

Rohingyas in Faridabad

A situational Assessment



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INTRODUCTION

Rohingya community is often called the most persecuted minority in the world today for a reason. They are the ethnic Muslim minority group in the Rakhine state of Burma. The Burmese government has failed to provide them legal protection and has denied them citizenship. Due to the ethnic violence and atrocities perpetrated against the Rohingyas community, they have fled to reach any land for safety and protection. They are fleeing persecution in Burma to reach neighboring countries in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Bangladesh and their numbers are increasing in India.

On reaching India many of them may have escaped threat to lives but their living conditions have touched the new lows. In many parts of India in Jammu, Hyderabad, Western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and other locations, Rohingyas have settled in small clutters in makeshift set up that freezes in winters, unbearable in summer months and gets flooded during monsoon. Indian Government has either turned a blind eye to them on purpose or they are simply invisible entities to be seen in the light of the day. They are not offered any basic healthcare; their children have never attended or have less access to schools. Their shanties are loathsome even in comparison to the most underprivileged Indian slums. The local population remains oblivious to their background, situation, fears and needs.

A team of SLIC visited the Rohingya settlement in Jammu on 16 and 17 September 2015 to assess the condition of the community. The Rohingyas in Jammu are residing at three pockets namely in Nerwal Bhatindi, Bhagwati Nagar and Bari Brahmna. Each pocket comprises of many plots which shelters the community ranging from 80 to 120 families per plots. There are about 1600 families totaling to about 7000 individuals residing in Jammu and the oldest settlement is between 5 to 6 years. When the Team met the community, their eyes filled with hope and anger at the same time as no one has come to extend relief to their plight. Each poured out similar story of abandonment grief and suffering. The team interviewed individuals and plot leaders from community residing in Nerwal Bhatindi and Bari Brahmna.

OBJECTIVE

Rohingyas are victims of modern day ethnic cleansing. They sadly remain intentionally displaced people whose civil rights have been systematically destroyed. Sole objective of this study was to realize their current conditions and witness several obstacles that they face each day. This study was in fact undertaken to spread awareness about the plight of suffering Rohingyas at all levels. It was indeed painful to watch that the most basic human rights are being violated of Rohingyas. It was appalling to realize that this community is knee down in poverty, abused victims of possible human trafficking and is easiest targets of bonded slavery.

There is a need to make concerted efforts through operations and services to strengthen protection, improve the quality of life and seek solutions for them. There has to be a concentrated rescue effort made to pull them out of their miseries and to find sustainable solution to their problems. They are in dire need of security and development on humanitarian grounds. The present report provides the estimates of characteristics relating the slum conditions of the Rohingyas refugees in Jammu.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was carried out for the essential assessment of the conditions of Rohingya community settled in Jammu. The team adopted methodologies such as observation, one to one interview with individuals and community leaders for gathering primary data from the target community. Household head of each family, individuals and groups were interviewed. The team collected data on structural aspects of dwelling units and basic housing amenities such as drinking water, bathroom, sewerage, latrine, electricity including children education, medical services, employment conditions, eviction threat, local perceptions etc made available to them. This survey was essentially exploratory in nature, designed to give a detailed account of hardships faced by Rohingyas. A further attempt was made to question women separately to collect general particulars in the same schedule of inquiry.

The report is presented in seven sections.

- Living Conditions

- Access to water
- Health and Sanitation
- Education
- Women and Children
- Employment
- Local threat and legal issues

LIVING CONDITIONS

Life in India is far from easy for Rohingyas. There are uncountable dangers they face in their everyday lives here. They have been denied basic rights as health care aid nor offered minimalistic security assurance which must otherwise be the legal obligation of the Indian government towards every person living within its territorial land. Many of basic requirements mandatory for human survival are far from being fulfilled. From the social point of they have been pushed away in the corner and left to fend for themselves.

Housing condition is one of the most important indicators of the socio-economic development of a community. The Rohingya population in Jammu is settled in shabby makeshift set up made of bamboos, plastic sheets, wood, gunny sacks, metal or some sort of waste material. At least 4-8 family members live, eat and sleep in the same room arrangement. The congested clutter definitely deprived them of sunshine and the air reeked of sewage. The huts are made amongst lying garbage, with cattle roaming through the huts and scattering the place with droppings. The area is infested with flies, which can be seen wherever the sight goes.

There is no proper toilet system in all the plots and temporary arrangement made of sheet mostly adjacent to their huts serve the purpose. The waste from the toilet and bathroom could certainly become the cause of many diseases. In Nerwal Bhatindi, some women reported that they relieve themselves by digging pits and take bath inside their huts.

The community mostly cooks on twigs collected from around the settlement, and some have access to small fuel cylinders. Electricity arrangement is provided by the land owner but face successive power cuts to which they pay a total sum of **Rs. 300** monthly. Each plot is owned by

local persons who rented out to the community. Each family contributes Rs. 500 to Rs. 1000 per month for the rent and electricity is provided by the land owners but many plots have no proper electricity. The Plot situated at Barjani Talab Area in Bari Brahmna is adjacent to the field and has thick vegetation. The community reported the field being infested with snakes and has bitten local person in the past.

ACCESS TO SAFE WATER

There is no provision of adequate potable water and have no water storage system. The team came across a single pipe water line in a plot that houses 120 families in Nerwal settlement area which was seemingly inefficient for the settlers. In another plot, two 1000 liter capacity syntax tanks was the only source of water for 80 families. The settlers have to contribute money to buy water to fill the tanks almost on weekly basis. Very few of the community know about diseases that spread from contaminated water. Those who do, express their helplessness at being unable to do anything to prevent it. In these circumstances storage is indispensable. This community hardly has any access to proper storage techniques. They do not use and cannot afford any water filtration or purifying mechanism. Such condition and practices poses enormous health risks among the community members.

HEALTH AND SANITATION:

With no access to hospitals or even dispensaries, these families under all circumstances consult the local chemist for medication for their cure. They are perpetually under debt. The community is aware about the presence of primary health centers in the area but they are reluctant to avail the services due to language problem or the face the local inhabitants. Given their living condition, there is high risk of the community suffering from malaria and typhoid, tuberculosis and others from of illness. There is no indication of immunization program being conducted by Government or local NGOs for them. With poor sanitation and close living quarters, sickness and disease come in unwelcomed. In the plots where rag picking is the main source of livelihood

for the settlers, they dump their garbage collection near the settlement site which could leads to constant fear of infection spreading which may prove fatal for the young, elderly and the weak.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Parents in some plots informed the team that children cannot go to school due to lack of documentation that hampers the admission process. However, the team saw *Madarasas* located in plots where children were provided religious teaching. There are children who attend government school situated in nearby settlement area.

Development and Justice Initiative (DAJI), a partner of UNHCR and Shikhawat foundation, a local NGO also provide alternative learning arrangement in the community settlement area. When spoke with DAJI staff, they informed that children do get admission in Government schools but retention of children is a big challenge. However, it is certain that given the number of children population, many do not have access to education as they are engage in rag picking activities.

Women had specific needs, vulnerabilities and protection concerns. Mindset of their fathers and husbands remains rigidly conservative. These poor, illiterate women are tied to the domestic chores and upbringing their off springs. Women have no proper access to sanitary material and suffice with whatever available mode they could afford. Like in other places, most Rohingya women in Jammu deliver their babies in settlement areas itself. This poses risk of mothers dying at child birth or incident of mortality of child during birth. However, some women told the Team that in complicated case, they approach nearby doctor, who charges them hefty amounts for the service. Where as in few occasion they have visited Government hospitals.

EMPLOYMENT

Rohingyas are a conservative Muslim community with rigid defined rules for men and women. Husbands are the breadwinners and wives remain house runners. Since working is strictly not

permissible for women, they focus on domestic chores and child rearing. Mostly, the burden on earning is alone shouldered by Rohingya men.

According to the information collected during the assessment, Rohingya men remain largely uneducated and illiterate with absolutely no or very little formal education attained. Currently this community is stuck in an unknown territory and a foreign language is imposed upon them to earn a livelihood. Language barrier seems like their first and foremost hurdle.

The men are engaged in work related to construction, contractual petty jobs, housekeeping in Malls, hotels and hospitals, rag picking, Train washing in railway station and as daily wagers earning Rs. 100 to 120 per day. Children are also engaged in rag picking and some women in pencil factory. Jobs in hospital, rag picking and railway stations are subjected to chemical hazard and infections. Because of malnutrition and regard to their unfortunate background they remain susceptible to diseases like typhoid, jaundice, cholera, malaria, tuberculosis etc due to their exposure to hazardous materials.

DETENTION AND LEGAL ISSUES

The Team came across eleven (11) cases of Rohingyas arrested and detained in Jammu jail. They were arrested by the Jammu police when found them without any documents such as Passport or Visa. All the detainees were booked under Section 14 A Foreigners Act. The first case of arrest was made in 2010 followed by in 2013. Since then the detainees have been languishing in jail after completion of their sentence. Recently for five accused, the judgment has been pronounced for push back of the accused after completion of their sentence. However, this has not been executed but directed for detention in Jail under Public Safety Act for 6 months.

The Team also met the lawyers of the above mention cases to gather detail understanding of matters. The Team also met with Mr. Abhinav Sharma, the President of Bar Association, Jammu. The objective to meet him was to share information about Refugees Protection and its principles. Present cases of detention was shared with him and appealed for lawyers from the Bar Association who could provide free legal aid to Rohingyas. The president was very receptive and extended positive assurance regarding the request.

CONCLUSION

The assessment report indicates gloomy picture of Rohingyas in Faridabad. They have no protection from almost all corners given the abysmal situation and condition. Access to public services is negligible mainly due to lack of awareness and lack of documents. The refugee ID cards cannot fully guarantee their protection or access to Governmental institutions such as education or medical services. They do not understand the local language, which adds to their plight, since they cannot seek any new avenues on their own.

The team witnessed that Rohingyas struggle every day to make two ends meet in the midst of uncertainty and adverse situation from locals or police. The condition of women and children are even insignificant with no access to education, basic nutrition, maternal care etc. The women were of the mindset that their work should be confined to the domestic chores and showed no inclination to work outdoors except for few women engaged in Pencil factory.

There is a need for immediate intervention to address the living condition of the Rohingyas in areas pertaining to access to shelter, water, healthcare, education, non hazardous employment and legal protection.