

**RESEARCH PAPER**

# Challenges in the Humanitarian Response at Rohingya Camps in Bangladesh: A Study of the Perceptions of Local NGO Workers

**Md. Sadequle Islam***Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh*

Email: sadequle.eng@cu.ac.bd

**ABSTRACT**

**PURPOSE:** Myanmar's Rohingya population has endured decades of institutionalised prejudice and targeted violence. Nearly a million Muslim people fled to Bangladesh as a result of the most recent of these incidents, which occurred in late August 2017, sparking a significant humanitarian catastrophe. Numerous domestic and foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs) participated in the response to this massacre. However, despite the initiatives from these NGOs, the Rohingyas remain in an extremely precarious situation. This case study examines the challenges in the humanitarian responses faced by the development workers at the Rohingya camps in Ukhia Upazilla of the Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh.

**DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH:** To find a consolidated picture of the challenges, 10 development workers from local NGOs were interviewed and these semi-structured interviews were transcribed for content and discourse analysis.

**FINDINGS:** The result of this qualitative study shows that although there has been a mushroom growth of Rohingya camp-based NGOs in Bangladesh, they often face challenges in terms of operation and co-ordination. In addition to the mismatches between policy and action from the government and NGOs, direct interference from local political leaders, impediments from Rohingya *majhis* and bureaucratic complications are the major challenges that need to be addressed in order to ensure smooth and true humanitarian responses at the Rohingya Camps in Bangladesh.

**ORIGINAL VALUE OF THE PAPER:** This research work focuses on the challenges faced by the local NGO workers in order to pave the way to unearth the unaddressed challenges.

**PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS:** By considering the challenges, the NGO workers and the Rohingya communities can be supported and strengthened to ensure a more effective response.

**KEYWORDS:** *Humanitarian Response; Perceptions; NGOs; Challenges; Rohingya; Bangladesh*

**CITATION:** Islam, M.S. (2023): Challenges in the Humanitarian Response at Rohingya Camps in Bangladesh: A Study of the Perceptions of Local NGO Workers. *World Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 19, No. 3/4, pp. 65–78.

**RECEIVED:** 1 February 2023 / **REVISED:** 26 April 2023 / **ACCEPTED:** 26 April 2023 / **PUBLISHED:** 1 October 2023

**COPYRIGHT:** © 2023 by all the authors of the article above. The article is published as an open access article by WASD under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## INTRODUCTION

Since the independence of Burma (now officially the Republic of the Union of Myanmar), a country in Southeast Asia in 1948, the Rohingya Muslims have continued to experience numerous violations of their human rights, including rape, torture, and mass murder; this has continued to the present day. This institutionalised persecution and targeted violence has resulted in a continuing refugee crisis in neighbouring Bangladesh. The latest exodus began on 25 August 2017, when violence broke out in Myanmar's Rakhine State, driving almost a million Rohingya women, men, girls and boys to seek refuge in Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2019a). Following seeing indescribable horrors, the majority of those who managed to flee are now psychologically traumatised. Families were split up and massacred, entire villages were set on fire, and women and girls were gang raped. The government of Bangladesh estimated that there were roughly 1.1 million Rohingya people, but the local population insists that the actual number is significantly greater (Hossain, 2020).

Most of these Rohingya people have access to the basics, such as food and health care, as there are humanitarian actions from several organisations; however, they are still extremely vulnerable, living in highly challenging circumstances, exposed to the monsoon elements and dependent on aid (UNOCHA, 2022). Despite improvements in humanitarian aid efforts, the Rohingya's condition is still quite perilous. Their future is still uncertain, and there is little indication that they will soon return to the nation where they were denied citizenship. The underlying causes of their suffering in Myanmar have not been addressed. The camps' extreme density puts the refugees who live there in grave danger. Since tarpaulin and bamboo are the most common building materials, fires can start easily and spread swiftly. When a devastating fire engulfed the camp on 22 March 2021, this threat unfortunately materialised; nearly 10,000 homes were completely destroyed, and several people perished in the flames. There were about 50,000 persons who were homeless. Every year, the monsoon season poses a serious threat to the thousands of Rohingya families residing in the camp's temporary shelters (DRC, 2022).

As every child living in a camp in Bangladesh suffers from acute malnutrition, the Rohingyas may find it difficult to protect their human rights if they remain there for an extended period of time. There is no formal education system working at the camps due to the reluctance of the Myanmar government, children's lives are being compromised due to various crimes including drug trafficking, gang fights, etc. (Ahmed and Ahmad, 2019). In terms of education, Chandan (2021) pointed out that the majority of the 500,000 Rohingya children in Rohingya camps lack access to formal education. According to a UNHCR report, approximately 36% of Rohingya children aged 3-14, and 91% of young people still lack access to any learning opportunities in the overcrowded refugee sites (UNHCR, 2019b). There is essentially no formal education offered in the camps because there is no curriculum available in the Rohingya language in Myanmar, and the government of Myanmar will not allow the use of the Burmese curriculum in Bangladesh.

In order to address these issues and to improve the lifestyle of the Rohingya community of these Rohingya camps, humanitarian aid is offered jointly by the Bangladeshi government, international

NGOs, Red Cross organisations, and local NGOs. Each of the major areas of humanitarian assistance, such as water, health, nutrition, cleanliness, housing, etc., has groups of organisations within them. Under the auspices of the UN, the humanitarian groups operating in the camp organise themselves into so-called clusters in order to be able to offer quick and efficient support. The organisations that make up a cluster co-ordinate their efforts with each other; this guarantees that aid is distributed evenly and that it is as simple as possible to reach the refugees residing in the camp. Among the major organisations providing aid to the Rohingya in Bangladesh are UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, International NGOs (Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Council, Terre des hommes, Relief International, Save the Children, International Rescue Committee, MSF, World Concern, ACF, Handicap International), Local NGOs (BRAC, Bastob, Gonoshasthaya Kendra, Mukiti, PHALS, Prottoy, Proshika, etc.), Red Cross Societies (International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), and the government of Bangladesh.

It is needless to mention that in order to improve the quality of life of the Rohingya refugees in the largest refugee camp in the world, NGOs are assisting the government of Bangladesh and UN agencies effectively. However, despite the initiatives from these NGOs, the Rohingyas remain in an extremely precarious situation. This case study tries to dive deep into the causes of this precarious situation and sufferings of the Rohingya people in the camps of Bangladesh. In order to do this, this study discovers the challenges in the humanitarian responses faced by the development workers at the Rohingya camps in Ukhiya Upazilla of the Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh.

Since the largest Rohingya influx of 2017, research has been done on Rohingya refugees. Previous studies mainly focused on the micro level of factors, but very little attention has been paid to the challenges faced by the macro level factors, such as NGO workers. As the local NGO workers work at the root level directly with the Rohingya community to provide them with humanitarian aid, to discover the challenges, this current study sheds light on the perception of these local NGO workers. In doing so, the author aims to contextualise and provide an holistic understanding of this issue by investigating the challenges in the humanitarian response to the forcefully migrated Rohingya community at the camps of Ukhiya Upazilla in Bangladesh.

## **ROHINGYA CRISIS: PAST AND PRESENT**

### **A Brief Historical Background**

The Rohingyas are a group of ethnic and religious minorities, mostly Muslims, who are natives of Myanmar's Buddhist-majority Rakhine state (also known as the Arakan). Historical accounts show that they inhabited this region even prior to the British East India colonisation (Sudheer and Banerjee, 2021). The majority of Rohingya converted to Islam around the eighth and ninth century as Arab traders migrated to China and India (Amrith, 2013). Before Burma took control of the Arakan in 1784, this region was mostly a sovereign state. British forces seized power of the Arakan state and the rest of Burma 40 years later. After the end of British colonial rule in 1948, Arakan remained part of independent Burma. The country's name was changed from Burma to

Myanmar by the government in 1989, and the Arakan State's name was changed to Rakhine State (Majeed, 2019).

The Union Citizenship Act, passed in 1948 after Myanmar gained independence from the British, proclaimed the majority of Rohingyas to be “illegal” and barred them from obtaining citizenship. The first displacement of Rohingya refugees began in 1978, when 200,000 Rohingya refugees were forced to leave their homes and fled to neighbouring Bangladesh. The 1982 Citizenship Law of Myanmar is more than simply a means of stripping Rohingyas of their rights; in reality, it denied Rohingyas Myanmar citizenship and made them stateless. It is one of the elements that fuels prejudice, violence, and human rights abuses against the Rohingya. It also led to military genocide against the Rohingya.

The communal riots of 2012 made the situation worse when, in revenge for the gang rape of a Rakhine girl, 10 ethnic Rohingya Muslims were attacked and killed by ethnic Rakhines. Following that incident, Rakhine Buddhists began to target Rohingya Muslims. As a result of the riots, the military of Myanmar forcibly removed the Rohingya from their homes, confiscated their land, attacked their villages and homes, and nearly 140,000 Rohingyas were killed or forced to flee their homes (Debnath *et al.*, 2022).

According to the OHCHR Mission Report (2017), in early August 2017, the Burmese military started a “systematic” process of expelling hundreds of thousands of Rohingya from Myanmar. By inciting hatred, violence, and murders, as well as labelling Rohingyas as Bengalis and illegitimate settlers in Myanmar, the Burmese military repeatedly engaged in acts of humiliation and brutality to drive out Rohingya communities. They used acts of savagery, like killings, disappearances, torture, rape and other types of sexual assault, to deeply and widely create fear and anguish in the Rohingya victims on all levels, including physical, mental, and psychological (OHCHR, 2017). In August 2017, a huge crackdown in Myanmar resulted in the deaths of thousands of Rohingyas and the mass evacuation of over 750,000 of them to Bangladesh.

## Rohingya Camps in Bangladesh: An Overview

Rohingya refugees have long been hosted by Bangladesh. Around 1 million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar continue to live in the largest refugee settlement in the world in Bangladesh. More than 200,000 Rohingyas first arrived in Bangladesh in 1978. Over 250,000 additional Rohingya refugees arrived in Bangladesh in 1991-1992, and they resided in the two officially recognised camps at Nayapara (Teknaf) and Kutupalong (Ukhia) in Cox's Bazar, a district in the southern part of Bangladesh (Banerjee, 2019). Some of these settlers were repatriated, but many others stayed. The majority, however, more than 750,000, fled genocidal attacks by the Myanmar military in August 2017.

Almost everyone who arrived during the Rohingya influx of 2017 has found a place in and around the Kutupalong and Nayapara refugee camps in Bangladesh. Some have joined relatives there. Huge pressure is being placed on the Bangladeshi host community's facilities and services because of the massive volume of this influx. Overnight, new spontaneous settlements sprang up and the Kutupalong

(Ukhia) refugee camp expanded to become the biggest of its kind in the world. With over 600,000 people crammed into a 13 square kilometre area, infrastructure and services are at maximum capacity (UNHCR, 2022). The ensuing high population density in these settlements, combined with the lack of essential services, has severely strained the environment, especially because of deforestation and the depletion of water supplies. Throughout the crisis, the government of Bangladesh has generously responded, and nearby Bangladeshi villages have warmly welcomed the newcomers. They stretched their already scarce resources to the maximum in an effort to help. In 2020, with a view to alleviate worsening conditions for refugees, Bangladeshi authorities began relocating refugees to the island of Bhasan Char, which is 37 miles off the mainland in the Bay of Bengal.

The Bangladeshi government has considered the presence of the Rohingya to be transitory from the beginning of the crisis. It has resisted any longer-term programming or planning that may allow for the integration of Rohingya into Bangladeshi society, and has insisted that the only workable answer is to repatriate them to Myanmar. As per the UN report of January 2022, in the Cox's Bazar District's Ukhiya and Teknaf Upazilas, as well as on the island of Bhasan Char, there are currently 33 severely crowded camps officially declared by the government of Bangladesh, housing about 918,841 Rohingya refugees (Humanitarian Response, 2022).

## Humanitarian Response at the Rohingya Camps

Bangladesh has historically allowed humanitarian relief, support, and repatriation as a reaction to the influx of Rohingya refugees (Banerjee, 2019). On 13 April 2018, the government of Bangladesh and UNHCR also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) relating to voluntary returns of Rohingya refugees once conditions in Myanmar are deemed “conducive” (Bhuiyan, 2019). Over the last five years of the Rohingya crisis, the government of Bangladesh has directed a strong humanitarian response, providing food, shelter, hygienic infrastructure, security and other services with the aid of international donors, UN organisations, and international and local NGOs. The vast humanitarian needs in Bangladeshi Rohingya camps continue to be the primary focus of the humanitarian response; this also aims to lessen the effects of natural threats such as the annual monsoon rains and other natural disasters.

According to the Joint Response Plan of Humanitarian Response (2022), the government of Bangladesh is in charge of organising and directing the aid effort for the Rohingya inclusively. For ensuring a smooth and transparent humanitarian response, four interlinked wings of the government collaborate together. The National Task Force (NTF), presided over by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), was established under the National Strategy on Myanmar Refugees and Undocumented Myanmar Nationals and is responsible for providing oversight and strategic direction for the whole response. The supervision and oversight of the Rohingya refugee response in Cox's Bazar is the responsibility of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), which reports to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR). Additionally, in December 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) formed the National Committee on Coordination, Management, and Law

and Order. As the representative from the civil administration, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Cox's Bazar District is in charge of vital duties, such as guaranteeing security and maintaining public order as well as managing the response to the requirements of Bangladeshi host communities, notably in times of natural disaster.

The United Nations Resident Coordinator, UNHCR Representative, and IOM Chief of Mission work as the Co-Chairs of the Strategic Executive Group (SEG). This SEG offers overall direction for the Rohingya humanitarian response and works at the national level with the government of Bangladesh, especially through communication with the NTF and relevant Ministries. At the field level in Cox's Bazar, the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) plays a very crucial role to this humanitarian response. ISCG Secretariat's Principal Coordinator is in charge of overseeing the response's overall coordination, including communication with the RRRC, DC, and government officials. Again, the ISCG Principal Coordinator chairs the Heads of SubOffices Group (HOSOG); this group includes the heads of operational UN Agencies, donor organisations, and representatives of the international and Bangladeshi NGO community (Humanitarian Response, 2022).

NGO representatives work at the field level directly with the Rohingya community by providing them with food, healthcare, sanitary services, and so on. They provide regular food assistance to Rohingya households in the refugee camps. In order for consumers to choose what they need and desire to buy, they accomplish this by offering fresh food through vouchers. They must go to shops near to their homes to get the food. With the coupons, consumers can purchase a variety of foods, such as rice, fresh vegetables, chillies, spices, lentils, dried fish, eggs, and so forth. In the Rohingya refugee camps, there are over 150 functioning healthcare facilities (including primary healthcare centres, health posts, special facilities, and field hospitals) in and around the camps that provide a range of general healthcare services and, if necessary, perform major surgeries (WHO, 2021). Apart from these, on a need basis, shelter, sanitary infrastructure, protection and other services are also provided to the Rohingyas living in the camps of Bangladesh. This is how administration, management and operation of the humanitarian response takes place at the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh.

## THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the challenges in the humanitarian response at Rohingya Camps in Bangladesh. Two research questions guided the study:

- What are the challenges in the humanitarian response at Rohingya Camps in Bangladesh?
- What are the factors that influence the humanitarian aid of the local NGO workers at Rohingya Camps in Bangladesh?

## Context of Data Collection and Participants

The research was carried out at the Rohingya camps in Ukhia Upazilla of Cox's Bazar, a district in the southern part of Bangladesh. To find a consolidated picture of the challenges, 10 development

workers from 5 local NGOs were interviewed. Five of the respondents were male and five female, with job experience varying from one to five years. To gather information on the viewpoints of the local NGO employees, semi-structured informal interviews were conducted. The author conducted the interviews in Bangla at a time and place that was convenient for the respondents. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, throughout the study pseudonyms and code of identifications have been used to refer to respondents and NGOs respectively. The main goal of the semi-structured interview questions was to learn more about the difficulties that the local NGO workers face while providing humanitarian aid and how these difficulties have affected their efforts.

Among the questions that were asked, the following are important to understand the analysis:

1. What challenges do you face from local political leaders?
2. Do you think that Rohingya leaders influence your humanitarian aid, if so, how?
3. What are the challenges you have encountered from the bureaucracy or government officials?
4. Do you have any other comments on the challenges in the humanitarian response at these Rohingya camps?

## Corpus and Methodology of Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were transcribed for content and discourse analysis. Additionally, the author repeated reading and listening to the interviews in order to find a category system that would enable the analysis. In the next section the challenges faced by local NGO workers have been analysed and described accordingly.

While analysing NGO workers' responses, pseudonyms (Abid, Afif, Habib, Hasan, Bashar, Muttakina, Matluba, Samia, Sabiha, Marnia) and code of identifications (N1, N2... N5) are used. Table 1 summarises the participants' profiles.

**Table 1: Participant Profiles**

NGO Workers' Profile (Pseudonyms)	Name of NGO Code of Identification	Male/Female	Job Experience (In Years)
Abid	N1	Male	3
Afif	N2	Male	3.5
Habib	N3	Male	2.5
Hasan	N4	Male	5
Bashar	N5	Male	1
Muttakina	N1	Female	1.5
Matluba	N2	Female	4
Samia	N3	Female	1
Sabiha	N4	Female	2
Marnia	N5	Female	3.5

Source: Constructed by author



## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the local NGO workers' perceptions show that they face a number of challenges while providing humanitarian responses at the camps of Ukhia in Cox's Bazar; there are also some factors that influence the humanitarian aid.

Aid agencies have already constructed thousands of latrines and water points for the refugees in an effort to improve sanitation and access to drinkable water, reducing the risk of health issues like acute water-borne diseases. They are also assisting the government in developing new sites that can safely house refugees. As part of this, they are also constructing roads, helping site planning, constructing latrines and wells, improving drainage, upgrading the water and sanitation systems, and distributing shelter supplies. However, local NGO workers revealed that Rohingya communities are used as a “Tramp card” by the local political leaders as they temporarily rent their lands to the Rohingya families and show it to the NGOs for implementing infrastructural developments on their land. Once the works are done, they force the Rohingya families to leave their home by cancelling the rent contract. The extract below from one of the respondent reflects this vicious practice:

Local political leaders use the Rohingyas as their ‘tramp card’... you know... it’s so pathetic. Sometimes the leaders rent their own space/land to the Rohingya families inside the host community for their accommodation. Then the leaders show it to the NGOs for developing infrastructure including building latrines, water points, drainage and roads... once the infrastructural developments are done, they remove these families... and... and again they move to a new place and same thing happens. So, you know...it’s like a cycle...ultimately Rohingyas conditions are unchanged. [Afif from N2]

The NGOs often recruit translators, field facilitators, drivers, labourers and security guards for the camps. Muttakina, Bashar, and Matluba indicated that local political leaders often pursue or even sometimes try to influence the recruitment process of the NGOs by creating political pressure. Hasan from NGO N4, who also works as a camp manager, said that in January 2022, one of the local political leaders from the ruling party created pressure on him to appoint one camp security guard from his acquaintance. He even threatened Hasan that no one will be allowed to work there if his candidate was not recruited. The following extract from another respondent indicates that they face local pressure for appointing more local youths in the NGOs:

Due to the current funding crisis, many NGOs have had to cease operations, umm... which has decreased the number of job opportunities for local youth...we are unable to hire employees in the same manner as we did two years ago, so... sometimes...the local youth are kind of attempting to put pressure on us... in a variety of ways with the help of local political leaders. [Habib from N3]



Rohingya people use the term *majhi* to refer to someone who leads a group and assists them in every possible way. A *majhi* is often considered as a community leader of the Rohingya communities in several Rohingya camps of Bangladesh. As the local NGO workers deal with these *majhi*, they pointed out some issues they face from the side of Rohingya *majhi*. In this study, one of the NGO workers stated:

One day a young Rohingya woman, who was a victim of domestic violence, came to our NGO with a complaint against her husband. As we were trying to process it through proper channel, the next day the woman came and withdrew the complaint saying that her family has been pressurised and threatened by the local *majhi* to withdraw the complaint. [Sabiha from N4]

These *majhis* accept bribes and use their local influence to try and resolve some disputes politically. Local disputes and gender-based violence are frequently resolved by *majhis*, where the victims hardly ever receive fair justice. If the victims report their allegations to law enforcement or NGOs, they and their family members would face harsh societal pressures, such as social exclusion. This way, *majhis* use their leadership to influence the common Rohingya people. As revealed by Samia from NGO N3, *majhis* take extra benefit from local NGOs. Some NGOs with offices in Dhaka and other cities deploy staff to the Rohingya camps to distribute aid. Since they are from Dhaka and are unfamiliar with the camps, they simply contact the *majhis* to distribute the aid. They take the chance, keeping a lion's portion for themselves while distributing a small amount to other Rohingyas.

As mentioned by Muttakina, Abid and Marnia, the lack of clarity and consistency in the provision of information relevant to the implementation of Rohingya policy is one of the most significant bureaucratic issues that organisations encounter. According to Faruque (2020), response to the Rohingya crisis has been incredibly challenging for a variety of reasons, including the fact that Bangladesh is neither a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol. Furthermore, the Bangladesh Constitution has no provision for refugees within the country, and Bangladesh has had a pre-existing policy since 2013, delegating responsibility for providing relief aid to the Rohingyas to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). A further significant fact is that the Government of Bangladesh refers to the Rohingya population in Bangladesh as “Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs)” whereas the UN system refers to this group of people as Rohingya refugees in accordance with the pertinent international convention. Refugees are protected by international law, although the country's judiciary system makes no provisions for refugees or stateless persons. This policy also indicated that the Rohingyas were perceived as illegal migrants rather than refugees by the Bangladeshi authorities (Faruque, 2020). Bashar and Marnia from NGO N5 said that when planning or implementing any actions, the NGOs have to use

“FDMN” and again when they go to the UN agencies or to the donor groups, they have to use the term “Refugee”. The following extract indicates that this misalignment leads to a mismanagement of future planning for strategic implementation:

There is a disparity between Rohingya policy and action in Bangladesh... a conflict with the term ‘refugee’...you know conflict between the term ‘refugee’ and ‘FDMN’... This mismatch results lack of future plan and vision in terms of strategic implementation.  
[Marnia from N5]

Another challenge mentioned by the participants is the provision of Travelling Allowance (TA) or Dearness Allowance (DA). Indeed Marnia, Hasan and Habib mentioned about this practice. Government officials regularly visit or inspect the camps, and some local NGO authorities bribe the officials in the name of TA and DA to secure their clearance. As these inspections are part of their job, they are not authorised to take a single penny from the NGOs. However, it is becoming an unofficial norm to give out a significant amount of TA/DA. Some officials even refuse to sign the documents without this unlawful TA/DA. On the other hand, after getting TA/DA, they overlook the inconsistencies and flaws of the activities carried out by some NGOs and thus the serious issues are unaddressed to the higher authorities of the government. One of the respondents said:

Not every officials do this... but yes... uhh... some of them... maybe 1 out of 5 officials... yes...directly asks for the TA/DA... and you know it is needed for your NGO... to get a clearance... which is sometimes a burden for a small NGO like ours...  
[Hasan from N4]

Some respondents revealed that co-ordination is also impeded by the high, and increasing, number of bureaucratic impediments faced by NGOs. These include delays registering NGOs implementing projects in Cox’s Bazar, and extended and obstructive procedures to receive foreign donor approval from the higher authority, without which NGOs cannot receive donor funding or implement projects.

Over the last few years, safety and security issues have become a serious concern in the Rohingya camps of Bangladesh. The security situation in Cox’s Bazar’s camps has become worse since more criminal gangs and militant Rohingya groups are targeting and murdering Rohingya camp leaders. Arson, murder, rape, kidnapping, drug smuggling and human trafficking were listed as the most common crimes in the camps (Root, 2022). The interview with Hasan from NGO N4, who also works as a camp manager, revealed that it is challenging to maintain law and order in congested camps, and that outraged Rohingyas are increasingly engaging in criminal activity or becoming targets of criminal organisations. In this study, another respondent stated:

There is not enough security personnel in the camps...the fighting over controlling the camps among the armed gangs is also deteriorating the security situation inside the camps during the daytime makes everything appear tranquil but surprisingly after dusk, everything completely changes...Umm...maybe you know about killing of various Rohingya leaders including Muhibullah master. [Matluba from N2]

According to Marnia, Abid and Habib, Bangladeshi policies have restricted refugees' access to possibilities for formal education and work, as well as their freedom of movement and capacity to organise and come together as members of civil society. The government of Bangladesh does not formally recognise the many Rohingya led civil society groups in the camps; this prevents those groups from participating in the development and design of humanitarian services and response. Afif from N2 mentioned:

We, the NGO workers, are often called as the broker or agent of Rohingya and even sometimes we are called as the Agent of Myanmar by some responsible government officials and some of the members of the host community!!.. I will not mention the names but... but this is really pathetic... it hurts... we are here only to improve the situation of Rohingya families... we are not anyone's agent... how can you say like this? [Afif from N2]

The participants said that there is a discrepancy between the Bangladeshi government and the UN in terms of repatriation. Apart from that, as the NGO workers speak in favour of the Rohingya community for ensuring their wellbeing and justice, these NGO workers often have to face criticism from the members of the host community and even from some government officials.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper started by briefly discussing the historical background of the Rohingya crisis, followed by the current state of affairs in the Rohingya camps of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is temporarily housing more than one million FDMNs/Rohingya refugees from Myanmar while having inadequate means to cover costs and damages imposed upon her economy, society, and environment.

Despite the government of Bangladesh and relief organisations' tireless efforts, the burden of Rohingyas is currently too heavy to bear. For now, humanitarian assistance by the aid agencies remains the only lifeline of this stateless and deprived Rohingya community. Therefore, attention and research need to focus on the challenges faced by the NGO workers as they are the ones who work directly with the Rohingya's humanitarian assistance. This research work focuses on the challenges faced by the local NGO workers in order to pave the way to unearth the unaddressed challenges. By considering the challenges, the NGO workers and the Rohingya communities can be supported and strengthened to ensure a more effective response.

From the very beginning of the crisis, the government of Bangladesh has regarded the stay of the Rohingya as temporary, which has resisted any longer-term planning or programming. The results of this research contribute to future government plans as well as the aid agencies to reconsider the issues and challenges faced by the local NGO workers, reconsider the problems and difficulties experienced by local NGO employees, particularly in light of intervention from Rohingya *majhis* and local political figures. The findings show that the discrepancy between the policy and action is a great challenge for the humanitarian response in the camps of Bangladesh; the government and the UN should work together to reduce this inconsistency. Moreover, the bureaucratic impediments, such as obstructive procedures and unlawful allowances, need to be addressed in order to ensure a swift and robust humanitarian support. The paper also shows security issues as a serious concern as the Rohingyas are increasingly engaging in criminal activity or becoming targets of criminal organisations. Therefore, the security situation in the camps should be improved and revised through investigation, enhanced coordination and accountability among Bangladeshi law enforcement agencies. Finally, not being escapist, all the stakeholders of government should take this large group of population into consideration to bring about long-term strategies to face social, economic, and environmental challenges and implement tangible acts to ensure the sustainable repatriation of Rohingyas to their homeland, Myanmar.

According to Majeed (2019), the basis of the Rohingya community's revival is finding a solution to the statelessness problem. Therefore, all the stakeholders should keep in mind that providing aid and humanitarian support can be a temporary measure, but their ultimate, feasible and permanent solution is to help them to return to the place of their ancestors; to the land where resides their emotion, their identity. Bangladesh needs to create a comprehensive strategy for dealing with the Rohingya problem and keep all channels of communication open to continue putting pressure on Myanmar and the international community. Furthermore, the international community must play a more active role to immediately exercise all the possible diplomatic efforts with Bangladesh to allow the dignified and voluntary repatriation of Rohingya into Myanmar.

## REFERENCES

- Ahmed, M.Z. and Ahmad, A. (2019): *Reclaiming fate of Rohingya Refugees: Role of Local and International NGO's* [sic]. International Non-Governmental Organisations Congress-NGO'19, 1-3 November 2019, Bandırma, Turkey. 13pp.
- Amrith, S.S. (2013): *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*. Cambridge, MA, USA; Harvard University Press.
- Banerjee, S. (2019): *The Rohingya crisis: a health situation analysis of refugee camps in Bangladesh*. New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation.
- Bhuiyan, H.K. (2019): Rohingya repatriation: Myanmar to extend 'secret' MoU with UNHCR, UNDP for another year. *Dhaka Tribune*. Available at: <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/world/south-asia/2019/05/06/rohingya-repatriation-myanmar-to-extend-secret-mou-with-unhcr-undp-for-another-year>.



- Chandan, S.K. (2021): How Rohingya youth are fighting for education. *The Daily Star, Dhaka*. Available at: <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/how-rohingya-youth-are-fighting-education-2160291>.
- Danish Refugee Council (DRC) (2022): *Rohingya in Bangladesh: The world's largest refugee camp*. Available at: <https://help.drc.ngo/en/how-we-work/life-as-a-refugee/rohingya-in-bangladesh-the-world-s-largest-refugee-camp/>. Accessed 5 December 2022.
- Debnath, K., Chatterjee, S. and Afzal, A.B. (2022): Natural Resources and Ethnic Conflict: A Geo-strategic Understanding of the Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp.186-207. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120309>.
- Faruque, T.E. (2020): Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh: The Case of UNHCR's Response. *Jurnal Hubungan Internasional*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp.28-40. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18196/hi.91160>.
- Hossain, I. (2020): *After humanitarianism: Bangladesh's evolving Rohingya policy*. German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA). Available at: <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/after-humanitarianism-bangladesh-s-evolving-rohingya-policy>. Accessed 12 December 2022.
- Humanitarian Response (2022): *Bangladesh: 2022 Joint Response Plan Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis*. Available at: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/bangladesh/document/bangladesh-2022-joint-response-plan-rohingya-humanitarian-crisis>. Accessed 5 December 2022. 52pp.
- Majeed, S. (2019): Islamophobia and the mental health of Rohingya refugees. In Moffic, H.S., Peteet, J., Hankir, A.Z. and Awaad, R. (Eds): *Islamophobia and Psychiatry* (pp. 277-291). New York City: Springer International Publishing. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00512-2\\_24](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00512-2_24).
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2017): *Mission report of OHCHR rapid response mission to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh*. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/CXBMissionSummaryFindingsOctober2017.pdf>. Accessed 1 December 2022. 12pp.
- Root, R.L. (2022): New Report Reveals 'Miserable' Conditions in Rohingya Refugee Camps. Available at: <https://www.devex.com/news/new-report-reveals-miserable-conditions-in-rohingya-refugee-camps-102616>. Accessed 17 December 2022.
- Sudheer, N. and Banerjee, D. (2021): The Rohingya refugees: A conceptual framework of their psychosocial adversities, cultural idioms of distress and social suffering. *Global Mental Health*, Vol. 8, p.E46. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2021.43>.
- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2019a): *UNHCR Bangladesh—protection factsheet—as of December 2018*. Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/67748>. Accessed 1 December 2022.
- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2019b): *Rohingya refugees: an urgent need for quality education*. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/videos/2019/6/5cf67f1e4/rohingya-refugees-an-urgent-need-for-quality-education.html>. Accessed 5 December 2022.
- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2022): *Rohingya Emergency*. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/rohingya-emergency.html>. Accessed 1 December 2022.
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) (2022): *Rohingya Refugee Crisis*. Available at: <https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis>. Accessed 12 December 2022.

World Health Organisation (WHO) (2021): *Rohingya Crisis Situation Report #5, Cox's Bazar*. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/who-cxb-situation-report-5.pdf>. Accessed 17 December 2022.

---

## BIOGRAPHY



**Md. Sadequle Islam** is an Assistant Professor of Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh. Currently, he is pursuing his PhD with a DAAD Doctoral Research Grant at the University of Hamburg, Germany. His particular research interests are the Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh, Translanguaging, Technology in ELT and Second Language Acquisition.

---

