job market.
- The government should monitor the distribution and use of relief materials to prevent the Rohingya from selling them in the local market.
- Medium and short-term plans should be undertaken to preserve and increase job opportunities for the local community.
- Law enforcement agencies should be more vigilant in Cox's Bazar about checking the Rohingya's involvement in unfair economic practices.
- Further research should be conducted to properly assess the economic losses due to the Rohingya crisis.

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Photo Source: HADRI, Western Sydney University

1. Khatun, F., & Kamruzzaman, M. (2018). Fiscal Implications of Rohingya Crisis for Bangladesh. CPD Working Paper 120, Dhaka: Centre for Policy Dialogue.
2. Jubb, Christine & Habib, Mohshin & Ahmad, Salahuddin & Razia, Sultana. (2018). Rohingya mass exodus: Who should pay compensation and how much?



POLICY BRIEF

THE ROHINGYA CRISIS: PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Background

Well-being of the Rohingya is a major concern. The most common health problems they face are Reproductive Tract Infection (RTI), Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI), Blindness, Higher Childbirth, Pregnancy-related Mortality, Cervical Cancer, Worm infestations, Malnutrition, Anaemia, Chronic Anxiety and Depression. These health issues of the Rohingya could bring a multitude of health hazards and threats to the Bangladesh healthcare system if left unaddressed. Although many agencies have been providing health services and facilities to the Rohingya since the influx of 2017, they are inadequate to meet their growing health care needs. Interim measures should be taken to address the health concerns of the Rohingya.

Challenges

- Inadequate services for mental health counselling is a barrier to overcoming the trauma and loss they experienced during the exodus.
- It is common among the Rohingya to use informal health services, which are often unsafe.
- There is a reluctance among the Rohingya to use reproductive health services due to cultural and religious conservativeness.
- High birth rates among the Rohingya causes prenatal and postnatal health issues for the new-born babies and the mothers in the Rohingya camps.
- While primary health care is provided by some NGOs, specialized and advanced health care is largely unavailable for the Rohingya.
- Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) are prevalent in the camps.
- Lack of access to pure drinking water and inadequate sanitation facilities leads to various water-borne diseases.
- Limited or no awareness of reproductive health education among the adolescents often results in reproductive health problems.

Recommendations

- Increase health services in the camps to cover both primary and specialized care.
- Encourage the Rohingya to use formal health care services available to them instead of resorting to unsafe informal health services.
- Build awareness and provide counselling about family planning and the consequences of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD).
- Provide adequate mental health services to those who experienced trauma and loss during the exodus.
- Prioritize the health needs of women and children, particularly nutritional needs.
- Provide health training to the Community Health Workers by the NGOs working in the Rohingya camps.
- Build capacity of the non-government hospitals and develop an effective health emergency and crisis management referral system at the local hospitals.
- Provide Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) education to the adolescents.
- Ensure the availability of safe drinking water through filtration, rainwater harvesting, and setting up of shallow tube wells.



POLICY BRIEF

THE ROHINGYA CRISIS: SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND REMEDY

Background

The environmental impacts of the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh are multifaceted and include continued deforestation, water and air pollution as well as land erosion, which have affected the living conditions of both the Rohingya and the host community. Moreover, both communities are exposed to serious threats of natural disasters such as rainfall-triggered landslides, flash floods, cyclones and tornadoes. To prevent loss of lives and resources in the camps and surrounding areas, it is important to formulate and implement proper environmental management and crisis mitigation plans.

Challenges

- A total of 4,300 acres of hills and forests have already been lost due to the makeshift camps in Cox's Bazar¹.
- Every month the Rohingya collect nearly 6,800 tons of firewood damaging the local forests².
- The waterborne diseases are prevalent in the camps during the monsoon season as water gets contaminated by human waste.
- Waste generated by the Rohingya is dumped inside the camps which deteriorates the camp environment and exposes the Rohingya to further health risks.
- There is a reduction in the foraging area and pathways for elephants, which creates human-wildlife conflicts resulting in casualties for both humans and elephants.

Recommendations

- An immediate comprehensive plan is needed to prevent further deforestation.
- The local community and the Rohingya must be sensitized to the local natural resources and encouraged to participate in tree plantation and gardening in the camps and adjacent areas.
- In order to prepare a Disaster Response Plan, an assessment of the total environmental loss should be conducted immediately.
- Training should be arranged for the Rohingya and local youth volunteers on basic knowledge and drills of disaster preparedness.
- Materials on disaster risk management should be prepared and disseminated to build awareness and resilience among both the Rohingya and the local communities.
- The Rohingya should be provided with alternative fuels, such as water heaters and gas cylinders, so that they do not use firewood.
- Proper sanitation facilities and practices should be ensured for the Rohingya in the camps.
- Creation and maintenance of corridors should be established to ensure free wildlife movement.

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Photo Source: HADRI, Western Sydney University

1. UNDP. (2018). Environmental impacts of Rohingya influx: A multifaceted problem requires multifaceted responses. Retrieved 9 July 2019, from http://www.bd.undp.org/content/bangladesh/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2018/09/18/Environmental_impacts_of_Rohingya_influx.html
2. Ibid.