

Expert offers solution to prevent conflict between Rohingya refugees and locals

[Kamrul Hasan](#)

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While Bangladesh may have opened its borders to Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar's genocide, the prolonged stay has soured relations between the host country and the displaced community.

A researcher from University of Singapore has opined that a strong link between the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission and the local government can help mitigate problems among displaced Rohingya people and the host community.

In a lecture Sunday on "Complex Humanitarian Emergencies and Disaster Management in Bangladesh: The 2017 Rohingya Exodus" at the BRAC Centre, Dr Alistair DB Cook identified several obstacles to providing humanitarian support for all and resolve the problem.

Dr Cook's research, co-authored by Foo Yen Ne – a senior analyst at NTS Centre – was published last year by Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Dr Cook is also Coordinator of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Programme at the University in Singapore.

In his lecture, he identified that uncertain future of the displaced people, limited prospects for self-reliance, and impact on host people are creating problems.

Categorizing the challenges in several terms he said non-conventional relief process, absence of feedback mechanism to the affected people, overlooking local NGOs in humanitarian co-ordinating roles at the camps, limitations of local government in leadership position is creating challenge while ensuring humanitarian assistance there.

He said: “The RRRC and local government should have stronger links to mitigate problems between the host and the displaced. It would ensure humanitarian assistance to all by allowing them to work together without creating any problems.”

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Dr Cook suggested developing a fresh, efficient approach so international NGOs could engage in increasing local capacity.

He also recommended using the Bangladesh Army for their experiences from emergency humanitarian situation while working with UN Peacekeeping missions. He also recommended developing an effective policy to solve the problems and identify faith-based community groups who can easily mitigate problems.

A number of officers and researchers from INGOs and NGOs were present at the program.

IRC Country Director (Bangladesh) Manish Kumar Agarwal said the report should include if the host country has a policy to face the situations. He said it should include if the host country also has the capacity or prepared to resolve the situation.

Kabita Bose, manager of the Disaster Risk Reduction program at Oxfam International Bangladesh, said the report should include how local NGOs could take leading coordinating positions as the INGOs are leading with their experience.

She disagreed that there is an absence of feedback mechanism to the beneficiaries.

Rabeya Sultana, country director of HelpAge International, said she knew at least 20 NGOs and INGOs are working with ensuring this mechanism.

She suggested the report should include how civil society organizations could work so there would be no conflict of interests during providing humanitarian assistance.

When contacted, RRRC Additional Commissioner Shamsud Douza said it is an opinion made by the researcher.

He said: “The RRRC is working hard to ensure rights for the displaced while considering the interest of the host people.”