

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# From solidarity to resistance: host communities' evolving response to the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

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## Abstract

Bangladesh sets an admirable example of solidarity with the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar by hosting more than a million Rohingyas despite its resource constraints. However, there is a perceptible shift from this rather unconditional solidarity to an anti-refugee sentiment. In evaluating the factors that contributed to these changing dynamics, we analysed how the host communities' solidarity with the plight of Rohingya refugees evolved. Broadly, it identifies three key factors that influence the approaches of the locals towards the refugees: economic instability as a result of the wage fall and price hike, unequal access to humanitarian aid and uneven distribution of resource opportunities created through substantial humanitarian operations and finally, political uncertainty about the future of the Rohingya crisis. By bringing the experiences of host communities and the manifold implications of existing humanitarian interventions into the centre of the analysis, the paper underlines the need for a more conciliatory approach involving different actors engaged in this crisis. In so doing, we argue that addressing the adverse impacts of a refugee crisis on the poorer hosts, particularly within the context of a protracted refugee situation, needs a more systematic evaluation, and it cannot be dealt with isolation from the broader socio-economic context of the refugee-hosting regions.

**Keywords:** Rohingya refugee, Host community, Religion, Bangladesh, Resentment, Solidarity

## Introduction

Restricted mobility, denied citizenship, forced displacements and enduring persecution for decades—the plight of the Rohingya community in Myanmar has been one of the most violent and protracted humanitarian crises of recent time. Of late, the Rohingya crisis has been attracting significant attention from the international community and scholars in migration and refugee studies (Alam 2019; Cheesman 2017; Kyaw 2017; Wade 2017). Since 2017, more than half a million Rohingya refugees have sought refuge in Cox's Bazar district<sup>1</sup> of

Bangladesh, in a bid to escape, *Tatmadaw* (the official name of the armed forces of Myanmar) led attacks, joining almost an equal number who had already been stranded there since 1978. Despite severe resource constraints, local communities mobilised resources of various types and volumes to ameliorate the sufferings of the refugees, even before the Bangladesh government officially engaged in the humanitarian effort (Abrar 2017).

However, within a year, since the last arrival of refugees in 2017, perceptible solidarity and support for the refugees faded away, and resentment against both refugees and humanitarian aid agencies, particularly among the impoverished local population in Cox's Bazar district, is evident (Khan 2018). A strong perception has been developed among the locals that the humanitarian aid agencies and the government of Bangladesh have failed to acknowledge the adverse impact on the

<sup>1</sup>Cox's Bazar District is on the southeast coast of Bangladesh, bordering the Rakhine State of Myanmar.

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impoverished local population in many of their policies and programmes (Chowdhury 2019). In this context, this paper explores the factors that contributed to the shift from solidarity to resistance among the locals towards the Rohingya refugees and give an overview of the socio-economic landscape that has been gradually changing ever since the last significant arrival in 2017.

It attempts to understand the motivations for the majority of the local population behind providing support to the refugees in the early days of the arrival of refugees and the reasons and patterns of the changing nature of the refugee-host interactions. Despite the urgency of the present crisis and its impact on the host community, there has been inadequate relevant research that addresses the complex nexus between the refugee crisis and the impact on the host communities in Bangladesh. Few recent pieces of literature have focused on poverty, livelihood, security threats, illegal trafficking and environmental degradation that largely ignores the need for a reconciliatory approach (Babu 2020; Ahmad and Naeem 2020). By bringing host communities and existing humanitarian operations and their implications into the centre of the analysis, the paper underlines the need for a more conciliatory approach involving different stakeholders engaged in the overall Rohingya humanitarian response. In so doing, we argue that addressing the adverse impacts of a refugee settlement on the poorer host communities, particularly within the context of a protracted refugee situation, needs a more systematic evaluation, and it cannot be dealt with isolation from the broader socio-economic context of the refugee-hosting regions.

### Research design and methodology

This paper's narratives and findings derive from quantitative and qualitative tools to gather data and information on host communities' perceptions. A total of 300 respondents participated in this study in three phases between June to December 2019, with a diverse representation of age, occupations, gender and economic conditions (see Additional file 1). At the same time, all efforts were made to choose respondents from relatively lower-income households based on the hypothesis that the poorer among the local communities are most severely affected, and the opposition towards the refugees will be higher among them<sup>2</sup>. Respondents, both living

within the vicinity of the refugee camps and far from the camps, were purposively selected for the interviews. The survey was conducted in three sub-districts (*Upazillas*) of Cox's Bazar district: *Ukhiya, Teknaf and Cox's Bazar town*. Whilst Teknaf and Ukhiya host the vast majority of the refugees, the significant businesses managing the relief operations and NGO activities are installed in Cox's Bazar town, which has experienced a thriving economic boom since 2017 following the arrival of the refugees and the subsequent activities different aid agencies and their workers.

Qualitative instruments, including semi-structured informal interviews and researchers' observation, have been employed to gauge the host population's different perspectives. The interviews were conducted in the local language by the authors who have near-native proficiency and conducted in the respondents' place of convenience. Lines of enquiry broadly focused on gaining insight into the stories and challenges the locals have been experiencing throughout this massive refugee situation and how their life and livelihood have been impacted amid these ongoing challenges. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, respondents have been referred by using pseudonyms throughout the paper.

### The forced displacement of the Rohingya people from Myanmar to Bangladesh

The latest refugee outbreak manifests an ongoing and deep-seated ethnic and political fault line in Myanmar, growing for decades. Although the situation has escalated since 2017, the Rohingya (a minority ethnic group from Myanmar) had been subjected to persecution since 1978 when the Burmese army started its operation *Nagamin* (Dragon King), an attempt to clear out what the Burmese military government referred to as 'illegal migrants' from neighbouring South Asian countries to the Rakhine province (Kyaw 2017).

Since the late 1970s, the Rohingya refugees have sought refuge in Bangladesh and other countries due to persecution in Myanmar. After decades of human rights violation and forcible expulsions, a fresh military crackdown on the Rohingya community in August 2017 resulted in another mass arrival of refugees in neighbouring Bangladesh. More than a million Rohingya refugees have taken shelter in Bangladesh, whom the government of Bangladesh refers to as 'Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs)' (The Daily Star 2017). On the other hand, the UN system refers to this population as Rohingya refugees, in line with the applicable international legal and protection framework. Whilst the numbers entering the country have been increasing over the past few years, 81% of the total current refugee population arrived in Bangladesh between August and December 2017 (UNHCR 2019). According to

<sup>2</sup>Whilst the national headcount poverty rate is 24.3%, it is around 42% in the bordering regions of Cox's Bazar District, almost double the national average. Furthermore, the vast majority of the refugees are being settled in this region, namely in the Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-district of Cox's Bazar, where agriculture is the primary livelihood source. Another factor is that the sizeable impoverished population is due to the lower industrialisation in this region than other parts of Bangladesh (UNDP 2018, pp. 20-21).

the UN statistics, over 900,000 Rohingya refugees reside in Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts bordering Myanmar (Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis 2019). The Bangladesh government put the figure around 1.1 million, although the local population claims the actual figure is much higher than the official estimation (Hossain 2020). At present, Rohingya people constitute more than a third of the local population in Southeast Cox's Bazar region (Bowden 2018).

Rohingya refugees are officially denied the right to work, whilst their informal employment has been tolerated. Nevertheless, refugees' engagement in the informal economy makes them vulnerable to low wages and unethical employment practices, leaving them without recourse to legal protection if abused. Rohingyas are only able to get casual jobs for which they are generally underpaid. Apart from the legal hurdles, the socio-economic conditions are also a contributing factor in refugees' access to work. Their access to the labour market is limited due to intense competition for work, lack of skills and resources (Ahmed 2010). Besides, the official policy of 'warehousing' Rohingya refugees makes formal interactions challenging between the locals and the refugees. Nevertheless, a section of the refugees informally integrated into the labour market and played a vital role in the construction and fishing industries, providing a source of cheap labour, often engaging in hazardous and physically demanding work (Crabtree 2010).

Another notable fact is that, despite sustained economic growth, more than 20% of the population of Bangladesh still live under the poverty line (Asian Development Bank 2020). The majority of Rohingyas have taken refuge in the neighbouring region of Cox's Bazar, which is one of the most remote and impoverished areas of Bangladesh and has not benefited from the rapid industrialisation and economic growth that has recently taken place in some other parts of the country (Azad and Jasmin 2013). Whilst the Rohingyas have been crossing the border and taking refuge for decades, their presence has hardly created any significant concern for the local population until the 2017 Rohingya crisis that caused the largest ever refugee arrival into Bangladesh from the neighbouring Rakhine state. The following section examines these issues in detail in light of the latest Rohingya refugee situation.

### **Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh: from solidarity to resistance**

Whilst observing how local hosts' approach to refugees evolved in Cox's Bazar, we identified three discrete phases based on the responses we gathered from the fieldwork. The first phase of the crisis saw an unprecedented arrival of Rohingya refugees, making it the 'world's fastest-growing refugee crisis and a major

humanitarian emergency' (UNHCR 2017). In this phase, local community members demonstrated appreciable solidarity with the plight of refugees and helped them with vital aid and services such as food, shelter, clothing and funeral service. Local and national solidarity has been the dominant feature from—roughly August 2017 until the end of November 2017 (Abrar 2017). Even before the aid agencies and the Bangladeshi government fully engaged in the humanitarian operation, there was remarkable local community involvement in helping refugees during this period.

The second phase began when the local and international organisations took over the management of the situation. The second phase of the crisis roughly spans from the beginning of December 2017 until the first attempt to repatriate Rohingya refugees, which were supposed to commence on November 15, 2018 (Paul and Naing 2018). In this phase, hosts started coming to terms with the enormous challenges around managing the situation. In other words, for the locals, this period comes with new reflections and perspectives. Such a massive refugee settlement precipitated a major livelihood crisis in Cox's Bazar with a heavy toll on the local economy, particularly among locals involved in informal wage labour.

Finally, with no solution in sight, the third phase or the protracted phase began in mid-November 2018. At this stage, the host community started to prepare for a long haul against the backdrop of a failed repatriation attempt. In this phase, solidarity gradually burnt out, and strong resentment became widespread. They became critical to national and international humanitarian agencies over the allocation of humanitarian aid and implementation of refugee relief projects. Adversely impacted host community members started accusing relief agencies of ignoring the plight of the left-behind poorer hosts. Uncertainty about the future, higher consciousness about local hosts' rights and resistance to refugee-centric policies has been the defining feature of this phase. The following section details the stages that we identified in our study.

### **Solidarity with the refugees**

Almost all the refugees fleeing persecution sought refuge around the Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts of Cox's Bazar. The host population of Cox's Bazar was mostly sympathetic to the plight of the refugees. A generally accepted idea in refugee scholarship is that resource-poor and demographically surplus population often shows resentment to the arrival of new refugees (Benard 1986; Chambers 1986). However, the host population in Cox's Bazar showed solidarity and provided vital support to the refugees on humanitarian grounds. Thus, the situation has generated ground for academic research to

analyse underlying motivations behind showing solidarity with the refugees despite widespread poverty, severe resource scarcity and surplus demography. Our study identified four potential causes, which are (a) religious similarities between the refugees and the hosts; (b) historical linkage with the Rohingya refugees; (c) solidarity from the major political parties and lastly (d) Bangladesh’s historical experience as a refugee-producing country during the liberation war.

Whilst previous studies also indicate that a common historical connection and shared Sunni Islamic religious identity as an influential ground for providing vital supports for Rohingya refugees in need (Hoffstaedter 2017; Palmer 2011), nonetheless, cultural proximity also overlaps with physical attributes and language that goes beyond simplistic religious connection. The Rohingya language is almost identical to the Chittagonian language or dialect of Bangla spoken in Chittagong and Cox’s Bazar region, and both groups have almost similar physical attributes (Wipperman and Haque 2007). In the immediate aftermath of the military crackdown in neighbouring Rakhine state, the survey findings show that more than 80% of the respondents considered letting refugees in the right decision. Table 1 shows the nature of the support hosts provided for the refugees.

As Table 1 presents a significant majority of the respondents provided supports to the newly arrived refugees in different capacities, including providing initial shelter in their house, offering foods and clothes and donated money to community charities who were the first to provide the initial living arrangement before the NGOs and international relief operations flooded into the region.

Profoundly held shared religious belief inspired many locals to welcome and provide emergency support to Rohingya refugees. Apart from a tiny group of Hindu and recently arrived Buddhist Rakhine refugees, almost all the refugees in Cox’s Bazar are Sunni Muslims, an identity they share with an overwhelming majority of the locals, which in turn has been reflected in the hosts’

sympathetic and helping behaviour (Mim 2020; Palmer 2011). For instance, many local respondents referred to Rohingya refugees as brothers and sisters in need. The locals talked about the idea of the *Ummah* (Muslim brotherhood) as one of the reasons behind their generous response. Furthermore, local Islamic faith-based organisations’ response was significant in the initial phase of the refugee arrival<sup>3</sup>. Both locals and Islamic faith-based NGOs raised funds and called for empathy for the Rohingya refugees, and at the same time, several faith-based NGOs’ activities were suspended by the Bangladesh government due to their allegedly suspicious activities<sup>4</sup>.

Aleya Akter (35), a primary school teacher in Ukhiya, revealed how her family provided shelter to several Rohingya refugee families in her home yard and offered food. During the interview, she referred to her religious obligation and ideas of Islamic hospitality:

Rohingyas are our Muslim brothers and sisters in need. Our Prophet Muhammad and his followers fled from Mecca to nearby Medina to escape persecution. Rohingya are killed for being Muslims, and we should support them because it is also our religious obligation (personal communication, December 13, 2019).

Iman Ali, another elderly respondent (52) from Teknaf, echo the same feeling as a major reason to let them in. He says: ‘Rohingyas are *Iatim* (Orphan) in this world. No one helps them. If we Muslims do not stand by, then how they will even survive?’

Besides, a reference to this shared religious identity made many locals donate money and other material resources for the refugees. Such a faith-inspired refugee-host interaction worked as a bridge between the two communities and significantly helped refugees to settle down and navigate through the local social system. Rohingya refugees consider the right to freely practise their religion as a form of support beyond rights linked to material resources. When the refugees arrived in thousands, many died due to injury and diseases. Local hosts ensured dignified burials of the deceased Rohingya refugees. Many Rohingyas prefer to stay in Bangladesh since they believe that they would get a dignified Muslim

**Table 1** Nature of the support hosts provided for the refugees during the arrival phase

Types of support	Teknaf	Ukhiya	Cox’s Bazar town
Provided initial shelter	28%	30%	12%
Offered basic food and cloth	43%	38%	33%
Donated money	31%	28%	35%
There was no Rohingya in my neighbourhood	4%	3%	14%
I did not directly help any Rohingya	5%	7%	10%
Total respondents = 300			

<sup>3</sup>Turkish faith-based NGOs started major humanitarian operation following the major Muslim religious festival. Available at <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkish-ngos-begin-aid-campaign-for-rohingya-muslims-/1209296>. Accessed January 13, 2021.

<sup>4</sup>Bangladesh government imposed a ban on several Muslim charities because of ‘their alleged involvement in misguiding Rohingyas’. Available at <https://www.thedailystar.net/myanmar-rohingya-crisis/three-ngo-barred-relief-works-rohingyas-cox-bazar-bangladesh-1475002>. Accessed February 24, 2021.

burial (Holloway and Fan 2018). Therefore, the religiously inspired moral imperative of local hosts and institutions was a valuable resource in tackling the unprecedented arrival of Rohingya refugees.

It is important to note that many of the Rohingyas' contemporary ethnic and political debates stem from the complex unfolding of the Rakhine state's geopolitical history (formerly Arakan). Cultural and commercial contact between Bengal and Arakan from the eighth century to the nineteenth century shows strong political and cultural ties that resulted in building a cross-border relationship between the people and created a 'frontier culture' (Bhonsale 2015). Since the ancient period, the Arakan region came under the influence of different dynasties, which shaped the ethnic and social fabric of the region. From around the fourth to sixth centuries, Arakan was ruled by the Chandra dynasty, from north-east India, known as the Kingdom of Vesali. After the fall of the Chandra dynasty, power was held by local chiefs; and then, in the eighth century, the region came under the influence of the Pala Empire, whose centre was in Eastern Bengal, until its fall in the twelfth century (Galache 2020, pp. 129-130). Throughout the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, Arakanese kings borrowed the political and cultural elements from central Burma and Bengal. Thus, whilst the pre-colonial Burma was often considered as the frontier region lying between India and China, the Arakan region, separated by a range of mountains, on the other hand, was the frontier lying between Burma and Bengal (Galache 2020, p. 130). Arakan had stronger relations with the kingdom of Bengal in the west than with the Burmese kingdoms in the east for most of its history and formed a culture distinct from both Bengal and the rest of Burma.

During the colonial period, due to the British annexation of Arakan in 1826, people from neighbouring Bengal were encouraged to migrate to the fertile Arakan valley as farm labourers because of the abundance of the agricultural land and labour requirement for mainly rice production (Alam 2019). Some scholars argue that the Rohingyas are of mixed Arab, Bengali and Burmese ancestry as the Arakan region was the centre of trade and commerce due to its strategic naval position and a cultural melting pot for centuries (Bhonsale 2015; Minahan 2016).

The geographical location of the ethnic minority inhabitants is a less-discussed dimension that is still relevant for studying the ethnic situation in Myanmar. Interestingly, the majority of the most important ethnic minority groups live in the areas bordering Bangladesh (Rohingya, Rakhine), India (Chin, Naga), China (Kachin) and Thailand (Shan, Mon, Karen). Through trade, culture, religion and political organisation, exchanges via different border networks have been instrumental in

shaping these communities (Gravers 2014). Cross border traffic and the strategic naval position of Chittagong port in Bangladesh and Sittwe port (formerly Akyab) in Myanmar have facilitated thriving business opportunities across the border and within the region since the pre-colonial period. This movement also encouraged marriage and other relations between the Rohingya and the people of the Chittagong region (Bhonsale 2015).

This historical relation is also evident in the folklore, music and other cultural elements in the Chittagong region. Even in poetry, Alaol, the celebrated poet in the early modern period of Bengali literature, romanticised the relation between the people of Chittagong and Arakan (D'Hubert 2005). These linguistic and cultural ties have facilitated a constant and robust interconnection between these two bordering regions. As a result of the pre-existing cross-border movement of people between the two regions and family connections on both sides of the border, the Rohingya refugees have found it easier to navigate the host communities' social structure.

The Rohingya situation presented an interesting case study to analyse positions held by the major political parties in Bangladesh. The political landscape in Bangladesh has long been characterised by the rivalry between the two main political parties: Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Despite the rivalry between the two, they did not differ in either crisis framing or policy response when the refugee situation aggravated. Even at the political level, shared religious identity became a social and political rallying cry for sympathy and empathy towards the Rohingyas. *Hefazat-e-Islam*, (protection of Islam), one of Bangladesh's most influential Islamist movements, strongly advocated an open border policy for the Rohingya refugees (Joehnk 2017).

Likewise, strong support in favour of opening border for the refugees from BNP and particularly from different Islamist groups such as *Hefazat-e-Islam* made it difficult for the Bangladesh government even to consider stemming the massive arrival of the refugees (Joehnk 2017). The situation led to an agreement across the political spectrum, with all parties favouring opening border for the refugees. Despite the awareness of the consequences of significant refugee arrival, political parties, civil society members and print and electronic media framed the situation as a humanitarian crisis, resulting in overwhelming public support for keeping the border open. Remarkably, the last mass arrival of refugees took place in August 2017, within a year ahead of the scheduled national election. Therefore, none of the mainstream parties took a different standpoint than accepting the mostly Muslim refugees. As a result, public opinion in Bangladesh was not politically divided during the peak of the refugee crisis.

Solidarity with the plight of Rohingya refugees is partly embedded in the shared memory of refugee experiences of the Bangladeshi people. During the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh, almost 10 million Bangladeshi refugees escaped to bordering India in a military crackdown by the Pakistani armed forces (Schanberg 1971). For Bangladeshi, especially for the political and urban elites, the Rohingya situation is a painful reminder of Bangladesh's bloody liberation war. The war and the subsequent refugee situation remain a defining feature of Bangladesh's national psyche. The Bangladeshi Prime Minister lately referred to the 1971 refugee crisis after visiting the Rohingya refugee camp and said, 'We, too, were forced to seek refuge in India in the face of Pakistan's attack'. (Bass 2017). This narrative and historical experience significantly contributed to the solidarity approach from the Bangladeshi political establishments and urban elites.

### The growing concerns: impact on the host communities

The immediate adverse consequences of refugee settlement were hardest on the hosts depending on natural resources, daily wage earners, small business owners and farmers. Furthermore, the deterioration of public services caused resentment against the overall refugee response. Rising prices of essential commodities, falling wages for low-skilled workers, competition over limited natural resources, loss of livelihood and tensions related to security are the critical factors in developing an understanding of the changing dynamics of the refugee-hosts relationship. Based on the interviewees' responses, the following sections provide more details on the experiences of the host communities since 2017.

#### The impact on income

From the beginning, both locals and refugees competed in the same unskilled daily labour market, with severe, resulting deterioration of employment opportunities for disadvantaged and ultra-poor local community members. Our survey findings and key informant interviews show that the daily wage of a day labourer dropped by around 50%. In 2017, before the arrival of the new refugees, the daily wage in Cox's Bazar for agricultural labour was around Tk. 500-600, and for construction work Tk. 600-700. It has now fallen to Tk. 200-250 per day<sup>5</sup>. On top of that, many refugees are willing to offer their services at lower wages, as they are receiving sufficient relief goods and thus, with this added income, they can diversify their food choices and can save some of it, eventually. Table 2 shows the fall of the average rate of

**Table 2** Change in the average rate of daily labour (in BDT) (following the arrival of the Rohingya refugees)

Area	June 2017	June 2019
Teknaf	550	300-350
Ukhiya	550	300
Cox's Bazar town	600	300-400

daily wage labour in the refugee-hosting regions of Cox's Bazar.

Almost all the 66 wage workers who took part in this study claimed to have experienced a significant drop in their wages. This study could not compare with the national average on daily wage labour as there is no district wise national statistics on the income of daily wage labour. However, recent research on the impact on the host community in Cox's Bazar also shows how the wage pattern has dramatically changed in the labour market where the authors claim that the Rohingya refugees' offer for cheap labour upset the local labour market's wage pattern, which placed local daily wage labourers in a crucial predicament (Babu 2020; Ahmad and Naem 2020). Furthermore, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report published in 2018 also claims the Rohingya situation has caused a 14.3% wage reduction of all labourers among the host community in Teknaf (UNDP 2018). Latest in 2020, the Joint Response Plan report by the Bangladesh government and UN organisations also acknowledged the competition for opportunities for informal work as day labourers, which has resulted in reduced wages<sup>6</sup>.

Notably, a significant part of total employment in Cox's Bazar comes from fishing-related activities. The fishing sector in Teknaf employed nearly one in three persons there (UNDP 2018). Since the crisis in August 2017, a prohibition has been in place on fishing in the Naaf River for security and border control reasons. This prohibition has placed significant pressure on the local fishermen and their dependent family members.

Nur Islam (39), a fisherman in the Naaf River (personal communication, November 12, 2019), states: 'even if I was poor... I had never suffered due to a food shortage before... I eked out a livelihood from fishing. Now we are not allowed to go to the river. There is no job in the neighbourhood. We have little food and money... Often I struggle to provide basic meals to my children'.

Whilst many of them started to work as wage labourers, the availability of refugee labourers has led to lesser work availability and reduced daily earnings.

<sup>6</sup>The detailed economic impact that this official report can be found in the following link [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/jrp\\_2020\\_final\\_in-design\\_280220.2mb\\_0.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/jrp_2020_final_in-design_280220.2mb_0.pdf) Accessed January 11, 2021.

<sup>5</sup>As of December 2019, US \$1 = Bangladeshi Tk. 84.60

Several respondents and key informants in Teknaf hinted that a group of 30,000 to 35,000 fishermen of the Naaf River were probably one of the most affected host communities (UNDP 2018). Fishing community members lived in poverty even before the crisis, and now they are in a precarious situation. The research also found that many fishers in Teknaf was not registered, which means it is challenging to identify the affected fishermen and bring them to the assistance programme. Table 3 shows that, on average, NGOs and private job holders experienced a significant increase in income, whereas poor wage labourers, particularly in Teknaf and Ukhiya, saw a sharp decline.

Furthermore, the current refugee crisis has created a low tourist turnout in Cox’s Bazar, the major tourist destination in Bangladesh. Because of the ongoing instability along the Bangladesh Myanmar border, ship traffic is strictly forbidden. Companies and employees heavily dependent on tourism are experiencing a major setback since the latest refugee arrival (Babu 2020).

Nevertheless, a section of the local population with access to resources and education benefitted from the current situation. For instance, humanitarian aid creates new employment opportunities. Humanitarian agencies hire both skilled and semi-skilled locals, which represent an excellent job opportunity for the locals. However, only a tiny percentage of hosts can benefit from such job opportunities with aid agencies, and the sustainability of such benefits remains a subject of considerable debate, which may invite further research on the host community in Bangladesh.

**The rising cost of living**

The Rohingya refugee situation has pushed up prices of essentials in the district. According to the respondents, public transportation costs have more than doubled, and expenses of daily commodities have also shot up. Due to aid agencies and their employees’ presence, house rents have increased by more than 120%. For a two-room apartment, the rent was around Tk. 8000 before August 2017. The rent is now a minimum of Tk. 20,000. (Aziz 2020; Alsaafin 2018). Moreover, often there is hardly any space left as many houses have been turned into make-shift offices for different aid agencies. Almost every respondent mentioned that the cost of public transport

has increased threefold as aid agencies are subcontracting these vehicles to continue their services in remote areas.

Nearly 80% of the 300 respondents interviewed have experienced an increase in the price of household goods. Many of them claim that the aid agencies deliver food essentials—such as rice, lentils and vegetable oil—to the camps’ residents. A section of the refugees sells the surplus items in the market for a fraction of the price to buy items that the aid agencies are not providing, i.e. fish, meat and other food items. This is affecting market stability and putting an existential threat to local small retailer shops. Fahmidul (28), a small retail shop owner, says:

The cost of living will not come to a tolerable situation as there is no end to the crisis...I am afraid that the poor will only get worse off, whereas the wealthy will grow wealthier...Wealthy people will keep doing businesses as they have resources...The vulnerable group like us will continue to face hardships (personal communication, September 14, 2019).

The increased living cost due to the addition of one million-plus population and thousands of national and international aid workers in the region have also been identified by recent studies, including the UN agencies report (Ahmad and Naeem 2020: UNDP 2018).

**Tension over natural resource sharing**

The refugee situation has taken a severe toll on the local forest resources. Environmental damage is among the worst effects of the refugee settlement (UNDP Bangladesh and UN Women 2018). Around 20% of the participants who previously had a living and earning from the local forests reported a change in their livelihood opportunities. A large-scale refugee arrival into an area may cause a significant strain on natural resources, causing both environmental and social impacts. In Cox’s Bazar, demand for natural resources increased exponentially, leading to a fast clearing of forest land for housing, unsustainable consumption of firewood and timbers, accelerated use of ground and surface water and excessive fishing. The poorer the locals, the more reliant they are

**Table 3** Average monthly income (in BDT) of the respondents (before and after the refugee arrival in 2017)

Professions	No. of respondents	Teknaf		Ukhiya		Cox’s Bazar town	
		Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Local small traders	38	15,000	10,000	14,000	8500	17,000	17,000
Farmer	33	12,000	7500	12,000	6000	15,000	13,000
Fishing sector worker	34	8700	6000	8300	5300	11,000	8000
NGO/private job	38	10,000	40,000	10,000	43,000	12,000	40,000

on natural resources for their livelihood, the study observed. Since the refugees arrived without any belongings, they are also dependent directly on natural resources.

Taher Mia, 44, a daily wage earner (personal communication, December 14, 2019), explains, 'Before the NGOs arrived, my income came mainly from the forest, such as wood-cutting, timer business and land cultivation. However, the forests – up to 5,000 acres – were cut down to settle the refugees—depriving people like us of their traditional occupation'.

The unplanned establishment of the camps in the surrounding areas has seriously polluted the canals and streams, a significant water source for the host communities, for decades. Since August 2017, they cannot use surface water for irrigation or household chores anymore as these canals and streams are logged due to the constructions of camps and roads and the use of the same water sources by the refugee community.

Our life was just okay before the seizure of our forest and agricultural lands...Our situation is miserable now... We do not have a steady source of income, and we live in abject poverty, Another respondent, Karima begum (35), informs.

About 93% of the respondents who had previously used canal and stream waters for irrigation are now using shallow machines, which has become both time consuming and expensive for local farmers. The UNDP and UN Women identified 28 risk factors that endanger biodiversity and human security in a collaborative environmental assessment study<sup>7</sup>. Thousands of acres of forest land were cleared for the settlement of refugees. Areas where wild elephants once roamed are now devoid of them. The lush, fertile, hilly landscape has been quickly turned into long stretches of red earth covered in tarp tents. Smoke from firewood burned by refugees and exhaust from thousands of vehicles carrying passengers and goods into the camps have increased air pollution in the region. Recent studies also observe a nexus between the arrivals of refugees with massive deforestation in the region. For example, using the GIS system and other algorithms, Ahmed et al. (2019) shows a rapid decrease in Cox's dense forest's Bazar region in 2018 compared to 2008. This study also claims that 'the year 2018 has the lowest dense forest area in the last 30 years of the region's history, implying massive deforestation

due to Rohingya migration from Myanmar to Bangladesh' (Ahmed et al. 2019, p. 289).

#### Acquiring land to build new camps

I brought the last crop home from my land in September 2017. It is no longer there- Farhad Hakim, 52, a local farmer (personal communication, October 17, 2019)

A section of the respondents blames the NGOs for their aggressive relief operation that has negatively affected the locals. About 18% of respondents were affected by a large number of NGO operations and the extension of refugee camps onto agricultural land. It is important to note that Bangladesh's hills and mountainous regions have a unique land ownership system. The most disadvantaged members of society can often lease the territory from the government for a nominal price. However, the government can reclaim the land whenever they need it, especially in times of emergency. Owing to the establishment of warehouses, offices and relief operations of local and foreign NGOs in these territories, many of the respondents who previously had such ownership are now suddenly at a loss. This type of abrupt occupancy has also created conflicts between NGOs and local farmers. Often, the government prefers to lease the land to the NGOs, as they are willing to pay high rents. Altaf Sheikh (47), who claims to have lost a significant income from selling jackfruits from the local forest, says:

Within a week's notice, they (the government agencies) told me to cut all the jackfruit trees from my orchard that I was using as a lease because they will build a new camp there. My main source of income has gone overnight, and I have not even received any compensation for that.

In a recent study, Babu (2020) provides statistics of the loss of around 3500 acres' forest area due to Rohingya concentration in Cox's Bazar. It represents a loss of 1.67% in Cox's Bazar forest area and a loss of 0.05% in the total national forest area. The same study estimates the value of forest land around Tk. 5 billion (Bangladeshi currency) that has been adversely affected due to the arbitrary establishment of camps and settlements.

#### Host communities' experience in the protracted phase of the crisis

The Rohingya refugees and the adversely impacted host communities are stuck in limbo without knowing what will happen to them. There is a perception among the locals that the involved stakeholders' subsequent policy

<sup>7</sup>The joint assessment report details the environmental impacts following the latest mass arrival of the Rohingyas, Accessed February 24, 2021, from <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/report-environmental-impact-rohingya-influx-executive-summary>.



initiatives are yet to feature their concerns on the policy agenda. Many respondents also feel that their government is not keen to aid them in their struggles either. Table 4 presents the factors identified by the respondents as causes for their discontent with the current situation:

Interesting dynamics are being observed when we further break down the responses. For example, whilst insecurity and threat to livelihood are the major concerns for the local population in Ukhiya and Teknaf, the threat to local demography was identified as the key concern by the respondents from Cox’s Bazar town, which does not officially host any refugee.

Again, when we see the gender-disaggregated data, women respondents tend to highlight the livelihood challenges and insecurity around law and order over the issues of political uncertainty and demographic threats. Figure 1 shows the key concerns identified by the women respondents. Out of 130 women respondents, 46% identified livelihood challenges posed by the new refugees as the key concern for them, followed by another 28% who point out the growing challenges on maintaining law and order in the hosting region.

Interestingly, whilst the concerns around livelihood opportunities and insecurity appear to be significantly higher among the respondents from Ukhiya and Teknaf, the situation is quite different in the responses from Cox’s Bazar town. It is because of the livelihood opportunities created by a section of the local businessmen in Cox’s Bazar due to the concentration of aid agencies and international organisations and their employees in this area.

**Refugee centric humanitarian assistance**

Humanitarian agencies responding to the Rohingya emergency had little chance to focus on local hosts at the initial phase of the crisis. Furthermore, refugee aid organisations concentrating on emergency relief operations are often reluctant to widen their mandate to include adversely impacted host communities under aid coverage. The study found that even in the protracted phase, poorer hosts are receiving inadequate attention. Hosts, predominantly in Teknaf and Ukhiya, have a sense of being overlooked by the local and international

humanitarian agencies. Tahmina Akhter (32) says: ‘Much money comes from abroad for the refugees, but we do not get anything... Strong local elites take everything if help comes at all... We are not having anything’.

The host community is not a homogeneous group, and the population is scattered across Cox’s Bazar District. As a result, identifying the most vulnerable local hosts has been a significant challenge. Mominul Haque (25), a local NGO worker, shares another complex dimension in outreaching disadvantaged local population: ‘I think it would be wrong to say that there is no contribution for the host community. Nevertheless, the thing is the way it has been channelled through the local administration via the Union Parishad (the grassroots administrative body of Bangladesh government), they put the majority of the relief and other supports in their pocket’.

Consequently, the disadvantaged host population remained outside the aid intervention. Furthermore, the study found that reaping the benefit of resource flow is contingent upon the degree of access to resources, and in the process, the most vulnerable section of the host community is often left out. In addition to that, a significant percentage of the poorer hosts living in remote areas have not received any assistance. The researchers observed that impoverished locals from occupations such as daily wage earners, small farmers and natural resource dependents strongly resent refugees’ overwhelming focus from the aid agencies.

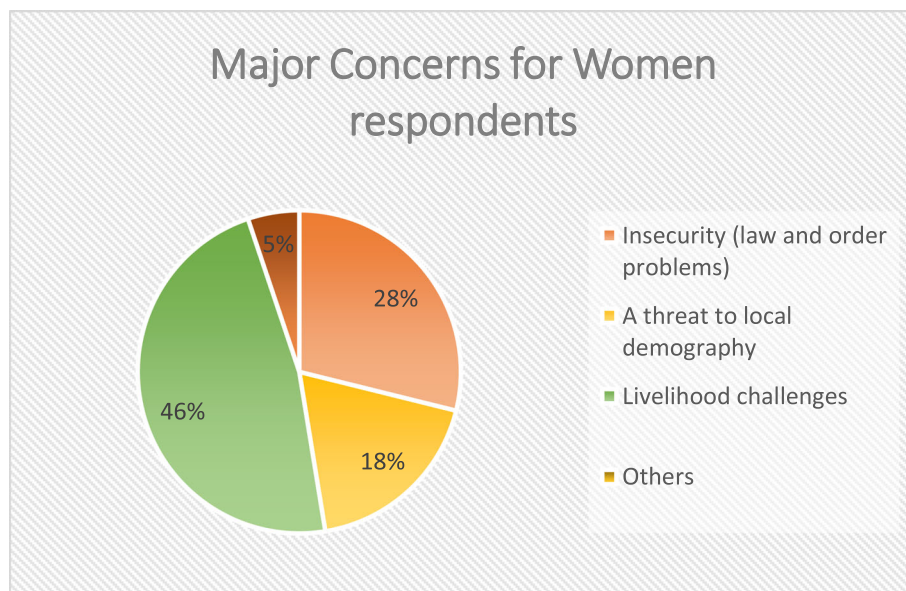
**Voice of local community ignored**

Whilst the demographic shift has created significant tension in the region, the absence of the voice of host communities in the entire process of beneficiary selection and distribution further marginalised the local population (Abrar 2017). As many as 83% of the respondents state that they were neither invited by the government nor by the NGOs to discuss the running of emergency relief operations. By the end of 2018, Rohingya refugees outnumbered residents by more than threefold in Teknaf and Ukhiya (UNDP 2018). There is considerable debate around the role of NGOs, and conflict between locals and NGOs is growing. People also took to the streets demanding the NGOs leave their areas in several

**Table 4** Major concerns for the local population

Types of opinion	Teknaf	Ukhiya	Cox’s Bazar town
Insecurity (drug trafficking, damaging law and order)	40%	37%	17%
Threat to local demography	23%	28%	47%
Livelihood challenges	56%	52%	21%
Political uncertainty	11%	17%	18%
Others	5%	3%	7%

Note = multiple responses



**Fig. 1** Key concerns identified by women respondents

rallies that called for saving the region from NGOs (COAST Trust 2018).

A significant 58% of our respondents believe that NGOs should give priority to recruiting aid workers from the local hosts over Bangladeshi citizens from other regions, for two main reasons, (1) locals know the situation better and (2) because they are losing their livelihood due to the refugee arrival. As such, they should be accommodated in the system of operations. Besides, many local entrepreneurs and small traders abandoned their traditional business and started working for the NGOs. Moreover, the NGOs' recruitment criteria for potential applicants based on academic, linguistic and economic standards have also created tension within the host communities.

#### Disruption of government services for the local hosts

Transitioning from a largely government-led emergency operation to a multi-stakeholder coordinated response will undoubtedly require different layers of support. What is new in this context is the withdrawal of local authority from providing certain public services. Because of the diversion of human resources from public sectors to humanitarian aid agencies, the local population finds it increasingly difficult to access essential services such as health and education. Many of the respondents claim that it is no longer possible for local Bangladeshi citizens to apply for a Bangladeshi passport in the regional passport office in Cox's Bazar. Many refugees believed to avail Bangladeshi passports hiding their identity (Babu 2020; Rahaman 2019).

Due to the linguistic proximity and similar physical appearance of Rohingyas and Bangladeshis, a refugee can easily apply for a Bangladeshi passport in the guise of a local, albeit unlawfully. Therefore, the services are 'no longer running to avoid such errors'—as one of the local government employees explains. The same applies to the registration of birth certificates and many similar documents. Whilst the local administration could have handled the situation differently, the refugees are blamed for the deadlock in services. Consequently, there is a significant potential for tensions to escalate and erupt between the locals and the refugee community.

Since the arrival of refugees, students from the host community have begun to drop out of school or skip classes to help their families with income-generating activities, such as selling goods at refugee settlements. According to the Directorate of Primary Education, many school buildings and playgrounds were used as refugee transit camps, which led to structural damage and the destruction of school furniture and vital infrastructure (personal communication, November 12, 2019). In many cases, law enforcement agencies and security forces also found accommodation in school and college buildings. As a result, regular activities in these schools were disrupted for several months. Even after relocating refugees to the camps, the repair and renovation work did not take place promptly, further delaying the resumption of regular school activities. Some schools continue to be used as refugee-related support/coordination centres by various agency personnel involved in humanitarian projects. Educational activities in these schools can use only part of the premises.

Many students and teachers have found well-paying jobs as local facilitators and translators with international agencies and NGOs operating in Cox's Bazar. High absenteeism is now a significant issue facing many institutions. According to a study by COAST, a Bangladeshi NGO working on refugees and the host community suggests that absenteeism in Teknaf and Ukhiya schools and colleges has risen to 60% (COAST Trust 2018). The study also found that, in some schools, up to 70% of teachers have left their jobs for more lucrative NGO/INGO positions. Whilst these developments benefit some people through enhanced income-earning opportunities, they affect overall educational activities in the host community. Local guardians and civil society members viewed that youth are surrendering their long-term job prospects for temporary monetary benefits by working with different agencies instead of completing school or college. This outcome may have adversarial bearings on human resource development in the region.

#### **Tensions related to security and surveillance**

One remarkable observation from the findings is the expression of resentment over the growing security instalments and massive surveillance of the region's population. The locals are not happy about the increased number of checkpoints, harassment by law enforcement agencies, mobility restrictions and safety issues. Many of them complained about not having women police officers at the checkpoints. A staggering 80% of the residents no longer feel safe having Rohingya refugees living nearby as it exposes them to constant surveillance and deployment of security personnel in the region. There have also been reports of clashes between host communities and refugees and between refugees and law enforcement authorities (Yasmin and Akther 2019). About 18% of respondents say they have experienced harassment at checkpoints and are thus facing mobility restrictions out of safety concerns.

Due to extreme poverty and the absence of legal work opportunities, many refugees are believed to be involved in drug trafficking due to their strong network on both sides of the border (Gaffar 2018). A majority of the respondents (67%) blame the refugees for drug trafficking in the region and accuse them of destabilising the internal security of the country. However, it would be an absolute scapegoating if Rohingyas are being blamed for the drug trafficking, as many locals are indeed part of the racket and merely using the Rohingyas as they are desperate for immediate financial gain and ready to embrace the risks. Like many other places that are hosting refugees, it is hard to ignore that there are often misrepresented facts and prejudiced responses by the local hosts towards the refugees in Cox's Bazar.

Again, the security dynamics that the Rohingyas bring in have been researched previously (Rahman 2010). Whilst these studies suggest a broad, international security dimension, i.e. military surveillance, drugs, security instalments, our study, on the other hand, reveals the everyday security concerns that the locals are being endured to in the new circumstance.

#### **Analysing shifting solidarity: positively associated with refugee centrism and weak state capacity?**

The Rohingya refugee crisis represents a long-term challenge for the aid agencies, the government of Bangladesh and most importantly, the host communities. As the situation stands, repatriation of the Rohingya refugees seems implausible in the near future. At this stage, providing sustainable livelihood opportunities for the adversely impacted hosts, lessening tensions and fostering positive relations between refugees and hosts are some of the significant challenges for humanitarian aid agencies. Given the scenario, refugee assistance that excludes host communities and does not create a linkage with the refugee-hosting areas' overall development faces substantial challenges in implementing refugee support programmes. A situation as dynamic as discussed above leads one to pose a few fundamental questions. How different is the latest Rohingya refugee situation from previous refugee crises in Cox's Bazar, and why has the recent arrival of refugees created anxiety and tension among the local population? Broadly, the study has come up with the following observations: The recent demographic shift has triggered significant social and economic changes in the region with the arrival of nearly a million refugees since August 2017 (UNDP 2018). There is hardly any durable solution for the foreseeable future, and many locals are concerned that closing down humanitarian operations without repatriation might result in confrontation between the refugees and affected hosts. Besides, the speed and scale of the situation resulted in an unprecedented global humanitarian response for the Rohingya refugees. As a result of such a massive refugee settlement, the remarkable presence of international refugee aid agencies and the flow of humanitarian aid host communities have been experiencing a wide range of effects.

The study identified four general causes that determine host communities' approach to refugees and refugee aid agencies' presence in the refugee-hosting areas. The first issue is the scale of resources and livelihood opportunities that the host communities may need to share with the Rohingya refugees. It is now a recognised fact that large scale refugee arrival strained natural and economic resources, thus causing tension between the host population and refugees in Cox's Bazar. The second aspect is how the host communities understand

potential gains from the assistance delivered to the refugees, particularly in the protracted phase of the crisis. Refugee aid organisations concentrating on emergency relief operation find it challenging to widen their mandate to incorporate local hosts within the overall refugee aid programme. Refugee humanitarian responses, especially for protracted crises, remained refugee and camp centric. The unequal access to humanitarian assistance and opportunities were instrumental in shifting poorer hosts' attitudes towards the Rohingya refugees. Although affected hosts do not expect a return from the refugees, they want to be compensated, either from the government or the aid agencies. Such anticipation is legitimate, and it requires humanitarian agencies to include poorer hosts within humanitarian assistance programmes. However, enough attention has not been given to identifying the need of the host communities. The decisions humanitarian aid agencies make over 'who gets what, when and how'<sup>8</sup> can have a profound impact on how local hosts engage with the refugees.

A significant but often overlooked fact is that the host community is not a homogenous group. Different community members respond to the refugee crisis differently, and their capacity to adapt to the new challenges is also determined by different factors, including their financial strength and how the new arrival impacts their profession and livelihood. Although a portion of humanitarian assistance has recently been allocated to host communities, there is an unequal distribution of such resources, with benefits restricted to a specific segment of the host population<sup>9</sup>.

There are hosts in Cox's Bazar who have been immensely benefited from the flow of humanitarian resources as particular types of businesses started flourishing in the region, such as food suppliers, building construction sector, hotels, real estate agents, local apartment owners and transport businesses, to name a few. On the other hand, the poorest among the hosts are suffering in these changing social and economic circumstances, i.e. the price of essential goods is increasing, and daily wages are decreasing to a substantial level. Many respondents, particularly those who earn their living from daily wages, believe that they have been overlooked

in the process of crisis management, and their sacrifices have made no returns.

Thirdly, local state authority with greater administrative and financial capability can better manage the challenges stemming from refugee settlement and minimise the host communities' challenges through the proper delivery of service and crisis management. However, the study observed inadequate focus or effort to improve the capacity of the state to deliver services for the host communities. On top of that, some of the practices and policies of humanitarian aid agencies resulted in severe disruption of public services, making refugees an easy target of scapegoating whilst also putting the legitimacy of the local authority into question. For example, humanitarian agencies' recruitment practices caused a shortage of skilled human resource in the local public service sector. Whilst the diversion of public employees provides much needed local knowledge and skills to the humanitarian aid agencies, the practice hurts the government agencies' service delivery and capacity development, thus on the host communities. The severe lack of service delivery capacity only allows locals to scapegoat already vulnerable refugees at the local level. Refugee aid agencies risk causing anti-refugee sentiment by not providing support for creating local authorities' service delivery capacity.

Lastly, the study found that the host population in Cox's Bazar considered refugeehood temporary, and they were not prepared for or expected such a large-scale arrival of the Rohingya refugees. Also, an overwhelming majority of the hosts see camps as a temporary habitation where refugees can shelter for a whilst and then return home. Consequently, refugees coming out of the camps triggers hostility from the poorer hosts since refugees and hosts compete for the same labour market and natural resources. Local hosts also have a concern that the repatriation arrangement will not work, and they feel the refugees will be there for an indefinite period. Whilst many of the underlying problems have to do with governance and taking an all-inclusive approach to humanitarian crisis management, the lack of such a holistic strategy has resulted in the refugees becoming a scapegoat for the region's emerging challenges (Bowden 2018).

## Conclusion

The paper elucidates some of the complex dynamics that have played a role in shifting the trends and magnitudes of solidarity among Cox's Bazar's host population regarding the Rohingya refugees. As the findings suggest, the humanitarian crisis in the form of a massive refugee situation inevitably affected the host community's poorest members in Cox's Bazar District. In evaluating the factors that contributed to this transition in solidarity,

<sup>8</sup>Harold Lasswell famously defined politics as 'who gets what, when and how'. The decisions aid agencies have distributional impacts as well as political implications.

<sup>9</sup>The Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) report claims more than 30% of respondents from the host community believe there is an uneven distribution of support mechanism. Accessed February 24, 2021, from [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/reach\\_bgd\\_msna\\_hc\\_overall\\_teknaf\\_Ukhiya\\_upazila.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/reach_bgd_msna_hc_overall_teknaf_Ukhiya_upazila.pdf)

we analysed how the host communities' solidarity with the plight of Rohingya refugees evolved. Besides, it offers some critical observations around socio-economic changes in the affected locality triggered by the crisis.

There is a growing consensus that the unprecedented arrival of refugees has strained limited resources, necessary infrastructure, public services and the local economy. Nevertheless, it would be imprecise to attribute refugees to the development of negative attitudes towards the Rohingya refugees. Instead, we argue that declining state capacity to deliver service, inadequate attention to institution building, broadly refugee centric policies of the humanitarian aid agencies, unequal access to humanitarian assistance and uncertainty about the future collectively contributed to the shift in public attitudes towards the Rohingya refugees.

Drawing from the variety of empirical evidence, this paper helps us re-examine two crucial aspects of refugee-host relationships in Bangladesh, which also echoes the situation in many refugee-hosting developing countries. Firstly, it shows the importance of keeping the region's complex socio-economic reality in the backdrop to critically examine the changing nature of the relationship between the refugees and the host community. This way, the findings contribute to moving beyond the dichotomous views on this complicated matter, i.e., pro or anti-refugee, of universalism and particularism, unconditional support and resentment that we experience in a significant number of scholarships on refugee studies. As a result, any attempt to comprehend the host communities' evolving attitudes in Cox's Bazar to the Rohingya refugees should therefore take into account the host communities' socio-economic conditions, the state authority's concurrent contingency planning, and the involvement of humanitarian aid agencies involved in humanitarian operations.

Secondly, there is an apparent correlation between the changing demographics in the region, increasing economic challenges and the growing resentment to the Rohingya refugees. However, it is an entanglement of significantly one-directional resource flow by the humanitarian aid agencies, weakening state capacity in rendering service delivery to the host population and an absence of an inclusive approach in addressing the ongoing humanitarian operation. Besides, due to the overwhelming pressure on local administration, government agencies have become saturated and less capable of catering to the necessary services. To avoid making the refugees the scapegoat for the region's growing tensions, a detailed, all-encompassing strategy and appropriate coordination between the stakeholders involved in this humanitarian relief operation are essential.

From a policy perspective, the findings of our study suggest that the refugee-host interaction is placed in

jeopardy when host communities' needs are overlooked or inadequately addressed by the local state entities and humanitarian aid agencies. In this circumstance, an understanding of the causes and the consequences of the adverse impact on the hosts is necessary to ensure proper distribution of humanitarian relief and the implementation of refugee and host community support projects, mainly in the protracted phase of the crisis. Furthermore, recognising local constraints is critical to the comprehensive management of the refugee situation, something that many current policy efforts, both by aid organisations and the Bangladeshi government, lack. Thus, a humanitarian response that is mostly refugee centric may only risk the further deterioration of social cohesion and host-refugee relationship dynamics. Therefore, considering the protracted nature of the crisis, this study suggests an all-inclusive and comprehensive humanitarian engagement by focusing on service delivery and capacity development of the state and by ensuring a shift from the refugee centric humanitarian assistance programme to integrated refugees-hosts humanitarian support programmes in Bangladesh.

### Supplementary Information

The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-021-00104-9>.

#### Additional file 1.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all 300 research participants from Cox's Bazar who have made an immense contribution to this study. In addition, we are grateful to Dr. Claude Chevalyere, at CNRS (Lyon Institute of East Asian Studies), France and Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies, Germany for his guidance.

### Authors' contributions

We declare that Mr. Anas Ansar is the lead author and Mr. Abu Faisal Md. Khaled is the co-author of this manuscript. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

### Funding

Not applicable

### Availability of data and materials

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, Anas Ansar. The data are not publicly available due to their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

### Declarations

### Competing interests

We (the authors) declare that we have no competing financial, professional, or personal interests that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript.

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Received: 7 September 2020 Accepted: 22 June 2021

Published online: 09 July 2021

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