

discrimination in their everyday existence (COHRE 2007: 82). The Rohingyas were exposed to forced labour and routine violence including rape and killings, and also required to get permission for even matters concerning their personal lives such as getting married (Lewa 2011:ii).

In addition to routine persecution and ethnic discrimination, intensified repression by the Burmese military state led to successive waves of Rohingya refugees fleeing to neighbouring Bangladesh.

density and extractive activities of its own local communities.

In parallel, the Cox's Bazar region has been significantly influenced by neoliberal globalisation. The small seaport of Cox's Bazar is the premier tourist resort of Bangladesh, constituting a major site of investment and speculation in urban real estate. Capitalisation of the rural interior by real estate developers and foreign and domestic corporations has grown rapidly to cover the entire coastal belt, with land being increasingly transformed into a financial



PHOTO: RASHED SUMON

It is striking that the unregistered refugees who had assimilated with local communities had more diversified diets compared to even the registered refugees receiving official food rations

The area where Rohingya refugees from Myanmar cross the international border to enter Bangladesh is the Cox's Bazar district. Even though some of the refugees have moved on to other areas, their highest concentration continues to be in Cox's Bazar. It is also one of the poorest and least developed districts of Bangladesh, such that large sections of the local (host) community are not much better off than the destitute refugees. The coastal plains, forests and hill ecosystems of Cox's Bazar have been under increasing stress due to the high population

asset for speculative gains (McMichael 2013:10).

The policies of Bangladesh, a Muslim-majority country, towards successive waves of Muslim Rohingya refugees have changed since the 1970s. After an initial phase of welcoming the Rohingyas due to religious and cultural affinity, the Bangladeshi state was unable and unwilling to take on the burden of harbouring and feeding the increasing numbers on its own. Attempts at forced repatriation (refoulment) have not been very effective because such returnees have faced persecution in Myanmar and fled to Bangladesh



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Not surprisingly, registered refugees had greater diversity in their food items compared to the unregistered ones in the makeshift sites, who had higher malnutrition rates.

yet again (Lewa 2011). Even though they have left behind their lands and livelihoods, returning home is not an option for most Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar.

Furthermore, Rohingyas who have entered Bangladesh after 1992 have not been formally given refugee status by the government, even though international law and practices would regard them as refugees irrespective of their official status (WFP & UNHCR 2012:ix). The lack of formal status as registered refugees made such Rohingyas vulnerable to abuse and arbitrary deportation without any legal recourse. In any case, all refugees in Bangladesh were subject to considerable "protection risks" in terms of violence and extortion in the places where they stayed as well as when travelling, as indicated below.

Formerly the Rohingya refugees had been mostly peasants in Myanmar, differentiated in terms of their wealth and class status. After arriving in Bangladesh, they were all levelled in terms of the common predicament of meeting basic food needs, irrespective of their earlier status and economic conditions. While their access to food was a matter of sheer survival, they were denied any entitlements based on citizenship rights and ownership of land. Furthermore, the Bangladesh government did not formally allow the Rohingya refugees to seek avenues of survival through employment, or access any of the welfare facilities provided by the

state.

Given this context, the ways in which the Rohingyas accessed food depended crucially upon their status as registered or unregistered refugees and the sites in which they were located, ranging from official and unofficial camps to settlements of the local population. On this basis, the refugees can be divided into three categories, whose numbers have fluctuated over time with changing circumstances (Lewa 2011):

First, there are an estimated 24,500 registered refugees currently living in two official camps in Nayapara and Kutupalong, run by the government under the auspices of the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR (Category A).

Second, there are two other unofficial "makeshift" sites in Kutupalong and Leda with unregistered refugees (Category B). The Kutupalong makeshift site had 20,500 unregistered Rohingyas in December 2010 (Lewa 2011:1).

Third, unregistered Rohingyas are dispersed among the local (host) population in the villages and towns of Cox's Bazar as well as adjoining districts, particularly Bandarban and Chittagong (Category C). Estimates of their total numbers range from 200,000 to 400,000, and they constitute the overwhelming majority of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh (Lewa 2011:44).

Among these, only Category A consisting of registered refugees in official camps received food from international aid agencies, administered by