

# IMPORTANCE OF FOOD SECURITY: ROHINGYA REFUGEE IN COX'S BAZAR CAMP

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**Abstract:** Food is one of the basic essential needs for every living thing. Man as a special creature as every opportunity and right to access the food for its sustainability. However, due to certain arising issues such as natural disaster, internal conflict and even war, food security has been one of the issue affecting most of our nowadays societies. The conflict in Myanmar has shown us how Muslim ethnic Rohingyas are suffering from the oppressive treatment of other ethnic namely; Burmese supported by Myanmar's government. This situation forces Rohingyas to run for their lives and seek refuge in another country as refugees. One of the refugee camps that homed the Rohingya refugees is known as Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. Due to their relocation, they have limited access especially to adequate shelter and food, a situation that affects their wellness. Despite they have left their country for safety, the cooperation and assistance from international community is needed to solve the issue of food security of Rohingya refugees. This paper discusses the challenges faced by Rohingya refugees on food security, the examination of food security level and what need to be done. It finally investigates on the role of international community in solving the issue of food security in the Cox's Bazar camp. The research adopted analytical and descriptive methods, while secondary sources such as book, journals and other relevant materials are utilized. The research concluded with recommendations to the refugees, the host nation and the international community for a better life for Rohingya refugees.

**Keywords:** food security, internal conflict, rohingya refugee, limited access, international community, cox's bazar camp.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

It surprised the world community when Rohingya people were forced to move from their own country. Being unwanted in their own land would never be an option for these people. In short and precise, these people have been denied their status as citizen in their own land. BBC News defined Rohingya as one of the ethnic minorities living in Rakhine state, Myanmar. They represented the largest number of the Muslims around the country (Myanmar Rohingya, 2018) Due to this crisis, these Rohingya people have made their way to other states in order to seek for protection. Bangladesh has been identified as one of the receivers by opening their space and welcoming these refugees to its land.

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One of the refugee camps in Bangladesh is located in Cox's Bazar. This camp area is really important to gather all the refugees in one place for their temporary settlements. The main concern in the each refugee camp is food. Food is the main highlight as basic human right that must be available for everyone. This right exists to ensure that people are free from hunger and able to access safe and nutritious food. This is really important to maintain life and growth. In addition to the argument, human body needs sufficient nutrients such as protein, carbohydrate, fat, vitamins and minerals to stay healthy and productive. The output of processed food will give energy to human in conducting their daily activities. With this explanation, everyone needs to acknowledge that hunger is a form of violation to human, either directly or indirectly (Jeffrey K Griffiths, 2013).

The issue of hunger and food security can be linked with the refugees living in Cox's Bazar camps. Why is there such connection between food security and refugees? With a great number of refugees reside in the camps; it is impossible for them not facing any problem regarding the food issue. All in all, the rising factor such as competition in accessing food with the local people who live in Cox's Bazar also should be given a proper attention. This factor is regarded as one of the challenges for the refugees' placement in Cox's Bazar. Many aspects must be taken into consideration in order to seek for proper solution for the better of the refugees themselves along with the citizens living there. The Objective of this paper are; to investigate the challenges faced by Rohingya refugee on food security, to examine whether the level of food security adequate or not for Rohingya refugee, and to shed light on the roles of international community on the issue of food security faced by Rohingya refugee.

Methodology of Research; his research will be conducted using basic research because it is aiming to share the knowledge with public about the importance of food security among the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The data is collected based on literature-based through internet, journal and book. There are certain limitations of the sources since most of them discussed about other region instead of specific one; hence the data collected is limited. This research is conducted on qualitative research method. It focuses the underlying reasons behind the issue. This study only interpreted the existing data to know more of the condition behind the issue chosen. One of the branches of the qualitative research is on the case study research where refugee camps in Cox's Bazar have been chosen by looking at other affected place in another country. Problem-oriented research is chosen to understand the nature of problem in this study to provide details of the kind of solution that should be taken to solve the problems. Thus, it also makes analysis much better as refugees in Cox's Bazar have the chance to secure the food level or not in future.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The paper begins with few literature reviews on the area, first is the work of Keith Breene (2016) in his article entitled "*Food Security and Why it Matters*" he focuses on the causes of food security as global challenge. The author also explained the complexity in securing food to meet the need of the people. However, the author only focusing on the general case of food security which could not be fully relied in dealing with the specific case of this paper

Kate Hodal (2017), in his article "*Rohingya Children Close to Starvation amid Health Crisis on Imaginable Scale*". The author stated that lack of adequate food has resulted to malnutrition among the refugees which has affected their health. However, his research only focus on the roles of certain international organizations on food supply for the people in Cox's Bazar camps and for short term period, not for the long run.

As for Adam Brak "*Food Security and Rohingya Refugee Crisis*" he indirectly highlighted the challenges faced by Rohingya people; however he does not focus on the current situation in the Cox's Bazar camps and food security is omitted in his work, instead he drew more attention to historical factor of how the crisis. Ann Nallo, (2018). In his article of "*The Rohingya Refugee Crisis: One Year Later*" the main point highlighted is on the World Food Programme which is known for distribution of food to the victims. The effort by WFP and its partner in providing nutritious meals for the children is great, however, it is quite bias since adults should receive a complete meals too, he oversight them by not taking their age and working into consideration.

Finally, "Food Insecurity, Poverty and Agriculture: A Concept Paper" authored by Sumiter S. Broca, (2002). He laid down ways to reduce hunger and poverty; Agricultural is one of the helpers in coping and solving both issues. In the case of Rohingya refugee, poverty has already present since before the crisis happened, however, the food insecurity is only occurred after the refugees moved from their land to the camps. Here the agriculture can be considered as a way to secure the food in long term and of course if the refugees where free to work, at present, Broca should have suggested urgent solution.

### **III. CHALLENGES FACED BY ROHINGYA REFUGEES**

Challenges are normal to every human being, however, for refugees; the term might be viewed differently. These unwilling refugees have to face many challenges to ensure that they are able to continue living. The challenges can be presented in many forms such as shelter, food, security and also health (Yusob, M.M.L., et al., 2017). Generally, food is very important to every living thing, especially human, it enrich body with nutrients, vitamins and energy. Lack of adequate food may result to negative impacts occur to our body. For Rohingya Refugees, before the crises that led them to refugee status, they have ability to manage and adequately protect themselves from hunger because they possess freedom that gave them ability to work and secure their daily means, now the situation is different and such freedom has been lost through the conflict and migration to other location (Allen, J. S., 2012).

As a result, the first challenge faced by the Rohingya refugees is their limited access to food. The refugees who live in the camps are currently receiving only the food assistance under the supervision of Bangladesh government. They are also receiving several food aids from the intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. However, the amount of aid received is not enough to feed all of them (Yusob, M.M.L., et al., 2017). In fact, the amount of people living in the camps make the food quite hard to be distributed and the government ended up with ration. In addition, they also have no other source to access to food, no farm to planting and cultivate it, due to their condition of life and the geographical area. The limited access on food did not only caused hunger, but actually further resulted in the spreading of disease among faced by the refugees. This is due to food shortages and environmental sanitation (Ann Nallo, 2019).

In other words, disease is the second challenges identified among the refugee of **Cox's Bazar**. One of the main causes of the disease through food shortages resulted in malnutrition. Malnutrition occurs when body cell is unable to absorb nutrients from food and eventually leading to lack of nutrients in the body. Malnutrition can affect not only children, but also the adults. However, children are always holding the highest number in this disease. This can be supported by the survey conducted by United Nations Children's Fund that the nutrition crisis is the dominant in refugee camps which have the highest rates of acute malnutrition. With the limited access on nutritious and healthy food, the refugees are not able to consume the right amount needed by the body (Clay, E., 2003).

Another challenge arises among the Rohingya refugees is mental health suffering. People always misunderstood on the definition of mental health. Mentally unstable does not mean a person is suffering sort of mental illness, but it is actually a condition where a person has already tired of dealing with continuous problems in his or her life. For instance, can you imagine living in the camps with improper shelter, with the uncertain food supply? It must be challenging and stressing as they have to accept what is given to them in order to continue living. The situation itself gives traumatic feelings and experience especially to women and children. In this refugee camp, to prepare any meals, unlike the norm, women have to cook outside of their shelters. The shelter itself is made of plastic sheet and if they are handling the fuels inside their tents, there might be a huge possibility of setting up a fire on their own shelter. This issue is actually stressing them and lead to unstable mental condition which can affect their health and life (Malnutrition, anaemia, 2018).

Thus, out of number, there are several challenges faced by the Rohingya refugees that can be identified in relation to food security. It can be proven that food is not only affecting the health of physical, but includes the emotional wellbeing of a person. Living in worries without any assurance would only worsen the situation of a refugee herself or himself. The only option to help these refugees in overcoming the challenges is by reaching them out to lift up their spirits to continue living. The least that someone can do is giving chance to them to build up their lives with their family (Malnutrition, anaemia, 2018).

### **IV. THE LEVEL OF FOOD SECURITY IN COX'S BAZAR**

The level of food security in Cox's Bazar is not a mere issue anymore. With the growing population, of refugees, it should not be taken for granted. Can you imagine what will happen to the people if the food is not enough and secured very well? The situation would be terrible as everyone would do anything to get food in order to escape from hunger. Food is a crucial issue to the residents of Cox's Bazar camps, hence the level of food security is really worrying since the only dependable source for food assistance were from the international community consisting of humanitarian agencies. The refugees only have access to food when they are allowed to do so, under the supervision of the higher authority of

Bangladeshi government. Thus, it is quite challenging to determine whether the level of food security would adequate or not to cater all the refugees residing in Cox's Bazar due to issues arise, both locally and internationally (Clay, E. 2003).

However, from my personal research, it can be assumed that the level of food security is inadequate to cater all of the refugees in camps. Here are the reasons. Firstly, the refugees only depend on the external assistance of food especially from the World Food Programme (WFP). WFP can be vulnerable too as sometimes they are not able to enter the camps due to certain problem such natural disaster. Bear in mind that any assistance or aids only can be brought from the ground. The argument of inadequate food security level can be supported based on Health and Human Rights Journal which reported "households eating two meals only" is more than one-third households while for three meals, 32.7% reporting a food shortage. The reasons behind of the food shortage including sharing of ration with unregistered household members, poor access to complementary food and essential non-food items and lack of work opportunities in the host communities (Clay, E. 2003).

Secondly, the competition of getting food supply between Rohingya refugees and the host communities in Cox's Bazar is another reason to support my statement. The massive number of refugees entering camps in Cox's Bazar has affected the local people who are already in competition state to get access on food supply. Another question pop up, how the food going to serve all of the refugees when it is not even able to fulfil the local's? So it is definitely answering question for the level of food security in refugee camp located at Cox's Bazar. The inadequate level of food security level also related to monsoon season (Brennan, E., Ruiz, V., Economos, 2018).

Whenever the monsoon comes, the host community especially need to brace themselves for the crop damage and land degradation. In addition, the Cox's Bazar district is also a prone area to flood due to heavy rains. Most of farm by the locals are washed away by the flood in along July and August. Thus, the food production based from the farm is facing the great amount of loss. In addition, the refugees are not allowed to own and not even given land for them to work for their own source of food. Here, these refugees only can depend on others' sources. All in all, the level food security in the Cox's Bazar refugee camps is still not adequate to support all of the refugees living there. Another framework and strategy must be planned to increase the security level of food where the refugees should not be relied fully on food assistance. No one knows what future holds. International community should make cooperation with the Bangladeshi government along with World Food Programme and UNHCR to find solutions regarding this issue. Thus, a stable level of food security is really important to ensure everyone has access to food which good for the growth of people and free them from the any possible disease.

## **V. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S ROLES ON FOOD SECURITY**

No matter what happened in the world, there are various humanitarian international organizations who always ready to carter for the welfare of vulnerable. The issue of Rohingya refugees has become the spotlight in the international arena and steps were been taken by various international communities to cater for their necessary needs. The international community includes state's government and international organization such as intergovernmental organization and non-governmental organization (Salleh, M.A, *et.al.*, 2015). This community plays an important role to ensure the wellbeing of Rohingya people in the Cox's Bazar. They make sure that these people received necessary assistance regardless of their status. Here, it can be said that each of the component of international community treated the refugees of Cox's Bazar well with no discrimination in the camps. In fact, there are several roles played by the government and organizations such as distribution of food and shelter assistance to the vulnerable people (Ahmad, A.A., *et.al.*, 2017).

Since the camps are located inside Bangladesh, the Bangladeshi government is the most responsible entity that has the mandate to manage the refugees and the camp-building. The action of Bangladeshi government is very noble as they accept the refugees and let them settle down temporarily in the Cox's Bazar district, which located in the forest. The government has full controlled over the camps to ensure that no one can leave or enter the refugee camps without their permission. This can be proven from an article that exposed 39 strangers who were detained for their attempt to enter the Rohingya refugee camps without been granted permission to do so. The Bangladeshi government also has power in dividing the assistance to the refugees from healthcare to food distribution (Police Release 39 Foreigners, 2018).

Apart from the Bangladeshi government, the U.S Agency for International Development (known as USAID) also played a vital role. USAID is an international development agency which famously known in conducting project for the betterment of the needy people. Overall, USAID has done a lot of contributions around the globe. In the case of Rohingya

refugees, USAID's Office of Food for Peace (FFP) recently channelled almost \$46 million for emergency food assistance directly to Cox's Bazar camps. In previous year, over \$101 million has been distributed to World Food Programme (WFP) in order for WFP to create plan for the Rohingya refugees for food aid, food vouchers and cash based income generating activities to the Rohingya refugees. Food aid is not only essential to prevent and treat acute malnutrition, but it also helps in supporting the life-saving nutrition services. As for the food vouchers, it allows refugees to get a variety range of nutrient-rich food from local markets (Food for Peace Rohingya Response Infographic, 2018). The donation of USAID to WFP is a massive help to the refugees in the camps (Food Assistance Fact Sheet, 2019).

Furthermore, is the World Food Programme (WFP). WFP is an initiative of United Nations known as the world's largest humanitarian organization focus in addressing hunger and promoting food security around the world. WFP is another major initiative to allow the refugees continually accessing food. In the case of Cox's Bazar, WFP does not move alone as they collaborated with other NGOs, local authorities, the Myanmar Red Cross Movement and other humanitarian agencies in distributing food assistance. This method of collaboration is meant to avoid any overlapping and maximizing coverage around the camps during distribution. Moreover, they also received financial assistance from certain states to ensure the food aid reach people in the camps without any delay and inconsistency.

Generally, the roles been played by various parties are commendable. Despite certain weaknesses which are unavoidable that occurred during the mission, they have performed incredibly in the manner they offered their services. The food assistance is very important and valuable for the refugees living in the camps. This is to ensure that the shortage of food can be avoided and everybody will receive the same ration with no exception.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Food security is indeed important for existence of all living creatures. Although, human struggle day to day fetching for their daily need, freedom and stable atmosphere make it ever easy to do so. However, if human freedom felt under restriction to some extent that settler and food can not be adequately sought by individual, especially the refugees who have migrated into a strange location such as the refugees living in the Cox's Bazar camps. They have limited access to food; hence the food given was done through ration by the higher authority who managed them. Furthermore, lack of food is not only causing hunger but also lead to malnutrition and vitamin deficiency. Besides, shortage of food also relates to mental health especially the women among these refugees. For the expected mothers, the baby needs to receive enough nutrients, meanwhile for the parent, they have to think on how to feed their children. All of these matters become worrisome to mother and can affect the pregnancy. In addition, the assumption of how they can sustain their level of food security is difficult, because the refugees do not have any source of food instead; they depend on the humanitarian agencies. In other words, their food is solely depending on others because they are not allowed to even leave the refugee camps and work to fetch for themselves.

## **VII. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings, there are several recommendations that will be suggested in order to increase the level of food security. The first recommendation is by providing education to the refugees. Education is not a new term in the refugee camps worldwide especially among the children. This can be seen through several early works on the role of UNICEF's and in this context, its representative to Bangladesh which sought on enlarging the scale of services to reach and improve more children's education. The researchers' view is that education is not only limited to the children, but also should be extend to adult as well. it is important to educate the adults on important issues including the food security and the importance of sanitations (Solomon, F. 2019).

The second recommendation is by creating a policy for the refugees to be allowed to work in agriculture sector. This policy is important as they will be self sufficient to provide for themselves and their children, as such, they will be less depending on the humanitarian aids. Furthermore, this effort also important to increase the food production and eventually increase the food security level not only in the camps, but also the whole district of Cox's Bazar. The first option of implementing this policy is by lifting up the limitation of restriction to leave and re-enter the camps. If the first option cannot be negotiated, the second option would be to find a nearest area with fertile soil within the confined refugee's camp, so that the refugees can work on that soil. Since the refugees need special care, the security will be monitoring their movement in

the farm area. However, this recommendation has its own weakness where Cox's Bazar is prone to natural disaster and flood with its own host community.

Third, relocating these refugees to a better place is very important. This recommendation actually has been proposed by Bangladeshi government as stated in Kyodo News. The Rohingya refugees are said to be relocated at an island called as Bhasan Char. The effort of Bangladeshi government also is fully supported by UNHCR.. However, the refugees refused to move due to many negative possibilities they could face in the future. Many factors should be considered before relocating these people especially in the aspect of life security. Personally, it is recommended that refugees should be relocated to a stable place and life security guaranteed especially in developing countries should be ensured. This is really important as they would escape from endless worrying of any possible cyclones that might hit them in the island. No specific country is mentioned as it depends on country's policy in accepting these people. This recommendation seems to be quite complicated and challenging, but it will surely work with full cooperation among the governments, organizations and people themselves (Faruque, Z., 2019).

In conclusion, the recommendations are just ideas to help the Rohingya refugees to build a better living condition and prosperous future. Most important, the Rohigas refugees in Cox's Bazar camp need special attention from around the world. The Bangladeshi government has done their part in hosting the refugees, and United Nations' branches also play their roles along very well. However, the level of food security is still need to be worked out to prevent the welfare of the refugees.

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