Risk Acceptance for Humanitarian Crisis Response:
Evidence From Rohingya Influx Into Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to identify the risk acceptance of humanitarian crisis response associated with the Rohingya influx into Bangladesh. Myanmar government's oppression at Rakhine state triggered Rohingya people to flee to Bangladesh to save their lives. While Bangladesh is a densely populated small country, she welcomed Rohingyas considering the humanitarian ground. This study analyzed journal articles, situation reports of different agencies and media contents on Rohingya issues, and conducted interviews of Rohingyas, host community, and crisis responders. By accepting risk, Bangladesh is responding to the Rohingya crisis which has saved humanity; however, it created conflicting dynamics, increased population, leading to environmental degradation and creating health risks. This is also challenging national security and impacting reversely on the economy, food security, employment, and tourism. For the betterment of the region, it is necessary to solve the problem in a peaceful way through bi-lateral and multilateral dialogue.

KEYWORDS

Bangladesh, Emergency Response, Humanitarian Action, Myanmar, Risk Acceptance, Rohingya Crisis

1. INTRODUCTION

Researchers tried to identify the core issues of the Rohingya crisis, ethnic identity, and historical context (Chan, 2005; Driss, 2016; Farzana, 2015; Milton et al., 2017; Uddin, 2019; Zawacki, 2012). Rohingyas are often described as the most persecuted minority in the world (Bepler, 2018). In 2014, the UN-backed census attempted to conduct; permission given initially to identify the Muslim minority group as the Rohingya. Buddhist nationalists threatened to boycott the census, and 'some hard-line Buddhists spread rumors that Muslims were attempting to convert Myanmar from a Buddhist country through migration and marriage to Buddhist women' (Holland, 2014). Attempting to keep the peace, the government decided Rohingya could only register if they identified as Bengali instead (Albert & Maizland, 2019). Rohingyas are claiming Myanmar (Burmese) citizenship as their natural right; they

are entitled to enjoy all citizenship rights. But the state political authority of Myanmar continued to deny Rohingya's right and entitlement, whereas Bangladesh considered Rohingyas as foreign citizens or 'illegal Burmese migrants' (Farzana, 2015; Uddin, 2019).

Historically, the Rohingya people are fleeing to Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Thailand to save themselves from the oppression in their country of origin (Steinberg, 2010; Yesmin, 2016). Myanmar's military *Junta* launched 'Operation Nagamin' in 1978. At that time, thousands of Rohingya fled to neighboring Bangladesh. Experiencing persecution at home, a large number [approximately 200,000] of Rohingyas also arrived in 1991, 1992, and 2012 (Yesmin, 2016). In 2017, the world saw Rohingya influx due to 'Clearance Operations' by the Myanmar security forces which had begun before the insurgent attacks on police posts on August 25; United Nations described it as a "Textbook example of ethnic cleansing" which includes killings, torture, and rape (Nebehay, 2017; Uddin, 2019; UN News, 2017). And even, inhuman justice was seen during disaster response (Cyclone Komen 2005) in Myanmar's Rakhine State. Massive flood impacted the state; Muslim Rohingya minority fled their homes to 'seek refuge' in government shelters, they could have stayed at the shelter if they had signed documents identifying themselves as Bengalis (Desportes, 2019).

In 2012, the then foreign minister Dipu Moni stated that "Bangladesh is a densely populated country and the Rohingyas have impacts on our society, law and order and environment. Considering all aspects, it will create serious problems for us. We are not interested in more people coming to Bangladesh" (The Daily Star, 2012). When Dhaka rejected the Rohingya entry to Bangladesh, the government directed the administration and law enforcement agencies to beef up vigilance and resist intrusion. During that time, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) urged the Bangladesh government to allow the people seeking refugees in the country (The Daily Star, 2012). Before the 1990s, Bangladesh followed liberal policy in dealing with the Rohingya crisis. For protecting the refugees, the government built camps, provided temporary shelters and other assistance. People of Bangladesh had a soft corner to the Rohingyas for humanitarian reasons (Yesmin, 2016). From the same humanitarian ground, Bangladesh had welcomed Rohingya people in 2017 when Myanmar's military torture was unbearable in their homeland. With the continuous Rohingya fleeing and camp settlements, the refugee situation in Bangladesh has become one of the most protracted crises in the world (Milton et al., 2017). Primarily the government of Bangladesh denied education for Rohingya children. Human Rights Watch (HRW) report finds the barrier to education for Rohingya refugee children. As per the report, it is not due to lack of resources but the government's policy of deliberate deprivation of education in pursuit of its efforts to prevent the refugees from integrating (Human Rights Watch, 2019). In January 2020, Bangladesh allows schooling for Rohingya children, which is welcomed by human rights activists (AFP, 2020). In 2019, Gambia filed the Rohingya genocide case against Myanmar at the United Nation's highest court, the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi claimed that the allegations are "Incomplete and misleading factual picture of the situation" (Al Jazeera, 2019; Bowcott, 2019). In a historic verdict, the ICJ ordered the Myanmar government to protect Rohingyas from genocide and to prevent the destruction of evidence related to genocide allegations (UN News, 2020).

Bangladesh is a densely populated country and highly vulnerable to disasters and climate change. Most of the people of this country mainly depend on agriculture. Though the country is facing enormous problems and challenges in the context of it's population density, frequent disasters, low vegetation coverage, less developed economy, it has responded to a humanitarian emergency by sheltering a large number of Rohingya people. Bangladesh has taken risks by accepting Rohingya influx in an emergency humanitarian situation. This paper tries to illustrate the general view of the risk associated with humanitarian response to the Rohingya influx into Bangladesh. This study may help the international community in understanding the perspective of risks taken by Bangladesh, which suggests the continuation of existing supports for both the host community and Rohingya people, and as well as work for sustainable solutions to the crisis. Therefore, this study aims to find the answer to the following question: What different risks Bangladesh has taken by accepting the Rohingya influx?

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