

Food Security for Marginalized Rohingyas in Myanmar

HM Moore

C/o. T Gibson, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Chiang Mai, 50200, Thailand
(email: hmmoore07@gmail.com)

Agri-history has taught us that governance relies on food and human security. This paper discusses an instance of insecurity among the Rohingyas of Rakhine State in Myanmar, which in some ways may be seen as arising from colonial decisions in Indianized Asia. In the case of the Rohingyas, limited access to citizenship rights affects food, environmental and other securities that are exacerbated by prejudice among officially recognized ethnic groups, especially the neighboring Buddhist Rakhine community. This study focuses on agricultural and environmental aspects of the social exclusion, which is defined (Silver *et al.*, 1995) in this case as exclusion from resources for food security – access to land and inputs. Exclusion has produced food insecurity. The overall subject was analyzed through the human securities as defined by the United Nations (UNDP, 1994).

Rohingyas, like many peoples, migrated with opportunities over different times since the 7th century CE and had been officially recognized as citizens until the implementation of the 1982 Myanmar Citizenship Act. The implementation of the 1982 Citizenship Law has resulted in increased prejudice against the Rohingyas which has resulted in them becoming effectively stateless. This

prejudice resulted in the intercommunal riots of 2012. Subsequent lobbying by the Rohingyas for reinstatement of citizenship since 1982 has led to the current government interpretation of the group as a political movement of ‘Bengalis’. Historically, it seems that the Rakhine and Rohingya ethnic groups lived peacefully during the Mrauk-U Dynasty (Rakhine Association, 2011) and that modern conflict is a tipping point reached after such long-term trends as a winding-down of the British administrative system in Burma (Myanmar) (1826–1947), mass immigration from India (1826–1947), intercommunal riots in 1942, and today’s anti-insurgent actions.

Using the human security frameworks (UNDP, 1994; Commission on Human Security, 2003), field studies examined Rohingyas’ access to livelihood, job opportunities, income sufficiency, education, health, land ownership and food, and natural resources. While the last two are discussed more fully in this paper, all seven securities became critical during the study after serious intercommunal conflict displaced some 140,000 Rohingyas. Other details may be found in Moore (2015).

As the second poorest state in Myanmar (UNDP, 2015), Rakhine relies on

This paper discusses an instance of insecurity among the Rohingyas of Rakhine State in Myanmar, which in some ways may be seen as arising from colonial decisions in Indianized Asia.

waterways for transportation of its main agricultural and fisheries produce. Rice yields remain low due to limited access to improved technologies and credit, and saltwater encroachment. In the dry season, livestock compete with humans for freshwater and vegetables are difficult to grow. Rohingyas often occupied poor agricultural lands and were often employed in the fishery industry in which, without citizenship to obtain fishing permits and capital for fishing boats, they are fishing labor. Where Rohingyas catch fish for sale themselves, they are forced to become price-takers because they are not allowed to travel from one township to another without a permit. A small minority of affluent Rohingyas engaged

Rohingyas, like many peoples, migrated with opportunities over different times since the 7th century CE and had been officially recognized as citizens until the implementation of the 1982 Myanmar Citizenship Act. The implementation of the 1982 Citizenship Law has resulted in increased prejudice against the Rohingyas which has resulted in them becoming effectively stateless.

in shrimp farming now find that business licences require citizenship, which leads to having to admit a Buddhist Rakhine partner who usually claims about 30% of profits. Similar permit restrictions affect ownership and cultivation of agricultural land. Working seasonally in agriculture and fisheries, Rohingyas from rural areas enjoyed greater security than those in towns. The occupation, prior to 2012, of 259 respondents according to field surveys conducted in 2013 is indicated

Table 1. Occupation of Rohingyas in Rakhine State, Myanmar prior to 2012.

Type of occupation	No. of respondents ¹
Unemployed	3 (1)
Government employee	7 (3)
Daily wager/hard labor	20 (8)
Farmer	36 (14)
Fishermen/fishery/shrimp farming	68 (26)
Shopkeeper/street vendor/trader	78 (30)
Trishaw driver	27 (27)

1. Figures in parentheses are percentage values.

in Ta
those
to 30
they f
dwe

Acces
prepa
land o
inadeq
tree fe
led to
low a
reduc
notab
not un
securi
be pla

Land
the et
Direc
food s
food
since
only
acces
limite
peop
for th
the 1
agric
and f
use.
Adm
num
equip
Beca
illega
probl

in Table 1. The surveys also found that those living in rural areas spent only 20% to 30% of their income on food because they fished for home consumption: urban dwellers spent over 80% on average.

Access to agricultural land and forests, preparedness for natural disasters, and land ownership have been undermined by inadequate knowledge and indiscriminate tree felling including mangroves. This has led to barren coastal and riparian lands of low agricultural potential. This in turn has reduced resilience against natural disasters, notably cyclones. Replanting of trees is not undertaken since Rohingyas have no security over the land on which they would be planted.

Land access and ownership declined with the effective denial of citizenship rights. Directly related to economic security and food security (WFP, 2011), land access for food production has been further reduced since the conflict of 2012. After the conflict, only 10% of surveyed respondents had access to agricultural land due to further limitations on movement of the Rohingya people and because of their concern for their personal safety. According to the 1963 Land Nationalization Act, all agricultural lands are owned by the state and farmlands are allocated to farmers' use. Registration is handled by Village Administrative Departments that record numbers of animals and agricultural equipment on a two-year renewal basis. Because Rohingyas are locally said to be illegal immigrants their access to land is problematic.

Using the human security frameworks (UNDP, 1994; Commission on Human Security, 2003), field studies examined Rohingyas' access to livelihood, job opportunities, income sufficiency, education, health, land ownership and food, and natural resources. While the last two are discussed more fully in this paper, all seven securities became critical during the study after serious intercommunal conflict displaced some 140,000 Rohingyas. Other details may be found in Moore (2015).

After the 2012 intercommunal conflict, limitation of movement imposed on the Rohingyas effectively denied them access to their agricultural land and so made it unsafe to practice agriculture. This and the other factors related to agriculture as presented in this review, represents an ongoing agri-historical issue that confirms the linkage between food insecurity and governance, expressed here as welfare for all persons within a nation.

According to the 1963 Land Nationalization Act, all agricultural lands are owned by the state and farmlands are allocated to farmers' use. Registration is handled by Village Administrative Departments that record numbers of animals and agricultural equipment on a two-year renewal basis. Because Rohingyas are locally said to be illegal immigrants their access to land is problematic.

References

- Commission on Human Security.** 2003. *Human Security Now*. Commission on Human Security, New York, USA.
- Moore HM.** 2015. *Citizenship and Human Security of Rohingyas in Myanmar*. PhD thesis, Thaksin University, Thailand.
- Rakhine Association.** 2011. *The Critique and Denunciation on the Use of the Term ARAKAN*. Rakhine Association, Myanmar.
- Silver H, Rodgers G, Wolfe M, and Gore C.** 1995. *Social Exclusion: Rhetoric, Reality, and Responses*. International Institute for Labor Studies, Geneva, Switzerland.
- UNDP.** 1994. *Human Development Report 1994*. United Nations Development Programme, New York, USA.
- (http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/255/hdr_1994_en_complete_nostats.pdf; accessed on 11 December 2012)
- UNDP.** 2015. *The State of Local Governance: Trends in Rakhine*. United Nations Development Programme, Myanmar.
- (http://www.mm.undp.org/content/dam/myanmar/docs/Publications/PovRedu/Local%20Governance%20Mapping/UNDP_MM_State_of_Local_Governance_Rakhine_ENG.pdf; accessed on 1 June 2015)
- WFP.** 2011. *Food Security Assessment in Four Townships Affected by Cyclone Giri: Kyukpyu, Minbya, Myeon and Pauktaw of Rakhine State, Myanmar*. Vulnerability, Analysis and Mapping Unit, United Nations World Food Programme, Myanmar.

Soor
of g
Kash
Shei
self-
uppe
grair
and
padd
was
bulk
gove
of f
resor
deve
To o
at tir
stapl
"Alc

How
agric
food
As a
an ag
it "
Coll
Maq
from