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RESEARCH PAPER

Beyond Humanitarian Assistance: The Rohingya Crisis, International Responsibility, and the Failure of Sustainable Repatriation

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the international responses and political restrictions regarding the failure to achieve sustainable Rohingya repatriations. Humanitarian assistance has safeguarded displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh. But a number of political and legal obstacles still hamper durable solutions. The study adopts a qualitative analytical case-study design. It explores the displacement situation of Rohingyas and the international reactions. Secondary data were taken from academic literature, UN reports, legal documents and policy statements. Analysis combines components of human security, refugee governance and international responsibility sharing approaches. Results show that humanitarian protection is crucial and does not ensure security or citizenship. International interventions have contributed to relief, but not to solutions to displacement. Sustainable repatriation is limited by sovereignty issues, poor enforcement, non-interference of regions and geopolitical interests. For sustainable repatriation, there is a need for recognized citizenship, security assurances, accountability principles and socioeconomic reintegration. Immediate independent monitoring and increased international cooperation is needed.

KEYWORDS Rohingya Crisis, Forced Displacement, Statelessness, Humanitarian Response, Repatriation

Introduction

Forced displacement is a major humanitarian and political issue in contemporary international relations. The Rohingya crisis is especially complex because ethnic marginalisation, citizenship deprivation, insecurity, and regional geopolitical rivalry intersect. Since the 1960s, Rohingya communities in Myanmar have faced restrictions on citizenship, movement, political participation, and access to basic services (Ibrahim, 2016; Southwick, 2015). Although the international community focused considerable attention on the Rohingya crisis after the mass displacement of 2017, its roots extend much further back. Historical studies show that debates about Rohingya identity and belonging developed through colonial transformations, post-independence nation-building, and ethnic nationalism in Myanmar (Leider, 2013). These debates became intertwined with political narratives that contested the Rohingya's legitimacy as a national community (Walton, 2017). Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law marked a major stage in the institutionalisation of Rohingya exclusion. Citizenship categories and documentary requirements created substantial obstacles to legal recognition for many Rohingya (Cheesman, 2017). Restricted recognition was accompanied by limitations on movement, education, employment, and political participation (Weissbrodt & Collins, 2006). In August 2017, attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on Myanmar

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security forces were followed by large-scale military operations in Rakhine State. International violations included killings, destruction of villages, sexual violations and forced displacement (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2018). Within months, over 700,000 Rohingya were on the run to Bangladesh (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2024).

Bangladesh provided shelter for displaced Rohingya and facilitated humanitarian actions by coordinating with international organisations. The result was averted a bigger humanitarian crisis, but the economies, environment and social conditions of host communities have been harmed by the proximity of almost one million people over an extended period (World Bank, 2023). Although the Rohingya refugee crisis has received significant attention and humanitarian aid from international organisations and donor countries, very few have returned safely to Myanmar. Then there is the question why, so far, large-scale humanitarian action won't be able to get a lasting political solution. Prior scholarship provides background on Rohingya identity, citizenship exclusion, human-rights abuses and refugee protection (Ibrahim, 2016; Cheesman, 2017; Leider, 2013; Betts, 2013; Zetter, 2013). The strands are typically dealt with in isolation and a lack of discussion is addressed on the interaction of citizenship exclusion, humanitarian intervention, international responsibility and geopolitical interests that hinder sustainable repatriation. This article seeks to close that gap by weaving together three strands of human security, a theory on refugee governance and a theory of responsibility sharing in the international arena. It asserts that the ongoing emergency situation is not just a lack of humanitarian assistance, but an absence of any linkage between protection and political change efforts to citizenship, security, accountability, and return. The article links humanitarian studies with international politics by showing why aid alone cannot resolve prolonged displacement and by examining how sovereignty, geopolitical interests, and responsibility-sharing shape responses to the crisis.

The article analyses literature on the Rohingya identity, citizenship and refugee governance, the research design and analytical approach, and trends of historical exclusion, humanitarian action, international responsibility, and barriers to repatriation.

Literature Review

The Rohingya crisis has spawned a broad amount of scholarly and policy discussion in the areas of refugee studies, international relations, human rights studies, citizenship studies and humanitarian governance. Previously existing literature has helped a great deal to comprehend how the exclusion of Rohingya has unfolded historically, how the definition of identity has been politicized, the effects of being stateless, and the challenges of safeguarding refugees. Nevertheless, the literature is still divided on the major factors that drove the crisis and results in little combined examination of why and why long-term humanitarian intervention has not had an impact on bringing about durable returns.

This part of the review critically examines past literature with the help of the four main themes, namely: (1) Rohingya identity and historical belonging, (2) citizenship and statelessness, (3) humanitarian governance and refugee protection, and (4) international responsibility and the geopolitical constraints. Instead of just giving an overview of past research, in this section the researcher assesses their contributions and limitations to show why the current study is necessary.

Rohingya Identity, Historical Belonging, and Ethnic Politics

There is a great amount of literature on how Rohingya identity is a contested one in relation to the Myanmar nation-building process. The issue of nationality in Myanmar has been at the forefront of the political issues regarding the Rohingya people.

One of the most elaborate historical accounts of the formation of Rohingya identity is the one by Leider (2013). He states that the history of Muslim people in Arakan cannot be discussed with the help of a simplistic dichotomy between the indigenous peoples and migrants. Rather, there were centuries of political, cultural, and demographic interaction in the region. It is significant that Leider has tried to bring forth a challenge to simplified historical narratives which have served to justify exclusion.

Nevertheless, discussions about the identity of Rohingya have been highly politicised in history. Ibrahim (2016) believes that the Rohingya identity denial was turned into the exclusion politics of exclusion instead of a historical dissent. Ibrahim sees questioning Rohingya belonging as the source of ideological legitimacy to restrictive citizenship policies and discriminatory practices. Walton (2017) goes further to note that ethnic nationalism has contributed highly to the formation of national identity among Myanmar. As indicated in his analysis, acknowledgment as a legitimate ethnic group became intimately related to political legitimacy and citizenship rights. People that were not encapsulated in official ethnic groups were left exposed to political marginalization.

Though these works offer valuable accounts on what the identity politics is all about, they tend to stick more on the domestic political affairs in Myanmar. The impacts of identity-based exclusion persisting post-displacement and influence international responses and repatriation efforts have received less attention.

Institutionalized Exclusion, Statelessness, and Citizenship

The other major area of research regards citizenship as the fundamental process that has constituted the Rohingya communities politically vulnerable. Persecuted Rohingyas are facing a crisis of not just discrimination, but also being denied legal citizenship, the researchers say. Cheesman's essay (2017) is one of the influential essays which give an evaluation of the citizenship system in Myanmar and legal acknowledgment of Myanmar ethnicity. He shows that citizenship was now not merely a legal status but it was also a political instrument in the manner the state used to determine national membership.

Myanmar Citizenship Law of 1982 is often deemed as a turning point. The law introduced various types of citizenship and demanded people to prove ties with officially recognised ethnic groups or historical standards. Even though the act did not literally deprive all Rohingyas of citizenship, the execution of the law made this process a hurdle to the members of the group (Cheesman, 2017). Statelessness is a significant concept that can be applied to formulate the vulnerability of Rohingya. Arendt (1951) opined that the person who is a non-member of a political entity generally turns out to be ineffective in acquiring rights given the fact that legal protection is usually tied with citizenship. This argument is very applicable to the Rohingya experience.

Weissbrodt and Collins (2006) also elaborate that stateless individual are more vulnerable as they do not have effective political and legal protection. Their work

explains the reason why loss of citizenship resulted in permanent insecurity within the Rohingya populations.

Southwick (2015) builds on this claim, analyzing the role that statelessness can play in fueling mass atrocities. She claims that lack of protection in citizenship exposes vulnerable situations in which the targeted communities are exposed to systematic abuse. Nevertheless, studies on citizenship usually focus on the statelessness generation in Myanmar. Although they succinctly describe why Rohingya people got vulnerable prior to displacement, they give less insight on why the international responses have not changed stateless refugees into secure political societies. This paper addresses this shortcoming by connecting citizenship exclusion with an international responsibility and the inability of sustainable repatriation to occur.

Governance and Humanitarian Response to Refugees

A third key focus of literature tries to look at refugee governance and the success of humanitarian responses. These articles are very valuable in understanding the reasons why despite large amount of international help, refugee crises remain to be long term. Betts (2013) asserts that the modern-day refugee systems often deal with the dislocation without dealing with political failures that cause the formation of refugees. It is his survival migration concept that states that people cross borders due to failure by the home states to even secure basic protection. This held of view is very applicable to the Rohingya case. Humanitarian organizations and Bangladesh have offered necessary protection however the political conditions which have prohibited returning have not been resolved.

Betts and Collier (2017) also state that the current system of refugees on a global level needs to change the mode of short-term humanitarian aids to more long-term strategies that would entail economic prospects, political resolutions, and international collaboration. Zetter (2013) discusses what he calls the complex of refugee humanitarianism in which humanitarian regimes tend to be preoccupied with the management of the population of refugees, and not the factors behind displacement. His reasoning can be used to understand why Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh have become permanent emergency camps instead of a temporary emergency camp.

McAdam (2014) stresses that the voluntary return, local integration, or resettlement under safety and dignity conditions is needed to achieve durable solutions. Her argument points out that the issue of refugee return cannot be isolated of issues of rights and protection.

The already available literature of the refugee governance reflects thus that humanitarian aid is not sufficient to solve displacement. Nonetheless, to a large extent, this literature is general and fails to adequately look at how these challenges play out in the unique political environment of Myanmar.

International Responsibility and Geopolitical Differences

The influence of foreign powers has gained more and more prominence in Rohingya literature. The activity of the United Nations, donor states, regional institutions, and the great powers have been studied.

Loescher, Betts and Milner (2008) also support this argument by stating that the protection of refugees involves international collaboration since there exist

responsibilities that the individual state cannot handle in cases of large-scale displacement. They emphasize the role of responsibility-sharing in governing refugees in their work. Rohingya crisis illustrates how this principle can become different in reality. The direct responsibility has fallen on Bangladesh in terms of hosting refugees whereas the international actors have taken the lead in terms of financial support and diplomacy.

According to the United Nations Human Rights Council (2018), there were serious human rights violations in connection with Rohingya groups and suggested any accountability actions. These results led the world to awareness of the crisis and being a part of the legal debate on accountability. Geopolitical factors have however limited international action. According to the arguments by international relations scholars, humanitarian responses are also considered to be at times affected by strategic interests and power relations (Chimni, 1998).

This tension is shown by the response of the ASEAN. As much as the organisation has promoted dialogue and humanitarian collaboration, its practice of non-interference has restricted its active intervention in domestic issues in Myanmar (Suzuki, 2019). The strategies of China and India have been calculated as well. Economic, security, and regional interests impact how they relate to Myanmar and have contributed to the degree of pressure generated on them politically.

Muslim Community Response: Solidarity and Its Limitations

The influence of the Muslim-majority countries is another significant yet a rather less developed field of study. Existing literature agrees that Muslim states and Islamic organizations volunteered to offer humanitarian aid and diplomatic support but the political viability of such answers is a controversial issue.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has continuously increase awareness of the Rohingya issue on global platforms and assist humanitarian efforts. Nonetheless, it has not had a lot of influence on domestic policies of Myanmar.

Research on Muslim international solidarity would indicate that religious identity can foster humanitarian cooperation, but not necessarily give rise to unified foreign policy behaviour. The diplomatic decisions remain to be influenced by the interests of states, economic relations, and strategic priorities. Thus, there is a significant contradiction in Muslim response: great humanitarian interest but low politics.

The literature reviewed illustrates that past studies have been able to study: Rohingya identity formation, citizenship exclusion, statelessness, human rights violations, humanitarian challenges. Nevertheless, there are still three significant gaps. First, the reasons of displacement and the failure of repatriation usually are separated by existing studies. The interdependence between the exclusion of the pre-displacement and the post-displacement political failure needs further study. Two, the humanitarian studies often focus on the assistance to refugees but they offer scanty explanation on why humanitarian assistance has failed to deliver sustainable solutions. Third, the major actors are frequently analyzed individually instead of looking at the interaction of the geopolitical interests, regional politics, and failure to share responsibility at the level of major actors in international response studies.

Material and Methods

Research Design

This qualitative analytical case study examines why extensive humanitarian support has not produced sustainable Rohingya repatriation. It traces the crisis from historical citizenship restrictions to the post-2017 displacement, using qualitative analysis to connect institutional exclusion, humanitarian governance, and geopolitical constraints.

The paper looks at the history starting with the enactment of citizen will limitations in Myanmar, up to the present issues of refugee repatriation. Though the specific focus is on the 2017 displacement, the analysis presents this event in a more general historical and political context.

Sources of Data

The study uses secondary sources in four categories: (1) academic books and peer-reviewed articles on Rohingya identity, citizenship, statelessness, refugee governance, and international relations; (2) reports from UNHCR, the UN Human Rights Council, IOM, and OCHA on displacement, assistance, and repatriation; (3) human-rights documentation from organisations including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Fortify Rights; and (4) government, ASEAN, and OIC statements and policy documents. These sources are compared thematically rather than treated as interchangeable evidence.

Thematic analysis is organised around four themes: (1) the production of statelessness through citizenship law and ethnic nationalism; (2) humanitarian management and refugee protection in Bangladesh; (3) international and regional responsibility and the constraints on political action; and (4) legal, political, and security barriers to safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation.

Thematic analysis is used to analyses the collected materials. The interpretation is directed by four key themes.

Theme 1: Statelessness by Production: The theme explores how statelessness was produced by laws of citizenship, ethnic nationalism, and identity politics.

Theme 2: Humanitarian Management: The theme examines the responses of the Bangladesh Government and international organizations towards the displacement of refugees and the constraints of the humanitarian strategies.

Theme 3: International Responsibility: The theme will assess the reactions of international and regional actors and the reasons why the international mechanisms have failed to produce a political solution.

Theme 4: Barriers to Sustainable Repatriation: This theme determines the political, legal, and security aspects that are the barriers to safe and voluntary return.

Reliability was strengthened by comparing academic research, legal materials, and institutional reports. The analysis distinguishes reported events and statistics from scholarly interpretations and the article's own argument, reducing the risk of presenting contested interpretations as established facts.

In order to enhance the reliability of the analytical process, the research will use different kinds of information sources instead of basing the analytical process on a single institutional point of view.

The study distinguishes between empirical evidence: Reported events and legal frameworks, Statistics of refugees and institutional reports.

Scholarly connotation: Academic debate on notions of identity, citizenship, humanitarian government and international politics. Analytical opinion of the author: Humanitarian assistance has caused no sustainable repatriation, either due to the structural political problems in the international system tackled in another way, or because it is not genuine humanitarian assistance but is simply transferred to another victim of the same conflict. This will ensure that there won't be different accounts of the same phenomena to show as a fact.

Study Limitations

This research has a number of limitations. Firstly, it does not rely on primary data but second data and it cannot ask refugees of Rohingya, policymakers and humanitarian workers themselves what the case is. Second, there is restricted contact with the internal (domestic) governmental decision making process. Third, the political environment of Myanmar keeps changing following the 2021 military coup, and so the future changes could affect the possibility of repatriation.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the research comes with a combined analytic insight of the connection between displacement, humanitarian response, and political resolve.

Results and Discussion

Analytical Framework

The article combines human security, refugee governance, and international responsibility-sharing to explain both the conditions that produced displacement and why humanitarian intervention has not enabled sustainable return. Human security focuses on threats to life, dignity, and rights; refugee governance distinguishes emergency management from political resolution; and responsibility-sharing examines how protection burdens and political commitments are distributed among Myanmar, Bangladesh, donor states, and international organisations.

Human Security Theory

A traditional security perspective emphasizes state, territorial security and military threats. Human security moves focus from security towards the security of the individual, in terms of his or her safety, livelihood, dignity, and rights. This much wider sense has since been popularised by the UNDP (1994) and is applicable in the case of the Rohingya, as the sense of insecurity is not just about violence, but also citizenship deprivation, restrictions on mobility, political and social exclusion and limitations in education, employment, healthcare, etc.

The use of the concept of human security as a lens for analysis does not exhaust its ability to explain. However, Paris (2001) cautions that adding all possible threats to the concept dilutes its specific content. In this study, it assists in looking at the reasons

for the need for return protection from new violence/discrimination, recognition of fundamental rights, and conditions for a dignified life – not just physical return.

Refugee Governance Perspective

Refugee governance" is defined as "the institutions, rules and practices in which states and humanitarian actors engage when responding to forced displacement". Responses can also address immediate survival needs without taking care of the political causes of displacement (Betts, 2013), or, as Zetter (2013) warns, humanitarian systems can focus on handling refugees rather than addressing their root causes.

In the Rohingya situation, even though Bangladesh and humanitarian partners have been able to offer vital protection, they are not able to restore citizenship, ensure security within Myanmar or effect political change. This exercise thus separates the elements of humanitarian effectiveness – including protection, healthcare, food and shelter – from the ability to implement a safe, voluntary, dignified and long-lasting solution.

International Responsibility-Sharing Framework

The responsibility sharing mechanism examines who does what for protection and who has to do what in the country of origin, host country, in the protection agencies in the donor countries and in international protection agencies in the country of origin. Cooperation can be done at the funding level, technical level, protection level, accountability level, diplomacy level and facilitate the safe return scenarios. It is not possible for a state of origin to do the proxying on its own, says Loescher, Betts and Milner (2008).

Bangladesh has been taking the responsibility of hosting Rohingya refugee and the activities of various foreign organizations and donor countries have helped Bangladesh to address immediate problems.Bangladesh has taken up the responsibility of hosting the Rohingya refugees and various foreign organizations as well as countries are providing help and diplomatic support to Bangladesh. But political change has not gathered sufficiently fuelled by this assistance support in Myanmar. The framework is meant to help measure inequalities, geopolitical agendas of make or break on those imposing conditions on return – it does not mean responsible sharing as an automatic political solution.

Integrating the Three Perspectives

All three lenses are mutually reinforcing: Human security highlights the threats to rights and dignity; refugee governance makes sense of how to deliver effective emergency relief while crisis situations remain unresolved; and responsibility sharing sees how do to allocate resources, protection responsibilities and political signals. These two essays combine armed force and displacement to the management of the refugee situation and international restrictions on return.

This relationship is summarized in Figure 1, which indicates that historical marginalisation and citizenship deprivation increases insecurity and displacement, and political and geopolitical factors hinder sustainable return. The framework acknowledges the framework of citizenship rights and security guarantees, accountability and international responsible burden sharing as necessary conditions.

These are qualitative propositions evaluated through documentary evidence, not statistically estimated causal effects.

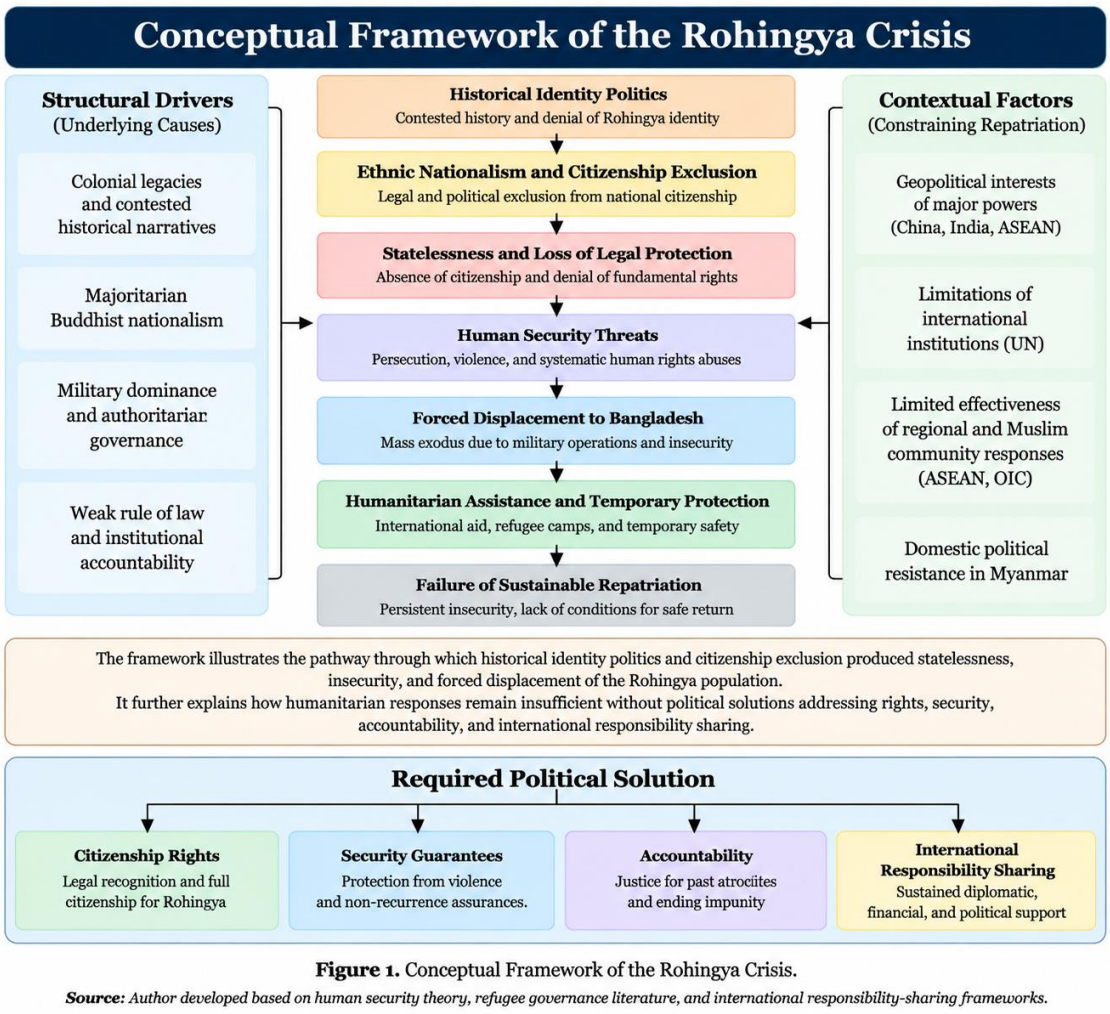


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Rohingya Crisis.

Source: *Author developed based on human security theory, refugee governance literature, and international responsibility-sharing frameworks.*

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Rohingya Crisis

Source: Author's framework, informed by human security, refugee governance, and international responsibility-sharing literature.

Historical Evolution of the Rohingya Crisis: From Identity Contestation to Forced Displacement

The Rohingya crisis predates the 2017 violence. It developed through prolonged disputes over identity, ethnic nationalism, citizenship, and political inclusion. This history matters because contemporary displacement cannot be understood apart from the institutional processes that progressively restricted Rohingya rights in Myanmar.

The question of Rohingya identity is, therefore, not a historical problem only, but also, a political one. The conflicting discourses of belonging and indigeneity have manipulated citizenship policies and societal perceptions on the Rohingya people. Although there are political actors in Myanmar who have depicted Rohingya communities as new arrivals, researchers believe that the narratives overlook the long history of interaction and demographic alteration in the region (Ibrahim, 2016).

The Politics of Belonging and Colonial Legacy

The British colonial rule had a wide impact on Arakan demographic and political changes. The colonial era regime (18241948) boosted population flows in the region through administrative assimilation of British India and Burma. Later on, these movements took the centre stage on political discussions relating to migration and ethnicity.

Myanmar, having obtained independence in 1948, had to tackle the task of forming a national identity out of many ethnolinguistic groups. Rather than creating an overarching civic identity, political processes grew to establish national membership along the lines of officially recognised ethnic groupings. According to Walton (2017), the nationalism of Myanmar was formed based on the concept of national races, in which the recognition of ethnicity was strongly associated with political legitimacy.

Such a strategy posed challenges to communities in which the identities were challenged by the state. This made the Rohingya especially susceptible as their ethnicity was doubting in official politics of Myanmar. Politicization of identity turned the social difference into legal and institutional issue. Throughout the years, the politics of belonging have shaped the policies of citizenship, the practice of administration, and the actions of the states towards the Rohingya people.

Citizenship Exclusion and the Generation of Statelessness

The greatest institutional force contributing to Rohingya marginalisation was the creation of discriminatory citizenship policies. In 1982, Myanmar Citizenship Law was enacted that established a system of citizenship by varying categories, such as full citizenship, associate citizenship and naturalised citizenship. The ability to access their categories was largely determined by the awareness of ethnic identity and historical existence in Myanmar (Cheesman, 2017).

The law itself was not a direct curtailment of the citizenship of all Rohingya citizens, but meant that many represented by this community found it difficult to exercise its rights. Those who failed to meet eligibility criteria as per the state requirements had a hard time getting citizenship documents. Being denied citizenship was more than just legal notability. Restrictions on Rohingya communities included restrictions on freedom of movement, education, employment, health and political participation, all of which were a result of their lack of citizenship.

The articulation of ethnicity became a political membership system in Myanmar after changing the citizenship system, Cheesman (2017) stated. Citizenship thus came not only to represent a legal term, but it also became the means of establishing who was part of the nation. The production of statelessness greatly enhanced the vulnerability of the Rohingya. Stateless persons tend to have ineffective access to the protection of the states since the majority of rights and services are planned by the models of citizenship (Weissbrodt and Collins, 2006).

Discrimination and Mass Displacement

There had been several trends of Rohingya displacement prior to 2017. After Operation Nagamin in 1978, large numbers of people entered Bangladesh, and during Operation in 1991-92 there was another significant influx (UNHCR, 2024). These arenas are indicative of unstable situations, rather than an isolated emergency.

In 2012, communal violence erupted in Rakhine State in Rakhine, increasing segregation and restriction of movement, and Human Rights Watch (2016) reported human rights violations during this period. After ARSA attacks on Myanmar's security forces in August 2017, the Myanmar military was responsible for operations that were reported by the international community to have involved killings, destruction of villages, sexual violence, and forced displacement (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2018). In less than a year, over 700,000 Rohingya refugees arrived in Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2024). Violence of 2017 must thus be understood in the backgroud of decades of exclusion and lack of rights.

More than 700,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh within a few months (UNHCR, 2024). Nevertheless, the explanation of the 2017 crisis merely as a reaction to ARSA attacks is not complete. The violence was in a bigger context of decades of exclusion, discrimination, and deprivation of citizen rights. The major displacement waves and their institutional consequences are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Major Rohingya Displacement Waves and Historical Developments

Period	Major development	Implications for Rohingya communities
1978	Operation Nagamin and military pressure	Large refugee movement from Myanmar into Bangladesh.
1982	Myanmar Citizenship Law introduced	Ethnic classification and documentary requirements created major barriers to citizenship recognition.
1991–1992	Renewed military operations in Rakhine State	Another large refugee influx into Bangladesh.
2012	Communal violence and segregation in Rakhine State	Internal displacement increased and movement restrictions deepened.
2017	Military operations after ARSA attacks	More than 700,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh within months.
2021 onward	Military coup and wider armed conflict	Political instability further weakened prospects for safe, voluntary return.

Source: Author, based on Leider (2013), Cheesman (2017), Human Rights Watch (2016), UNHCR (2024), and United Nations Human Rights Council (2018).

The Humanitarian Response of Bangladesh and the Dilemma of Long-term Hosting

Bangladesh facilitated entry of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya and mobilized international organizations to support their lodging, nutrition, medical, sanitation, protection and education. IOM, with support from other humanitarian actors, has helped the Kutupalon-Balikhali settlement in Cox's Bazar to become one of the largest refugee camps in the world (UNHCR, 2024).

The Joint Response Plan for 2025–26 projected 1.65 million people requiring assistance and a 2025 projection of 1.48 million, of whom will be approximately 1.09 million Rohingya refugees or forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals. It claimed to be $934.5 billion and engaged 113 partners (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees et al., 2025). These are planning not actual figures. The overall population data are shown in Figure 2.

The size of the appeal reflects the ongoing humanitarian need, rather than a change in causes of flight in Myanmar. Funding, access and security vary between days and days; citizenship and protection is based on political decisions, which humanitarian agencies cannot make.

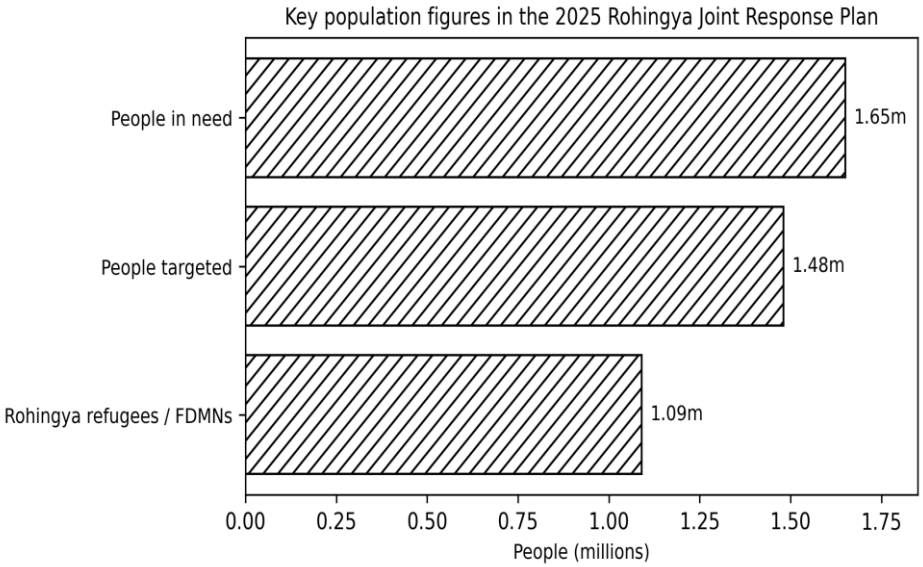


Figure 2. Population Figures in the 2025 Rohingya Joint Response Plan

Note: Categories overlap, and should not be combined. Data taken from: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees et al. (2025).

Local resources, forest ecosystems, infrastructure, and livelihoods of host communities are under stress due to long-term hosting. The World Bank (2023) has also highlighted other pressures on this economically marginalized region due to its development. The impacts provide a further imperative for international support that is equitable, and where refugees are not blamed for structural development issues.

Humanitarian Success and Political Failure

In the case of the Rohingya, the difference between a successful humanitarian effort and a political abject failure becomes evident. Humans, humanitarian actors have succeeded in preventing a larger humanitarian tragedy. Integrated interventions to deliver critical life-saving aid for refugees and the risk of mortality is reduced. Despite this, the march towards humanitarianism has not resulted in a political solution. Refugee camps are still relying on external aid since they have yet to be conducive to safe repatriation.

Betts (2013) is convinced that refugee regimes can prevent unmanageable displacement but are not capable of addressing the political failures which produce it. The Rohingya example is a good example of the distinction: while the immediate suffering has been lessened with humanitarian assistance the core issues of citizenship denial, political marginalisation, insecurity and lack of accountability have yet to be addressed. This should not be solely the fault of the humanitarian groups, but it is due to the capacity of relief without action on political contexts.

International Responses and the Limits of Responsibility-Sharing

Since 2017, the Rohingya crisis has been widely discussed on the international level. Among the many responses so far, there have been humanitarian aid, diplomacy, responsibility efforts and legal action. However, the international intervention has yet to be successful in achieving sustainable repatriation. One of the important constraints on

refugees' governance in recent years is that international actors generally have a stronger capacity to govern impacts on refugees, than the political processes that cause displacement.

The universal reaction to the Rohingya crisis speaks of a conflict between humanitarian duty and the principle of state sovereignty. Although the international organisations and governments have acknowledged the extent of Rohingya suffering, they have not been able to have any influence on the domestic policies of Myanmar.

United Nations Response: Humanitarian Assistance and Accountability

The UN has provided humanitarian assistance, assisted refugees, recorded human rights abuses and lobbied diplomatically. The protection needs and responses of the Bangladesh community have been strengthened with a greater focus given to shelter, food security, hygiene, health and education (UNHCR, 2024). These have reduced the immediate threats, but UN agencies can have an impact on Myanmar's domestic policy.

UN Human Rights Council's Independent International Fact-Finding Mission documented serious attacks against Rohingya communities and laid the blame on Myanmar security forces who were responsible for widespread human rights violations, particularly the killing of many Rohingya (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2018). Results led to its results and increased international attention and accountability debate, including the case of The Gambia v. Myanmar before the International Court of Justice (International Court of Justice, 2019). The length of legal practice is affected by length of cooperation from the state and documentation and advocacy does not necessarily lead to political change.

However, there are realities to accountability mechanisms. The way international legal processes are conducted is usually time-consuming, and their success or failure relies on the political collaboration among states (McAdam, 2014). Thus, it is evident that humanitarian effectiveness distinctly differs with the political effectiveness as exhibited by the UN response. The organisation has succeeded in providing aid and reporting the violations, but has not succeeded in bringing political change in Myanmar.

Western Countries: Humanitarian Aid, Sanctions and Diplomatic Pressure

The United States, United Kingdom, and European Union have funded humanitarian programmes, condemned abuses, and imposed targeted sanctions on Myanmar military figures. Sanctions signal condemnation and may constrain targeted actors, but their effects depend on economic exposure, international isolation, and domestic political conditions. Myanmar's leaders have resisted pressure while maintaining ties with states favouring non-interference, limiting the influence of Western measures.

In Myanmar, the military and political leaders have resisted international pressure coupled with their existing ties with other nations who subscribe to the principles of non-interference. Consequently, the influence of Western diplomatic action has not had much effect regarding Myanmar and its attitude to the Rohingya problem. This shortcoming is an example of a long-term issue of international politics, which is that humanitarian interests too often conflict with the requirement to consider the strategic interests and sovereignty.

ASEAN Response: Regional Diplomacy and the Limits of Non-Intervention

The Myanmar situation has been a thorny place to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) due to Myanmar being a member state. The traditional attitudes of sovereignty, being consistent, and non-intervention are the key factors that influence the reaction of ASEAN. The ASEAN has facilitated humanitarian collaboration and negotiations between Myanmar and other stakeholders. It has, however, not actively intervened in the internal political affairs of Myanmar.

The ASEAN has lubricated dialogue and humanitarian foothold but focused on sovereignty, consensus and non-interference has reduced organisation's action on the crisis in Myanmar. Remarks by Suzuki (2019) point to obstacles arising from member-state disagreement and decision making by consensus. The Rohingya situation thus illustrates a conflict between regional stability and safeguarding victims of grave human rights violations.

China, India, and Geopolitical Interests

China's answer shows the country's strategic, economic, energy and connectivity interests in Myanmar. Beijing has recently urged talks between the two countries, Bangladesh and Myanmar, however has been doing little to push Myanmar on its internal affairs (Sun, 2020). It shows how limitations in sovereignty and strategic interest can limit the employment of diplomatic leverage.

Border security, regional interests and connectivity have also been factors in the vision. Another key to the regional answer is, therefore, China-India relations and their relationship with Myanmar is important in respect to the pressure they will be willing to pay. Humanitarian priorities are not dictated by regional or international power dynamics, but work within them.

Muslim-Majority States: Humanitarian Solidarity and Political Limitations

States with Muslim-majority populations – which include OIC countries – have brought the Rohingya situation up, endorsed humanitarian initiatives and demanded accountability (OIC, 2020). Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Gulf states will also have a supporting or advocacy response. However, solidarity has not become a coordinated political strategy capable of changing Myanmar's policies, reflecting differing national interests, limited leverage, and the absence of a unified foreign-policy approach.

Humanitarian aid has been also provided by a number of Muslim majority nations. Government and civil society organizations in Turkey have supported it. Malaysia and Indonesia have repeatedly claimed about the protection of Rohingya and have defended humanitarian causes. Financial aid has also been provided by the Gulf countries. Nevertheless, the concept of humanitarian solidarity has failed to become a cohesive political agenda that can alter the policies in Myanmar.

This shortcoming can be attributed to various factors:

Different national interests

The relationship between Myanmar and Muslim-majority countries is different in political, economic, and diplomatic realms.

Limited strategic influence

Most of the Muslim countries have the moral and diplomatic but few economic or political leverage over Myanmar.

Lack of coordinated foreign policy

Even though the countries are worried about Rohingya misery, their strategies are rather nationalistic than global.

Thus, the reaction of the Muslim world represents the crucial difference between the humanitarian solidarity and the influence. Table 2 compares the main international actors, their contributions, and the constraints on their responses.

Table 2
International Responses to the Rohingya Crisis

Actor	Main response	Contribution	Main constraint
United Nations	Humanitarian coordination, investigations, and advocacy	Assistance, documentation, and international attention	Limited enforcement over Myanmar's domestic policy
Bangladesh	Refugee hosting and emergency protection	Territorial safety and coordination with humanitarian partners	Long-term social, environmental, and economic pressures
Western governments	Funding, sanctions, and diplomacy	Humanitarian support and accountability initiatives	Limited leverage and contested effects of sanctions
ASEAN	Regional dialogue and humanitarian engagement	Communication channels and regional diplomacy	Consensus and non-interference constraints
China	Diplomatic engagement and mediation	Maintained channels with Myanmar	Strategic and sovereignty interests constrain pressure
India	Humanitarian support and regional engagement	Assistance and regional engagement	Border security and strategic priorities shape policy
OIC and Muslim-majority states	Humanitarian aid and diplomatic advocacy	Sustained attention and support for refugees	Fragmented national approaches and limited collective leverage

Source: Author, based on UN reports, OIC documents, academic literature, and policy analyses

Failure of International Responsibility-Sharing

The Rohingya crisis is a good example of how the international governance of refugees has failed: responsibility is not evenly distributed. Bangladesh has had the greatest direct burden as it has accommodated hundreds of thousands of refugees. Financial aid has been given by international organizations and the donor nations, but the political aspect of the solutions to the causes of the displacement is not answered.

Share responsibility principle: Protection of refugees should be done by international co-operations among countries of origin, international organizations and host countries (Loescher et al., 2008). The Rohingya case however demonstrates this principle to be hard to realize when the country or origin denies significant political reform.

It is possible to identify three levels of responsibility:

Accountability of Myanmar: Myanmar continues to be accountable in creating environments to permit safe returns, such as citizenship status, violence prevention and political inclusion.

The responsibility of Bangladesh: Bangladesh has offered humanitarian protection despite major challenges in the country.

International responsibility: The international community should be responsible for supporting refugees, a sense of accountability and political solutions.

The lack of understanding about the link between such commitments has encouraged displacement of the nature of continuity.

Sustainable Repatriation: Political, Legal and Security Constraints

The protection of refugees should be forging the way towards the time when they can return safe and sound, and begin to take charge of their own lives, not towards permanence. Political, legal and security conditions for safe return have at many points been a challenge to repatriation in the Rohingya context.

But they are not political changes; rather there is also a humanitarian response which can save lives. To achieve a sustainable return it is essential that citizenship rights are restored, security guarantees are issued, accountability is held, and displacees know that the underlying causes of displacement will not re-appear (McAdam, 2014).

Citizenship Recognition: The Central Barrier to Return

The most outstanding problem is actually the citizenship question in the issue concerning for the time being sustainable Rohingyas' return. As has transpired over the years, Rohingya people are not assured of their legal status in Myanmar. Without citizenship, returnees would lack protection against discrimination, restricted mobility and political participation.

Citizenship is a legal status and means of political affiliation with and protection from the state. Recognised citizenship offers protection to returnees against discrimination, limited mobility and political marginalisation. Many refugees who are concerned with the exclusion in past has not been calmed by Myanmar's verification proposals, which are feared that the procedures may result in the return of refugees as foreigners but again marginalised.

Historically, the concept of membership in the nation and the definition of ethnic groups, Cheesman (2017) suggests, have always been linked to the concept of Myanmar citizenship. For the groups, this relationship was an issue of structure, which the official state discourses were not aware of. So, repatriation would be sustainable if there were a change in citizenship policy. Without a legal status, refugees could not be returned to Myanmar.

Insecurity and Lack of Trust

Security is another great concern blocking repatriation. Violence, displacement and discrimination are trauma-driven concerns of many Rohingya refugees who today fear for themselves and their protection. The situation is not just a call to arms; it's a call for a sustainable return. Refugees should be aware of: protection from violence,

protection from migration, healthcare and education, protection from economic deprivation and protection from discrimination.

However, international refugee protection principles place requirements on the process and conditions of voluntary repatriation, including that it must be done in a safe and dignified manner in accordance with informed consent (UNHCR, 1996). Some refugees are worried that repatriation without real political assurances may leave them vulnerable to violence or discrimination again. The Rohingya see security and citizenship as being tied together: physical security is not achieved without legal protection.

How the 2021 Military Coup Affects Repatriation Prospects

The military coup in February 2021 in Myanmar further contributed to political uncertainty and the lack of trust in government institutions. To date, bilateral repatriation talks have run into some resistance from refugees who felt there were too many obstacles to return. Furthermore, the subsequent outbreak of violence and threats South Sudanese civilians faced at the hands of the military, opposition, and ethnic armed groups also increases security concerns and the fear of sustainable return (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Severe security concerns in the broader arena have made it more difficult for institutions to remain safe, and have placed the Rohingya crisis in the context of Myanmar's wider political emergency. Repatriation planning that is based on an assumption of stable governance will most likely fall short of taking into account the factors that will affect the viability of return.

Accountability and Trust

However, the accountability issue is a crucial obstacle for repatriation to be considered sustainable. Numerous Rohingya refugees have been witnesses to massive human rights infractions amid military actions. A lack of accountability grows a lack of trust between the Myanmar authorities and refugees. In some situations, refugees may not be willing to return if the perpetrators of past abuses are still influential, and there has not been significant reform.

Procedures in the International Court of Justice and other international accountability measures are some of the significant measures that can be taken to resolve alleged violations. All procedures take time and are cumbersome, and most offer little workable solution in this law. Justice and repatriation go hand in hand – and that is the issue. With no accountability there could be a return without a reckoning, which further increases the likelihood of some form of instability in the future.

Geopolitical Constraints on Sustainable Return

Yet the decision to repatriate is limited by geopolitical considerations. Myanmar's relations to China, India and ASEAN countries have an impact on the pressure placed on the authorities. While dialogue was encouraged, China has not been keen to directly exert pressure on Myanmar's internal politics, which is due to strategic and sovereignty issues (Sun, 2020).

India's security and connectivity issues also influence its relationship with Myanmar. While communication and discussions between regional parties can help keep the lines open and to assist negotiations, nothing will result in a return without a

strengthening of the rights given to the Rohingya refugees, protection measures that could be taken to safe effective force, and a removal or reconsideration of the veto on refugee participation.

Preconditions for Sustainable Rohingya Repatriation

Based on analysis, there are 5 interrelating conditions for sustainable repatriation.

- Acknowledgement of Citizenship Rights: Rohingya returnees need to be allowed to be legally recognized and safeguarded as equal members of Myanmar society.
- There's a need for returnees to be assured that they will not be harassed, discriminated and displaced.
- Accountability and Justice: With a need to bring the past to justice, restore trust and prevent future abuse.
- Social and Economic Reintegration: Returns home to housing, education, health care and employment, and livelihoods.
- Long term International Monitoring: International organisations are not allowed to cease monitoring after return to ensure that protection and enforcement of agreements are implemented.

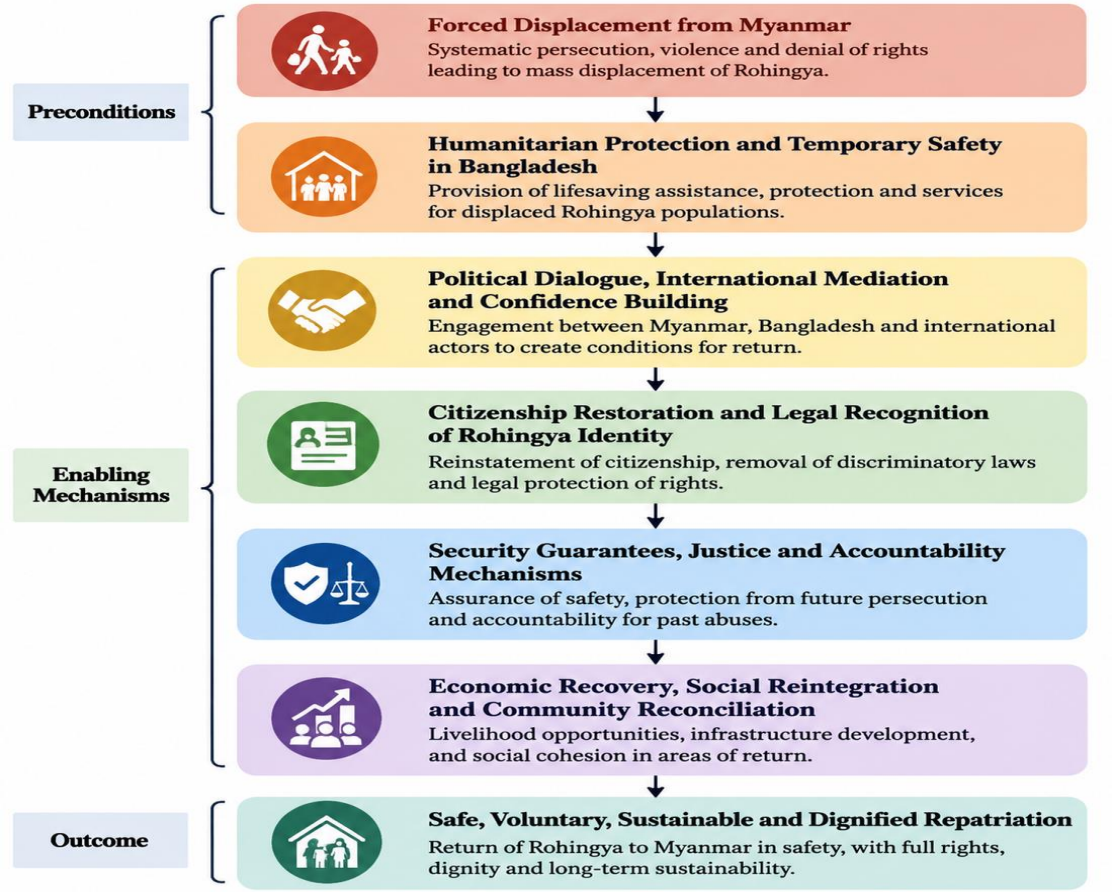


Figure 3 Framework for Sustainable Rohingya Repatriation

Source: Authoring based on principles of refugee protection under international law, refugee governance theory and human security.

Based on the lessons learned, there are two main dimensions to achieving sustainable repatriation of Rohingya: physical crossing of the border and institutional change, as described in Figure 3. Four pillars of a durable solution – legal recognition, credible guarantees of security, political commitment and socioeconomic reintegration – must be addressed.

The real test of a repatriation proposal is whether the conditions which necessitated the flight are changed. A return process must be voluntary, informed, safe and dignified; monitored by independent persons and, if agreements on what should be done to protect them are prosecuted, be accompanied by meaningful remedies.

Beyond Return: Why a Rights-Based Solution Is Necessary

A limited concept of repatriation simply emphasizes on the tangible transfer of refugees in Bangladesh to Myanmar. But it is not a realistic process to go back without rights that the Rohingya demonstration has revealed. In considering a rights-based approach, it is essential to take into account both whether it is feasible for the returnees to be equal members of the community or not. This concern is legal identity, political participation, freedom of movement, equality of access to public service and discrimination.

People's return is not the only indicator of sustainable repatriation. It should take into account the capacity for people to live in a safe place, exercise recognised rights and enact access to essentials like services and livelihoods; as well as enact access to society without renewed persecution or displacement, when they return.

Synthesis of Findings and Policy Implications

The five research questions are addressed by the findings, which relate the historical production of displacement with the inextricable aspects of humanitarian governance and international action. As a secondary analysis of information, these are qualitative analytical conclusions and not estimates of causal effects.

Historical Exclusion and Displacement

The evidence suggests that the Rohingya displacement was not a one-off in 2017. Gradually, the notion of citizenship restrictions, contested identity, and ethnic nationalism eroded legal protection and access to basic rights. The 1982 Citizenship Law and its enforcement introduced significant obstacles in the way of recognition of Rohingya and the previous displacement in 1978 and 1991-92 demonstrates that insecurity continued. The 2017 violence has only further exacerbated this longer path, but has not started it off (Cheesman, 2017; Southwick, 2015; United Nations Human Rights Council, 2018).

Why Humanitarian Assistance Has Not Produced Sustainable Return

Although human rights has played some role in safeguarding Myanmar's asylum seekers in Bangladesh, neither the humanitarian community could rewrite their citizenship nor assure them of security in Myanmar or accountability. There are no guarantees to a durable political resolution with an emergency response. Ongoing needs indicate the need to continue preparing responses on a large scale but don't necessarily mean that the drivers of displacement have been addressed. The overall conclusion is not

that humanitarian aid has proven to be insufficient, but rather that aid has not been paired with political transformation for safe return.

International Actors and Responsibility-Sharing

International parties have funded, protected, documented, advocated for, and provided legal accountability programs. Yet, they have been held back by sovereign rule, weak enforcement, the consensus and non-interference principles of ASEAN and the strategic interests of China and India. Muslim majority countries and members of the OIC have provided humanitarian aid and advocacy, but have lacked a coordinated political response that can hold up the pressure and force change to.The Muslim majority countries and OIC have provided humanitarian aid and advocacy, but have not developed a coherent political strategy that can create the pressure necessary to drive change. The sharing of responsibility is also less than optimal as Bangladesh hosts the costs of the relocation, but the parties best equipped to affect the situation in Myanmar have yet to achieve a sustainable outcome.

Conditions for Sustainable Repatriation

The five interdependent conditions that are identified are: (1) recognised citizenship and equal legal status; (2) credible guarantees against violence, discrimination and renewed displacement; (3) accountability and access to justice for serious abuses; (4) socioeconomic reintegration (housing, education, healthcare, livelihoods); and (5) independent long-term international monitoring. Return should be a voluntary, informed, safe and dignified return. Nonetheless, migration from a border without such protective measures would not be a lasting solution.

Theoretical Contribution and Implications of Policy

Some limitations include the use of secondary sources and the absence of first-hand interviews with Rohingya refugees, first-hand interviews with policy makers, and interviews with humanitarian workers. There is a need to further investigate refugees' self-assessment of citizenship, of safety and of re-return in future studies and to compare the guarantees of re-return in policy actions.

Conclusion

The Rohingya tragedy is a reminder of the constraints of humanitarian response to the presence of root causes of displacement that are not addressed politically. The article analyzed, through a qualitative approach, the nature of academic writing, UN and humanitarian reports, legal and policy documents, the reasons for the failure of extensive relief and international engagement to facilitating sustainable return to the country.

The main lesson is that humanitarian support has helped save lives and meet immediate needs, but it has not addressed citizenship exclusion, insecurity, weak accountability or geopolitical constraints. These barriers reinforce one another: the absence of legal recognition increases insecurity, insecurity undermines refugees' confidence in return, and the international community's limited leverage allows the underlying political conditions to persist.

This historical analysis examines the factors of long-standing identity contestation, ethnic nationalism, and the denial of citizenship as causes of displacement. The 2017 exodus failed to be a single occurrence and was indeed a pivotal moment in this

extended trend. This is a political and institutional as well as humanitarian crisis that has continued.

Beyond physical exchange from Bangladesh to Myanmar, there is a need for a sustainable repatriation. It is based on acknowledged rights and citizenship, credible security assurances, accountability for serious violations, socioeconomic reintegration and long-term independent monitoring. All returns need to be voluntary, informed, safe, and dignified.

There have been comprehensive contributions towards refugee protection made by the Government of Bangladesh and humanitarian organisations; yet, extended refugee hosting has exacerbated challenges to local services, resources, and livelihoods. International support and protection should be consistent and should be extended to support the host communities and current refugees as well as tackling the conditions that preclude durable repatriation.

International and regional responses have helped to raise awareness about issues, offer support, scrutinise abuses and help in the pursuit of accountability. But political pressure, owing to sovereignty concerns (and fact enforcement), and ASEAN norms on non-intervention and strategic concerns of the Chinese and Indian states have been capped. Although Muslim majority countries and Islamic organizations provide humanitarian assistance and promotion, no coordinated political action is taking place as a result of these efforts.

The one thing the article can do is to connect the human security, refugee governance, and global responsibility sharing concepts and ideas to propose one explanation of the joint space of ‘humanitarian protection' and ‘durable resolution' in refugee camps. The outcomes confirm the necessity to mainstream aid and political diplomacy and their linkage to the conditions of return based on rights, holding people accountable and sharing responsibility.

Future studies should focus more on the ideas of Rohingya refugees regarding consultation on identity, citizenship, safety and return through interviews and participatory approaches where ethical and safe. Further work might also include a comparison with regional diplomacy and a reflection on the possibility of implementation of proposed guarantees of monitoring and protecting.

Recommendations

Support should be tied to ongoing diplomatic engagement, return conditions based on the rights of individuals, accountability mechanisms and assistance for Bangladesh and host communities. Existing regional dialogue to pursue concrete protection guarantees. Support to refugee and host communities needs to be continued and there should be no coerced return using the principle of a return of refugees to their own free will.

Declarations

The authors confirm that this article is original, has not been published previously, and is not under consideration elsewhere. The study is based on published scholarly works and documentary evidence that are cited in the manuscript.

Authors' Contributions

Md. Shayeed Hossain conceptualised the study, developed the research framework, conducted the literature review, analysed the secondary sources, and prepared the initial manuscript. Ahmed Shah Masud made substantial and critical revisions to the manuscript. All the authors read and agreed to the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare in relation to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

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Ethical Considerations

The study has relied solely on literature and on-to-date documentary sources. No human subject or personal information was used.

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Data Availability Statement

The articles that are used in the study are sourced from published literature and document sources that are publicly available and cited in the manuscript. There was no new empirical database created or analysed.

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