

## The Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Socio-Economic and Environmental Impacts on Bangladesh

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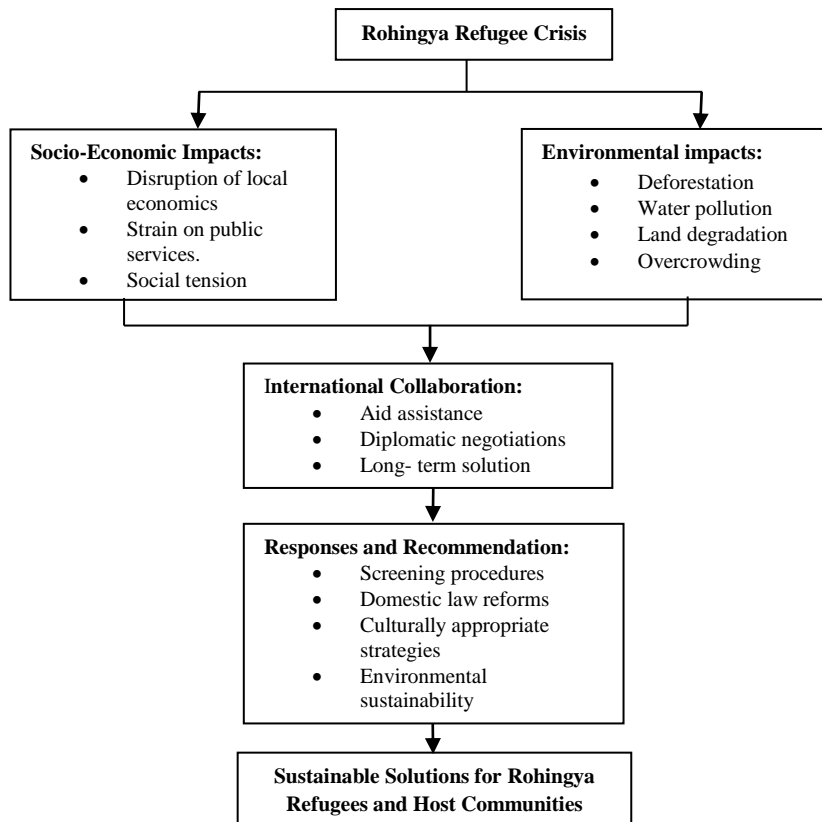
**Abstract:** The influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh has created a complex humanitarian crisis with far-reaching socio-economic and environmental consequences for the host communities. This study evaluates the impact of the arrival of over 688,000 Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar district since August 2017 on the indigenous Bangladeshi population. It highlights the significant strain on Bangladesh's resources, public services, and social cohesion due to the population increase. The establishment of overcrowded refugee camps has led to environmental degradation, including deforestation, water pollution, and land degradation. The contrasting ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds of the Rohingya refugees and local communities have strained inter-group dynamics, fueling tensions and conflicts. While Bangladesh has demonstrated remarkable resilience in accommodating the refugees, the crisis has exacerbated economic and ecological burdens. The study examines policy alternatives and recommendations, emphasizing the need for enhanced screening procedures, domestic legal reforms, culturally appropriate mental health strategies, and environmental sustainability measures. It underscores the pivotal role of international collaboration, humanitarian aid, and diplomatic negotiations involving Myanmar, Bangladesh, and global entities to find durable solutions. Addressing the systematic persecution of the Rohingya population in Myanmar is crucial for resolving the crisis's root causes and fostering an inclusive society with equal access to dignity and opportunities for all.

### **1. Introduction**

The study seeks to evaluate the socio-economic and environmental consequences of the arrival of Rohingya refugees on the indigenous Bangladeshi population, as well as the difficulties encountered by the government in handling this emergency. The report examines the policy alternatives the government can consider in collaboration with foreign aid agencies and non-governmental organisations. Moreover, it emphasises the need to address the fundamental interreligious and interethnic factors that led to the Myanmar crisis. It also highlights the significance of acknowledging and protecting the citizenship and national identity of the Rohingya people as an integral element of any efforts to repatriate and relocate them. The 1951 Refugee Convention, ratified by numerous nations, delineates the legal responsibilities of member countries to safeguard and offer asylum to refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2010). Bangladesh has been collaborating with international humanitarian relief agencies to meet its obligations by providing essential housing, food, water, and healthcare for almost 500,000 refugees as of early 2017 (UNHCR, 2017). Nevertheless, the growing influx of Rohingya refugees and their extended duration in substandard temporary camps present substantial obstacles and obligations for Bangladesh.

The Rohingya, an ethnically, linguistically, and religiously unique population from Myanmar's north-western Rakhine region, have notable cultural and religious differences compared to Myanmar's Buddhist majority and, to some extent, Bangladeshis. Although there are variations and many cultural characteristics, the common Islamic religion and the Bengali (Bangla) language, albeit with different dialects, exhibit commonalities (Human Rights Watch, 2013). In August 2017, security forces committed acts of violence, extrajudicial killings, rapes, and the burning of Rohingya villages. These actions were labelled as 'ethnic cleansing' and 'crimes against humanity' by Andrew Gilmour, the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights. As a result, many people fled their homes (Gilmour, 2018). A total of about 688,000 Rohingya individuals migrated to the Cox's Bazar district in search of safety and protection, either by settling in refugee camps or dispersing to different regions (UNHCR, 2018). Bangladesh has consistently displayed magnanimity towards Rohingya refugees over several years, but the government's benevolence and available resources are currently under significant strain. The increase in population has brought additional difficulties with security, pollution, deforestation, and conflicts between indigenous residents and refugees (International Crisis Group, 2018). Due to its status as a developing nation, Bangladesh needs to possess a well-defined plan or strategy for addressing the refugee issue. This lack of strategic vision and policy development is a significant impetus for the focus of this paper. It adds to the scholarly literature on the Rohingya issue by assessing the effects of the significant increase in August 2017 on the local population of Cox's Bazar. The analysis determines that although a quick solution may not be readily available, consistent diplomatic and political pressure exerted by other states and the United Nations could result in compromises and facilitate resolution.

## 2. Conceptual Framework



This conceptual framework illustrates the Rohingya refugee crisis as the central issue, leading to socio-economic and environmental impacts on the host communities in Bangladesh. The framework then outlines the responses and recommendations proposed in the article, such as enhanced screening procedures, domestic law reforms, culturally appropriate strategies, and environmental sustainability measures. It also highlights the importance of international collaboration, including aid, assistance, diplomatic negotiations, and long-term solutions. Ultimately, the framework aims to achieve sustainable solutions for both Rohingya refugees and host communities in Bangladesh.

### **3. The Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh**

"I was born in Burma. However, the Burmese government asserts that I am not a rightful citizen of the country." I was raised in Bangladesh, but the government of Bangladesh has declared that I am not permitted to remain in the country. "As a Rohingya, I feel trapped in a precarious situation," expressed a 19-year-old refugee residing in Nayapara camp, Bangladesh (Frontières-Holland, 2002, p. 8). Bangladesh and Myanmar have a shared border that is 271 kilometres in length. The Rohingya population in Rakhine state, who speak Bengali, have always maintained strong connections with the Muslim community in Bangladesh, which is located nearby. Bangladesh and Myanmar have historically maintained a consistently stable diplomatic relationship, notwithstanding occasional dissatisfaction. Bangladesh has filed a formal complaint against Myanmar, alleging that the Myanmar military has been strategically placing landmines along the border to deter migrants from entering (Das, 2017). The historical background of the Rohingyas and the difficulties they are encountering as a result of persecution, as outlined in this chapter, vividly demonstrate the intricate nature of the issues that have emerged in Myanmar and Bangladesh. Both humanitarian and security concerns have escalated to a critical level, necessitating the global community's participation in finding a solution to the issue. The upcoming chapter will centre on matters concerning the infringement of human rights and the actions taken by relevant parties to address this critical situation.

### **4. The Rohingya Crisis**

The Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh illustrates the socio-economic consequences of refugees on host communities. The substantial migration of Rohingya refugees into Cox's Bazar has had a significant and far-reaching impact on the region. Cox's Bazar, once renowned for its tourism, has become closely associated with refugee camps, resulting in a substantial decline in the local tourism industry. Conversely, regions located farther north in Bangladesh, where there have been fewer refugees, continue to prosper economically (Rahman, 2020). The influence of refugees on host communities, in terms of their social and economic aspects, is complex and substantial. Host nations must confront the immediate and long-term difficulties caused by the arrival of refugees to minimise ecological disturbance, financial burden, and social unrest. Efficient administration and assistance from the global community are vital in guaranteeing the harmonious coexistence and prosperity of refugees and host communities.

### **5. Relationship between the Local Community in Bangladesh and Rohingya Refugees**

A host community demonstrates hospitality and adheres to international law, standards, and principles set out by UNHCR. These principles are rooted in the relationship between a host and a guest. Divergent social, cultural, linguistic, and religious characteristics can give rise to conflicts between the two factions, as exemplified in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where the influx of migrants has placed significant strain on intergroup dynamics. Bangladesh will face considerable challenges in meeting the fundamental human needs of the Rohingya refugees,

including provisions for food, clothes, and other essential requirements. The country will soon find itself in a situation that cannot be justified.

According to Mr Muhith, the ex-Finance Minister of Bangladesh, the arrival of Rohingya migrants has caused significant strain on the country's economy. He stated that around 2 billion USD is needed to address the refugee situation. The International Monetary Fund is prepared to offer financial aid to Bangladesh in addressing the Rohingya situation, mirroring the approach taken by the World Bank. The current crisis has exerted significant strain on Bangladesh's economy. Although Bangladesh has several shortcomings, it is facing considerable criticism, yet it has maintained its policy of accepting Rohingya refugees.

After a meeting with Mr Muhith on October 11, 2017, Annette Dixon, the Vice-President of the World Bank for the South Asia region, emphasised the need for the international community to provide immediate assistance to the refugees and host communities with essential services while expressing hope for their safe return home shortly. We will make every effort to ensure that support is provided. The World Bank is currently determining the programme evaluation, which may involve enhancing the availability of health, education, water, sanitation, and roads (The Daily Star, 2019). The United States Department of State has announced its commitment to allocate about 32 million USD in humanitarian assistance to support the Rohingya refugees. The United States is allocating an extra sum of approximately 32 million USD in humanitarian aid to address the pressing requirements of Rohingya refugees escaping violence in Myanmar and seeking refuge in Bangladesh, as well as internally displaced individuals in Myanmar's Rakhine State and the communities hosting them in Bangladesh. The United States also commended Bangladesh for its generosity in responding to the humanitarian crisis that arose from the large-scale exodus of Rohingya refugees. The United States has asked all parties in Rakhine State to grant unlimited humanitarian assistance to the affected population. Additionally, the US has called on international donors to contribute further humanitarian help to individuals impacted by the crisis. Despite its high population density, Bangladesh has made efforts to accommodate hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees.

## **6. Socio- Economic Impact of Refugees on Host Communities**

The arrival of refugees in host countries frequently leads to substantial socio-economic difficulties. These problems encompass disturbances to natural equilibriums, social welfare systems, and customary community frameworks. The consequences of such influxes might be especially harsh when the recipient nation is already facing vulnerable ecological and socio-economic circumstances. Unforeseen and abrupt influxes of refugees might worsen pre-existing ecological and economic burdens in host nations. Refugees frequently establish themselves in regions that lack the necessary infrastructure to accommodate a sudden and significant rise in population. This can result in the overuse of natural resources and the deterioration of the environment. The ecological imbalances lead to economic pressures since the host country faces difficulties in meeting the needs of its inhabitants as well as the entering migrants (Jones, 2019). Mass migrations of refugees can disrupt established social and community equilibriums. Settlement regions, characterised by established standards rooted in ethnicity, religion, and communal values, may change substantially. The influx of many refugees from diverse cultural origins might result in tensions and conflicts between various groups. This is exacerbated by the burden on social services, such as healthcare and education, which might be inundated by the heightened demand (Smith & Martin, 2018).

## 7. Environmental Impacts of Refugees on the Host Country

The ecological consequences of refugee camps on host nations can be substantial, especially when the provisional housing facilities are insufficient. The adverse impact of unclean living conditions, water pollution, deforestation, and over-exploitation of natural resources on both the Rohingya refugee and local populations is obvious in the refugee camps (Parnini et al., 2013). The overcrowded and unclean circumstances in these camps facilitate the transmission of infections, including HIV, diarrhoea, and malaria, which pose health hazards to both refugees and the host society. The UNHCR and other international agencies are calling on the Bangladeshi government to implement a more pragmatic strategy in response to the Rohingya refugee crisis. In order to achieve a successful conclusion, Myanmar and Bangladesh must participate in deliberate and compassionate negotiations, as emphasised by Panini et al. (2013). The international community must assume a pivotal role, considering Myanmar's ongoing inability to tackle the underlying factors of the crisis effectively. The ongoing bilateral conversations are inadequate, and it is the moral obligation of the international community to take bold actions in order to address the challenges confronting Rohingya refugees. The Bangladeshi government should contemplate enhancing the screening procedures for Rohingya refugees, with a focus on addressing issues related to the spread of infectious diseases and their involvement in criminal activities. Refugee acceptance can be ensured by providing essential assistance from local and international aid organisations (Faruk & Mian, 2014). Augmenting both domestic and global assistance could effectively alleviate the prevalence of violent religious extremism and illicit operations in the area. To effectively address the Rohingya refugee problem, the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh must collaborate, with the assistance of international entities such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the United Nations (UN), and the European Union (EU). Moreover, it is imperative to employ culturally appropriate strategies in order to effectively tackle the profound mental health challenges that are widespread among refugees, including persistent anxiety, bereavement, depressive symptoms, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Bangladesh has always given more importance to its domestic laws than customary international ones regarding refugee law (Faruk & Mian, 2014). Bangladesh has been criticised for inadequately accommodating the Rohingya refugees who are arriving. In order to tackle these difficulties, Bangladesh needs to enhance its domestic laws regarding refugees and immigration to regulate the flow of refugees. It is essential to identify undocumented Rohingya refugees residing within the country. In addition, Bangladesh should consider entering into bilateral or multilateral agreements with other countries to address the refugee crisis better. The international community should exert pressure on the Myanmar government to implement effective measures to address the long-standing refugee situation that has imposed a significant burden on Bangladesh for almost twenty years without delivering any tangible economic or social advantages.

## 8. Findings

- **Socio-economic Impact:** The Rohingya refugee crisis has had significant socio-economic consequences on host communities in Bangladesh, including disruptions to local economies, social cohesion, and public services. Efforts to minimize these impacts are essential for ensuring the well-being of both refugees and host populations.
- **Interethnic Dynamics:** The influx of Rohingya refugees has strained interethnic dynamics in host communities, leading to tensions and conflicts. Addressing these dynamics requires promoting understanding, tolerance, and cooperation among different ethnic and religious groups.

- **Environmental Degradation:** Refugee camps have contributed to environmental degradation in host countries, including deforestation, water pollution, and overcrowding. Sustainable environmental management practices are necessary to mitigate these impacts and protect the environment for both refugees and host communities.
- **International Aid and Cooperation:** International aid and cooperation play a crucial role in addressing the Rohingya crisis, providing essential support for refugees and host communities. However, long-term solutions require sustained diplomatic efforts and collaboration between governments and international organizations.

## 9. Recommendations

- **Enhanced Screening Procedures:** Bangladesh should strengthen its screening procedures for Rohingya refugees, focusing on addressing issues related to communicable diseases and criminal activities. This would not only ensure the safety and security of the host population but also facilitate the acceptance of refugees.
- **International Collaboration:** Collaborative efforts between Myanmar, Bangladesh, and international entities such as the United Nations, European Union, and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation are crucial for resolving the Rohingya crisis. These efforts should prioritize humanitarian aid, diplomatic negotiations, and long-term solutions.
- **Culturally Appropriate Strategies:** To address the mental health challenges prevalent among Rohingya refugees, including anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, it's essential to implement culturally appropriate strategies. This involves providing psychosocial support and mental health services tailored to their specific cultural context.
- **Strengthening Domestic Laws:** Bangladesh should enhance its domestic laws regarding refugees and immigration to effectively manage the influx of Rohingya refugees. This includes identifying undocumented refugees and entering into bilateral or multilateral agreements with other countries to address the crisis comprehensively.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Efforts should be made to mitigate the environmental impact of refugee camps by implementing sustainable practices such as proper waste management, reforestation, and conservation of natural resources. This requires collaboration between the government, international organizations, and local communities.

## 10. Conclusion

The Rohingya refugee crisis poses complex socio-economic and environmental challenges for Bangladesh. Due to the arrival of over a million Rohingya refugees, Bangladesh, which is already one of the most densely populated countries in the world, is experiencing significant strain on its scarce resources, infrastructure, and social services. The socio-economic consequences encompass the burden on healthcare, education, and employment systems, intensifying pre-existing disparities and susceptibilities within both refugee and host populations. Furthermore, deforestation, land degradation, and pollution are causing

environmental deterioration, which in turn poses significant long-term risks to ecosystems and livelihoods, especially in the Cox's Bazar region. Notwithstanding these difficulties, Bangladesh has exhibited extraordinary fortitude and unity in accommodating the Rohingya refugees, as local communities, government institutions, and foreign organisations collaborate to deliver vital services and assistance. Nevertheless, achieving durable solutions necessitates a thorough and all-encompassing strategy that directly tackles the underlying causes of the issue, such as the systematic mistreatment of the Rohingya population in Myanmar. This requires global collaboration, heightened provision of humanitarian assistance, and endeavours to foster peace, stability, and human rights in the region. To promote a more comprehensive and lasting future for both Rohingya refugees and host populations in Bangladesh, the international community should focus on mitigating the socio-economic and environmental consequences of the crisis. This approach would help create a more inclusive and sustainable society where all individuals have equal access to dignity, security, and opportunities.

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