

ROHINGYA CRISIS IN BANGLADESH

Displacement, Triple Nexus and sustainable peace



Bangladesh has been hosting over a million Rohingya refugees since late 2017.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS



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TANBIR UDDIN ARMAN

Two communities. One is the host, the other the guest. They live in the same place, next to each other. Their religious norms are identical. They speak nearly the same dialect. The hosts once received the guests with open arms and shared food and living quarters with the latter, who were desperately trying to escape the atrocities launched upon them by the government of their own country. By sheltering around a million persecuted Rohingya Muslims from neighbouring Myanmar since late 2017, local communities in southeast Bangladesh set an admirable example of generosity and compassion for the world. But why did the hosts' compassion fade with time? Why did the refugees' sense of gratitude toward the hosts disappear so fast? This turn of events intrigues the humanitarian community in Bangladesh.

Competition between the host and refugee communities over scarce resources breeds resentment. Social cohesion between the communities degrades, and the hosts' attitude towards the refugees turns negative over time, fuelling inter-community conflicts. This is evident in the context of Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee crisis, one of the world's largest displacement situations. There are host families in and around the 33 refugee camps in the country's southeastern part that house the Rohingya. When I observe interactions between the two communities, it feels as though these two groups of people live next to each other, but each on a separate, isolated island, either without any interactions or having no interest to interact. In addition to the one million new refugees, approximately 40,700 refugees have lived in two old camps for over three decades with little or no interaction with the host communities. The prevailing inter-community division continues to widen. Locals say that the refugees have overstayed their welcome and accuse them of stealing jobs with cheap labour and impeding development.

A plausible solution to the hosts' grievances in a migration-affected context is linking humanitarian programmes with development interventions, targeting the betterment of host communities. This has been emphasised within the scope of what is called the Double Nexus (humanitarian and development),

which was proposed as part of the landmark Grand Bargain agreement between major donors and humanitarian organisations at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. The agreement stresses enhancing collaboration between humanitarian and development actors, taking into account the needs of both refugees and hosts at the onset of displacement, for a durable solution to protracted refugee crises around the world. In the context of Bangladesh's refugee response, there is a consensus between the government and humanitarian agencies that at least 25 percent of the total humanitarian funds mobilised every year for Rohingya refugees shall be earmarked for development work in the receiving

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communities. UN agencies undertake more and more projects targeting the hosts. Though all the elements essential to a peaceful, cohesive relationship are already in place, tensions between the two communities frequently escalate, leading to increased insecurity and fear. When, as a camp manager, I try to unite them by bringing them to the table to settle disputes, particularly over land and resources, I rarely see them agree on the subject matters discussed, due mainly to a lack of mutual trust and confidence. This growing division puts pressure on the government.

To achieve the intended outcomes of the Double Nexus, promoting peace is a must-do. This necessitates a shift from the Double Nexus to a Triple Nexus (humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding). The Triple Nexus came into existence in 2017, with UN Secretary-General António Guterres introducing the "sustaining peace" element. However, a review of the existing literature reveals that the idea of

incorporating peacebuilding as a component into humanitarian programming has been heavily criticised by the humanitarian community. One of the reasons the concept is derided is that critics of the Triple Nexus see peacebuilding as more about stabilisation and security than soft power. The original meaning of the term "peacebuilding," coined by Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung, refers to a bottom-up approach to addressing structural causes of conflicts to create sustainable peace.

Ironically, peacebuilding has been associated with militarisation/securitisation ever since it became a familiar concept within the UN following former UN chief Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 report, "An Agenda for Peace." Pointing to the concerns raised by humanitarian actors, critics of Triple Nexus argue that integration with peace may lead to the militarisation/securitisation of humanitarian programmes. Humanitarian actors, too, are concerned that if peacebuilding is integrated as a component, they

the effectiveness of the Triple Nexus. A sense of improved cooperation prevails among stakeholders in the country, with the Triple Nexus resulting in a well-coordinated humanitarian response. Humanitarian actors in South Sudan do not perceive the humanitarian principles to be in danger, despite concerns prevailing elsewhere over a possible loss of credibility of the principles if humanitarian aid blends with peacebuilding.

It is undeniable that stabilisation in armed conflict situations requires the presence of militaries to function as peacebuilders while ensuring the safety of civilians. Yet, in non-armed conflict areas affected by a protracted refugee crisis, the Triple Nexus may bring about improved coordination among humanitarian, development, and peace actors to achieve the shared goal of sustainable peace. Bangladesh is not involved in an armed conflict with Myanmar, nor is the country fighting internally against any rebels over the Rohingya crisis. The country may be chosen as a perfect case study to evaluate the effectiveness of the nexus in a non-military, migration-affected context.

As the Triple Nexus is repetitively associated with militarisation, proponents of the concept name it a Civil Triple Nexus, perhaps in an effort to eliminate the growing scepticism over a potential militarisation of humanitarian aid. A review of the existing literature shows that the prevalent criticism of the nexus derives mainly from a lack of conceptual clarity and empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness in practice. Other challenges facing the concept include the lack of longer-term funding support. As a result, peacebuilding and social cohesion interventions that require longer-term funding commitments are often under-resourced. Describing Western donors' aid as a strictly short-term band-aid, scholars say that Western donors are reluctant to finance such long-term programmes for peacebuilding as they fear that they may become entangled in providing perennial support for basic services.

Despite criticism and scepticism, the Triple Nexus is gaining momentum at a time when resources to support protracted humanitarian operations are increasingly depleting. How a well-sequenced Triple Nexus contributes to peace and cohesion between hosts and refugees in a protracted refugee crisis by ensuring effective utilisation of resources and greater coordination among different stakeholders is now at the centre of attention.

A development initiative or a murder spree?



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ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

When my husband and I took our first rickshaw ride to my office in Farmgate from our home in Rayerbazar sometime in May last year, we were pleasantly surprised by the rows of trees on Satmasjid Road, which served as a treat to our eyes and also made sure that we had a natural green canopy protecting us from the harsh rays of the midday sun. In Dhaka, where greenery is always at peril, this stretch of road was a refreshing anomaly.

Fast forward to earlier this year. While returning home from work a little before midnight one night, I was shocked to see how workers contracted by the Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) were mercilessly butchering the trees on the medians from Abahani field all the way to Jigatola. The felling stopped for a while owing to the Eid holidays, until recently when I found out that the DSCC had returned to chop down the last of the trees from Abahani field to Shankar. The trees are being cut down for a Tk 9.62 crore project initiated under the DSCC to develop different infrastructure and build public toilets, pavements, and walkways in the area.

DSCC Chief Engineer Saleh Ahmed said the city corporation planned to replace these plants with trees that are of higher quality. To reinforce the DSCC decision, the engineer further said the "geometric dimensions of the space require medians double the existing size" and assured that they have kept spots for plantation. According to other DSCC sources, the medians had to be widened and strengthened to prevent trees from falling down on the road causing accidents.

However, I wonder why the development project couldn't be carried out while preserving these trees. The most pressing question is: has this development project been designed with an environmentalist or an urban planner on board? If so, what exactly were their justifications behind this decision, and can they back it up with the latest research and experimentations from around the world?

According to a 2017 study published in the peer-reviewed journal PLOS One, an older tree absorbs and stores more carbon dioxide (CO2) than a younger tree as they are bigger in size. Also, as the CO2 is stored during a tree's food-making process, photosynthesis, the taller the tree, the more sunlight and carbon it is able to absorb. The study also suggested that replacing older mature trees with younger ones not only degrades the soil quality, but also impacts the new plant's overall quality and growth.

Bearing these facts in mind, it is expected to take at least another two decades for the newly planted trees to match the size and functionality of the felled ones, and this means that the residents of the area will have to wait for years to reap the same benefits as the

trees that are being felled for this one carelessly planned project.

As for the project itself, the new medians – to my untrained eye – do not appear much bigger in size from the previous ones, and it surely does not seem it was doubled in size. Despite repeated attempts to reach the DSCC for the exact dimensions of the old and the existing medians, the officials could not be reached.

Over 300 trees that were originally planted to beautify this 900-metre-long road have been removed since the project's inception on September 20 last year.

Marina Nazneen, zonal executive officer (Zone-I) at the DSCC, said the trees that have been felled had very little environmental impact and were only planted to enhance the area's beauty. She also asserted the fact that no permission from the forest or environment departments was required to cut down trees for such projects, defying the Cabinet Division's rule that firmly states that seeking permissions from designated authorities is mandatory if one wishes to cut down any tree, even on a personal property.

A conversation with Munirul Islam, a division forest officer in Dhaka, on February 2 confirmed that no one from the DSCC had reached out to them seeking permission in this regard.

In contrast, the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) recently took the initiative to appoint the first "chief heat officer" in Asia and promised to plant 200,000 trees in the next two years to help reduce the temperature of the city while purifying Dhaka's air. This is commendable, but only if the DNCC mayor manages to walk the talk.

It is also quite confusing as to how two ends of the same city are poles apart in their plans.

While multiple environmentalists have repeatedly expressed their worries over Dhaka's air quality, provided that the city steadily ranks as one of the top 10 cities with the most polluted air around the world, ruthlessly chopping down hundreds of trees in this metropolis and turning a blind eye to the matter may be convenient on their end, but it bothers me as a resident of the area.

Such initiatives compel me to think about my aged parents and the little children in my neighbourhood prone to falling sick frequently owing to the polluted air, and risking future health ailments such as lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

The DSCC has decided to term this massacre "development" and "beautification," but for me, it was murder. Sadly, only a few sweat in protests to vouch for these green lives, while the rest choose to walk around Satmasjid Road, once a shaded green paradise for street dwellers but now a stack of concrete and cement, in silence.

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e-Tender is invited in the national e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of

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817480	SC-001	Card and Printing Accessories	10 May 2023 15.45	25-May-2023 12.00	25-May-2023 12.00

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