

Hybrid Governance of Transboundary Forest Commons in the Rohingya Crisis

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ABSTRACT

There has been a shift in both Myanmar and Bangladesh in the governance of forest commons away from top-down, state-led management, towards a more community-oriented approach incorporating local knowledge. However, in both Bangladesh and Myanmar, the Rohingya have been actively excluded from hybrid governance regimes, undermining their agency in managing the resources upon which they depend. The Rohingya are subjected to two different regime types of hybrid governance. In Myanmar, the Burma Citizenship Law of 1982 excludes the Rohingya from, among other things, the 2017 New Community Forest Instructions, which transfer the rights to forest land to local communities and give communities rights to commercially sell timber and non-timber forest products. Across the border in Bangladesh's Teknaf district, Social Forestry (SF) programmes have been set up to improve rural livelihoods and alleviate poverty among forest-dependent people by managing afforestation to mitigate the rampant rate of deforestation. Seventeen stakeholder groups were identified in relation to their governance in a study by Islam and Sato (in Tani and Rahman, 2018). None of them, however, include the Rohingya or their representatives. Due to the acute need for building makeshift shelters and using biomass for fire, more than half of the 15-year old SF programme forest has been cleared by the Rohingya. This case highlights that the exclusion of the Rohingya from hybrid governance regimes predisposes SF programmes to a failure by premature and unsustainable use of the forest commons. While being mindful of the critique that indigenous users of forest resources are just as capable of their over-utilisation, the exclusion of forest users from key decision-making renders SF programmes incapable of supporting local rural livelihoods. Without the Rohingya, prospects for sustainable forest governance in both Myanmar and Bangladesh cannot be realised. The Rohingya's social traditions of forestry resource organisation needs to be negotiated with the wider government-community regimes of governance. Due to the difference of topography between the flat Rakhine state and the hilly Teknaf district, the Rohingya's indigenous knowledge of forest use is inadequate, as demonstrated by the practice of pulling out tree roots, which in hilly areas increases the chance of landslides during monsoons. The inclusion of Rohingya would therefore have the much-needed effect of exchanging localised knowledge to address unsustainable practices like roots-pulling. In this way, representatives from the Rohingya and Teknaf communities could cooperate to produce collective ecological knowledge of sustainable and efficient use of the forest commons, suited to Teknaf's topography. The case of the Rohingya highlights the importance of inclusive and participatory hybrid governance regimes, which are needed to ensure that transboundary forest commons traversing the Myanmar-Bangladesh border are governed sustainably and equitably.

Keywords: Hybrid Governance, Social Forestry, Rohingya, Forest Commons, Bangladesh, Myanmar

Introduction

The Rohingya refugee crisis calls into question the very definition of hybrid governance. Amid the shift from top-down, technocratic resource management to more people-oriented governance of the forest commons, Rohingya have found themselves on the outside of decision-making processes. On both sides of the border, in Myanmar and Bangladesh, the Rohingya have been actively excluded from making decisions about the very resources upon which their livelihoods rely. The systematic marginalisation and denial of active participation in Social Forestry programmes robs the Rohingya of the opportunity to economically benefit from the sustainable use of the forest resources. Being a dominating forest-user, the Rohingya, however, did not stop using the forest in the way that they have been for generations. The failure to include them in the governance of the resources which they utilise resulted in the over-utilisation of the forest, unsustainable logging, and unchecked deforestation. In fact, the exclusion exacerbated the ethnic tensions between the Rohingya and the local communities both in Myanmar and in Bangladesh. The competition for resources catalysed the forest degradation. This example shows that hybrid governance is an ideal to which many forest users aspire. Yet in fact, hybrid governance is a highly politicised process marked by imbalanced power dynamics, lack of trust across the government-community divide, and corruption. Both the stories of the Rohingya's exclusion in Myanmar and in Bangladesh point to the same conclusion. Meaningful Social Forestry programmes cannot be realised to protect and conserve the forest resources without the inclusion of *all* forest users, including the Rohingya.

Social Forestry (SF) is a term also known as community-based forest management (CBFM), community forestry (CF), participatory forestry (PF), or agroforestry (AF). These terms refer to the same approach of forest governance and are used across literature, and this paper, interchangeably. The main purpose of SF is to grant forest-dependent communities ownership and to task them with the responsibility of managing forest resources so that they would have an incentive to use the resources sustainably. This approach adopts a more people-centric model, which represents a shift away from commercial production and the upper hand of expert knowledge. It privileges local, indigenous knowledge over technocratic and generalised solutions. It stems from the recognition that forest-dependent people are on the front-line of environmental degradation, as this directly affects their livelihoods. SF aims to address the conservation challenges and improve socioeconomic conditions of rural people. The basic tenet is to integrate the local people in the decision-making processes and reforestation activities. As a result, SF presents a struggle for power and dominance between competing actors. A theory of the involvement of local people in the management of common natural resources supports social forest management's potential for attaining ecological sustainability, economic efficiency, and social equity (Agrawal and Ostrom 2008; Bowler et al. 2012; Ostrom 1990). The main objective is to foster trust and amiable relationships among forest users, forest departments and local communities, in order to prevent over-utilization. In this regard, SF is ultimately a political process due to competing access to and control over forests embedded within social and power relations (Islam and

Sato, 2018: 143). The drawbacks include participant selection criteria (Islam and Sato, 2010), negative attitudes of Forest Department officers towards community capabilities (Jashimuddin and Inoue, 2012), and widespread corruption and poor governance in the forestry sector (Muhammed et al., 2008).

There has been an increasing awareness by the international community about the advantages of shifting from expertise-driven, top-down management of forest resources towards more inclusive approaches incorporating local communities and forest-users in the decision-making (Islam and Sato, 2018: 144). Hybrid governance refers to collaborative commoning activities involving state, private and societal actors and institutions across mixed landscapes and regulatory regimes (Ponte and Daugbjerg 2015; Agrawal and Lemos 2007; Lambin et al. 2014). These forms of hybrid governance stem from the recognition that traditional forms of state-led governance alone are inadequate in dealing with transboundary environmental issues (Miller et al., 2019: 16). Forest resources are an example of transboundary commons, which necessitate such hybrid forms of governance due to their complexity beyond individual jurisdictions and property regimes. (Miller et al., 2019: 3). The forests on the Myanmar-Bangladesh border are a perfect example of how the common pool resources cross national jurisdictions and span through divergent property regimes. Transboundary commons, however, also describe the intertwined political relationships, revenue streams, labour mobilities and environmental flows that move across sub-national boundaries (Miller et al., 2019: 3). The plethora of stakeholders render the forests a transboundary common, which is best governed through the process of environmental commoning. Environmental commoning involves several state, private and civil society representatives that generate and sustain environmental commons through inclusive and informed decision-making (Linebaugh 2009; Ryan 2013). Forest-dependent communities need to forge their livelihoods through sustainable forest policies that integrate local knowledge with foreign expertise to arrive at win-win solutions. SF has been promoted substantially by governments of developing countries. However, in many cases, these efforts fell short of expectations due to lack of commitment to participate, which might be a reflection of the poor design of management strategies. In Myanmar and Bangladesh, the poor design of the SF programmes lies predominantly in the fact that the major users, the Rohingya, have been excluded. The forests shared by the two countries are so-called in situ commons, which describe “contemporary structures and programmes that govern these commons are typically both transboundary and hybrid in the sense that they are created and maintained by coalitions comprising state agencies, corporations, banks, international donors, local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community representatives” (Miller et al., 2019: 11).

Who are the Rohingya?

The Rohingya are an ethnic, linguistic and religious minority, inhabiting predominantly the north of Myanmar's western Rakhine (formerly Arakan). Rakhine is a coastal state, which borders Bangladesh. It is estimated that more than 725,000 Rohingyas live in North Rakhine (Lewa 2010). South Asian by descent and professing Islam, they are related to the

Chittagonian Bengali that live across the border. They are distinct from the majority population, who are of Southeast Asian origin and primarily Buddhist (Rahman, 2018: 114).

The Rohingya crisis escalated following the events of 25 August 2017 when Rohingya militants attacked more than 30 police posts, killing 12 members of the security forces. These attacks led to what the Myanmar military claimed to be a fight against insurgents. The Myanmar military, backed by Buddhist mobs, led a complete destruction of Rohingya villages. Nearly 7,000 Rohingya, many of them children, have been killed in the month after the breakout of the violence. Reports describe the use of rape, torture, and widespread abuse by the Myanmar military. Despite claims that the operations targeted only the Rohingya militants, independent observers have reported otherwise. Many of the satellite images evidence the destruction of Rohingya villages, thereby targeting civilians. Nearly 300 Rohingya villages have been partially or totally reduced to rubble. The UN says the Rohingya's situation is the "world's fastest growing refugee crisis" (UNHCR, 2017).

Dubbed by the United Nations as a 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing' (OHCHR, 2017), the Rohingya are among the world's most prosecuted minorities. The Rohingya gradually faced exclusion in Myanmar, especially since the military takeover in 1962. They have effectively lost their Myanmar citizenship with the implementation of the Burma Citizenship Law of 1982, rendering them stateless. The Law has been implemented by Ne Win's military government and lists 135 'national races' or official recognised ethnic groups, while intentionally excluding the Rohingya. The government of this predominantly Buddhist country denies the Rohingya citizenship, refusing to recognise their collective identity. Regarded as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, the Rohingya were also excluded from the 2014 Myanmar census. There are an estimated 1.9 million ethnic Rohingyas who are refused citizenship in Myanmar (Kaveri, 2017: 32).

Myanmar's institutional robustness is manifested in a systematic exclusion of the Rohingya from Myanmar's societal fabric. The denial of citizenship for Rohingya strips them of educational and employment opportunities, thus both driving and aggravating their socio-economic disadvantage. In the response to increased stress on essential life resources, such as housing and food, Rohingya were portrayed as a threat to Rakhine state's Buddhist majority and their ability to sustain livelihoods.

To better understand Rohingya's social exclusion, it is essential to also look towards root causes of widespread abuse, vulnerability, and displacement. The escalation of violent attacks against Rohingya was preceded by policies of 'opening up' in 2011. This policy came as a reaction to Myanmar's unprecedented economic growth, seeking transformative economic and political reforms. However, the economic growth also had the undesirable effect of harming the have-nots. The management and distribution of farmland privileged the middle-class and land grabbing practices further ostracised the Rohingya. This expulsion inflicted on the most vulnerable groups is a prime example of institutionalised social exclusion. Indeed, the lack of legal identity has a profound impact of

all walks of life for the 'unaccounted for' and can easily become a government tool for repression and marginalisation.

The case of the Rohingya crisis is marked with all the criteria that result in an outbreak of violence. The institutionalised oppression of the Rohingya and ethnic fragmentation mixed with the neo-Malthusian land grabbing amid climate change-induced dwindling of resources were the perfect recipe for a humanitarian disaster.

Protecting Forests in Myanmar, Excluding the Rohingya

Until recently, the Myanmar government held a tight grip on forest resources, which were managed in a top-down, state-led, traditional management style, excluding the local communities from decision-making. However, the increased recognition of the importance of forests for rural communities, and their record in managing these forests sustainably, especially compared to state forest management, has resulted in the emergence of community forestry (CF) (Feurer, Gritten and Than, 2018: 3). As of 2017, there were 3840 community forestry user groups (CFUGs) in the country (Feurer, Gritten and Than, 2018: 4). This allows forest dwellers to act as partners to sustainable forest management, as opposed to being treated as outsiders. The Forest Department has implemented the community-based forest management scheme that encourages local communities to actively participate in plantation projects as collaborators. (Soe and Youn, 2019: 130).

However, in Myanmar, the Rohingya have been actively excluded from this regime of hybrid governance, undermining their advocacy in managing the resources upon which they depend. The government of Myanmar targets the Rohingya in ways that deprive them of social, political, and economic participation. The Rohingya, just as the other ethnic groups, are a forest-dependent community. They depend on the forest resources for their housing, food, and economic activity. The Burma Citizenship Law of 1982 excludes the Rohingya, among other things, from the 2017 New Community Forest Instructions, which transfer the rights to forest land to local communities and give communities rights to commercially sell timber and non-timber forest products. This development ignores the Rohingya as active users of the forest resources and denies them access to these essential resources. Their customary indigenous knowledge of forest use is not incorporated into the hybrid governance regimes that are emerging. It also places them in a largely disadvantageous position vis-à-vis the other ethnic groups. Denied from participatory governance of the forest commons, the Rohingya are essentially deprived of their right to livelihoods. Escaping to the nearby Bangladesh, their social traditions of forest resource use are not being negotiated well in their new 'homes'.

New Home, Old Challenges

The extreme violence has driven an estimated 693,000 Rohingya refugees across the border from Myanmar to Bangladesh's south-eastern Upazila of Teknaf (ISCG, 2018). The majority of Rohingya refugees crossed the border to the nearby Bangladesh, fearing death and prosecution. Setting up

makeshift camps across the border, the settlements are mushrooming on a difficult hilly terrain, prone to flooding and landslides. With little access to aid, sanitary conditions, waste management, drinking water, and healthcare, diseases are quickly on the rise. Using the nearby forests as a vital resource for building shelters and making fire for cooking, the Rohingya are unleashing yet another environmental catastrophe that will ultimately bring about further deterioration of their miserable living conditions. With trees being cut off and roots pulled out, there is little to hold the soil in place during monsoon periods. Intense monsoon rains result in deadly landslides and floods. The flooded latrines contaminate groundwater and spread water-borne diseases, like cholera and hepatitis. Wet and humid conditions also provide a breeding ground for mosquitos, spreading malaria and dengue fever.

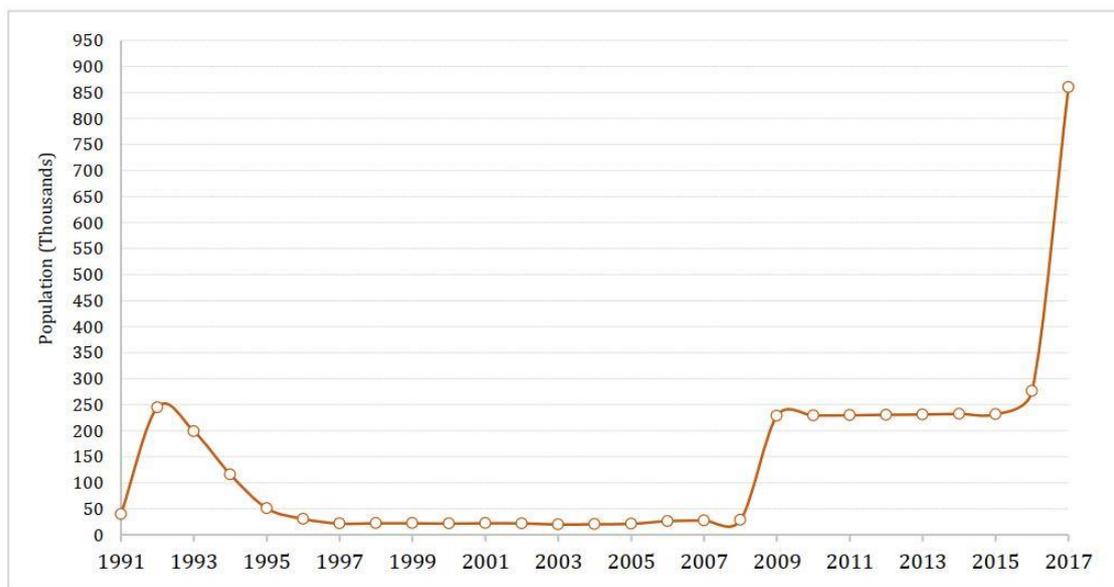


Figure 1. Number of Rohingya refugee influxes in Bangladesh from 1991 to 2017 (cumulative number of refugees including pre-influx population). Data for the period of 1991–2016 were retrieved from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR), and refugee population data for the year of 2017 were obtained from Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG). (Source: Hassan et al., 2018: 3)

Seeking relative safety in the neighbouring Muslim-majority Bangladesh, Rohingya refugees are generating a new environmental disaster for the fragile forest-covered region. Around 4,000 acres of forested hills have been cleared, turning trees into makeshift shelters and fuel. This forest fragmentation aggravates the exposure of refugee camps to deforestation-related disasters, such as landslides, desertification, and the depletion of groundwater supplies. With 800 tons of wood needed daily, around 1,000 football fields of timber are needed to supply the refugees for a single year (Ahmed, 2018). Half of the government-owned forests for the 15-year old SF Programme have been destroyed. SF programmes have been set up to improve rural livelihoods and alleviate poverty among forest-dependent people by managing afforestation to mitigate the rampant rate of deforestation. Intended as an elephant reserve, the elephants’ natural habitat fell victim to the Rohingya refugee crisis. Reports of elephants trampling people desperately seeking wood in the now-barren land of muddy hills are far too common. The topography of this area has been completely altered, as clearly seen on satellite imagery.



Figure 2. Before and after: Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh, inhabited mostly by Rohingya Muslims that have fled from religious persecution in neighbouring Myanmar. Copyright is: Pléiades © CNES 2017, Distribution Airbus DS

The inevitable environmental impact of nearly 700 thousand refugees on Bangladesh can clearly be seen on satellite imagery. Cox's Bazar's Divisional Forest Officer (South Forest Zone) Md Ali Kabir said the refugees were burning about 750,000kg woods as fuel every day (Mahmud, 2017). As many as seven reserve forests, totalling about 5650 acres, have been lost due to the anthropogenic activities in and around the camps (Hassan et al., 2018). Most of the deforested land was government-owned and about a half of the 15-year-old government SF Programme land has been lost. "They are cutting down the hills, they're chopping all the trees, herbs, shrubs then erecting their shelters. As a result, the topography of that area has been greatly damaged." (Ahmed, 2018). Timber has also become a commodity, traded and exchanged for food, medicine and clothes, all of which are in short supply.

The two biggest refugee camps are located in Kutupalong and Nayapara in Teknaf Upazila. The Kutupalong camp has joined with the Balukhali camp to the south and now represents the world's largest refugee camp. The (temporary) makeshift camps have replaced the forested hills and sit on landslide-prone soil that turns into mud during the monsoon season. This can all be observed from satellite imagery. However, what evades the satellite lenses is the direct impact of deforestation on aggravating the effects of climate change on the Rohingya refugees and Bangladesh more widely. The ravaging of nearby forests resulted in a loss of crucial wildlife habitat. "Environment and biodiversity of Cox's Bazar have already taken blows with the chopping down of hundreds of trees and levelling of hills. We fear rare animals like the Asian elephant, only seen in Teknaf might get extinct. Cutting of hills for settlements will trigger landslides during the monsoon period," (Uttom, 2017). Indeed, the makeshift settlements are expanding into wild elephants' corridors, which has resulted in deaths by elephant trampling. Deforestation has many more negative effects on the environment, including the loss of

wildlife habitat, soil erosion and desertification, water cycle disruption, loss of traditional livelihoods, and increased ecological risks from forest fragmentation (Hassan et al., 2018). Changes in forest cover further affect the capacity of forest biomass to store carbon, disturbing local climate by modulating the diurnal temperature variation, and thus increasing risks of global climate change (Hassan et al., 2018).

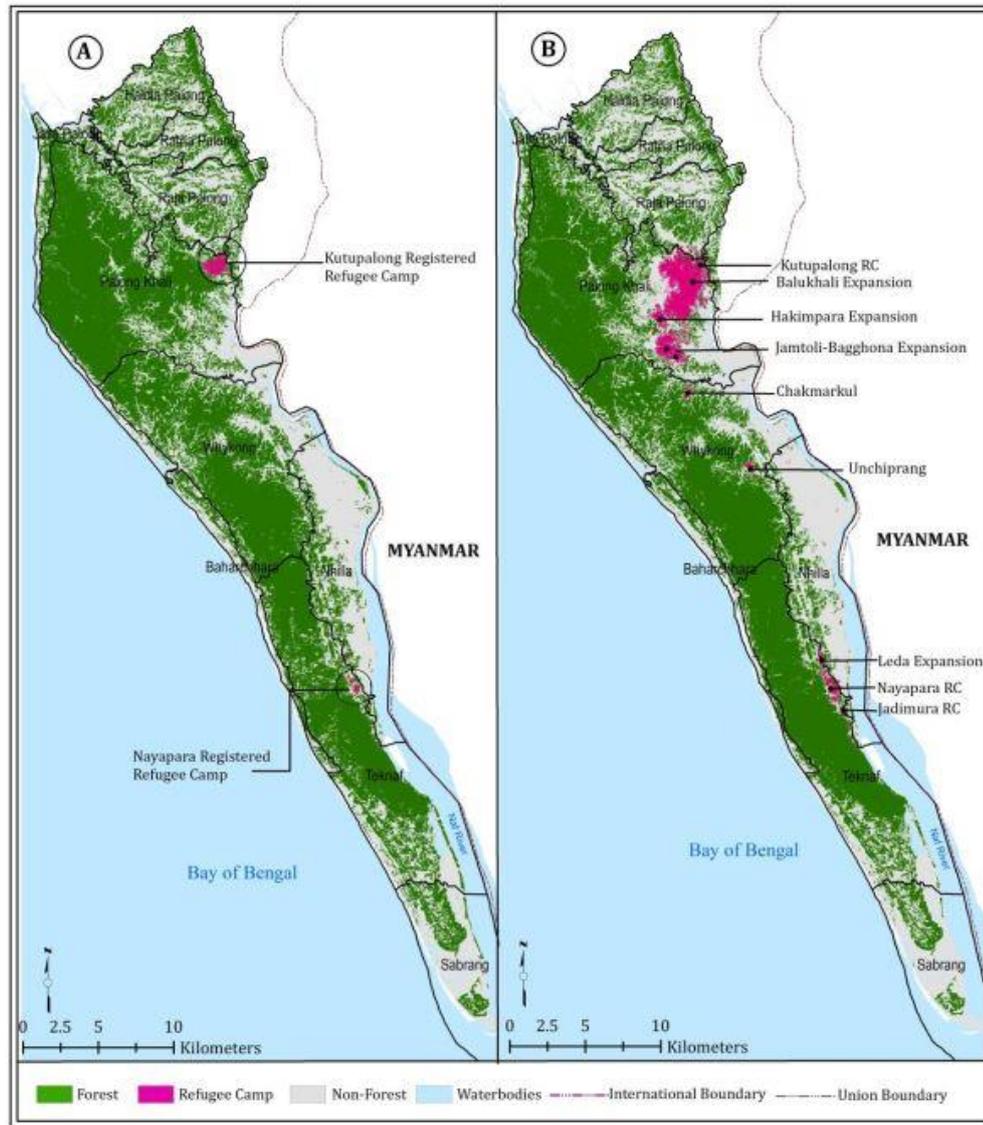


Figure 3. Land cover maps for the study area classified into three major land cover classes, including forest (green), refugee camp (fuchsia), and nonforest (gray), at two time-steps representing pre-influx: (A) December 2016 and post-influx: (B) December 2017. The pre-influx map (A) shows two refugee settlement camps; however, in the post-influx land cover map (B), many additional, spontaneous camps are visible with forested land replaced by continuous expansion of refugee settlements. (Source: Hassan et al., 2018: 11)

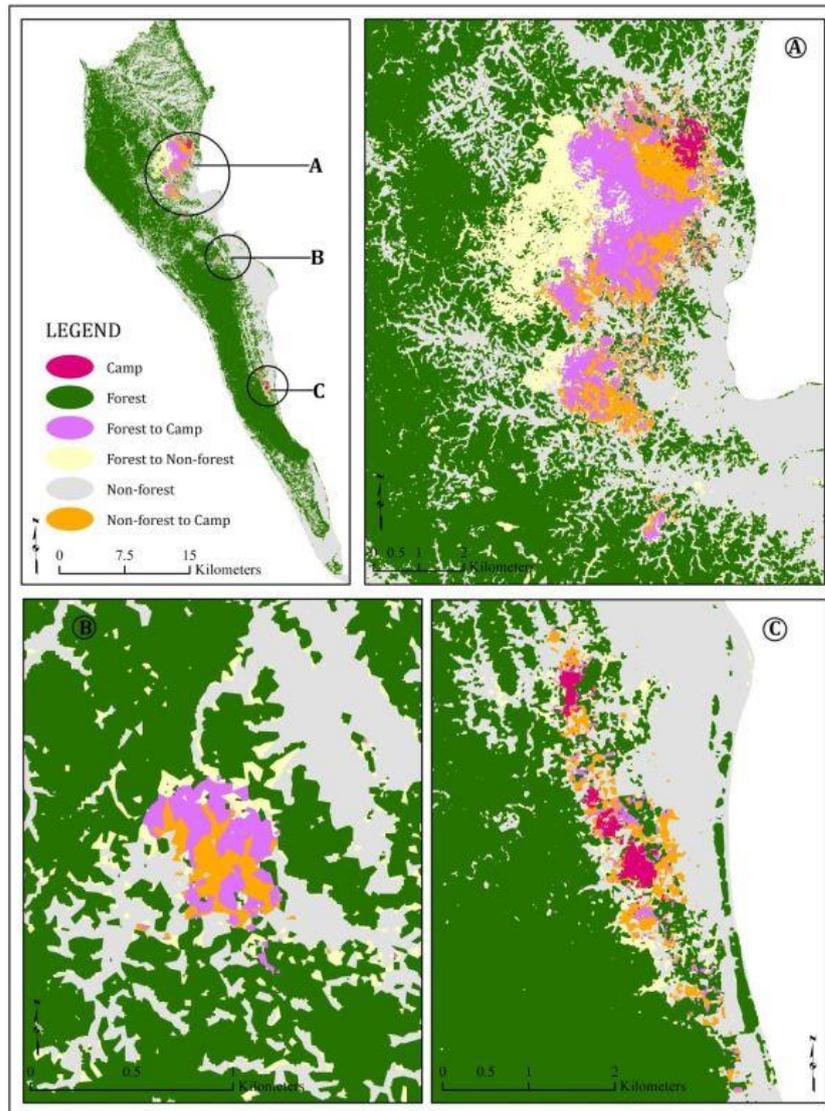


Figure 4. Land cover class conversion map with major land conversion classes (i.e., forest to camp (magenta), forest to nonforest (off-white), and nonforest to camp (orange), depicting land cover conversion and nonconversion between December 2016 and December 2017 at three refugee camp sites: (A) Kutupalong–Balukhali, (B) Unchiprang, and (C) Nayapara–Leda expansion. (Source: Hassan et al., 2018: 14)

Further, mass deforestation and the logging of tree roots reduces the amount of vegetation to pull water into the underground aquifers and thus causes rainwater to stream down to rivers, causing flooding. Due to with open defecation and leaking latrines, the floodwater spreads contamination, leading to more than 60% of water used by the Rohingya being unsafe. Cholera, malaria and dengue are feared during the monsoon season. The area of Bangladesh where the camps are located is one of the wettest parts, with an average of 12 feet of rain annually. Floods also trigger landslides, as the soil covering the hilly areas turns into mud. With no support from tree roots and vegetation, the bare land of mud slides down, taking shelters and infrastructure with it.

Despite efforts to mitigate the impact of the Rohingya influx on forestry, there has been a considerable degradation in forest cover in the past decades. This led the Bangladesh government to

establish a Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary (TWS) in 2009 after the first wave of migration. When the Rohingya started to settle down in areas around the TWS, their exhaustive livelihoods created bad competitions with local dwellers (Rahman, 2018: 113). The antagonistic relations between the local dwellers and the Rohingya further marginalised their position and excluded them from the CBFM. As Datta (2015) points out, uneducated Rohingyas do not know about the significance of forest reserve, so they are cutting down the trees without any hesitation. One can hardly blame the Rohingya, when no effort was spared to negotiate the Rohingya's traditional ways of using the forest and deploying sustainable methods as agreed within the SF program. Complex and imbalanced power dynamics plays a significant role in on the Teknaf peninsula. Seventeen actors were identified in relation to SF in Teknaf, which views the local communities as the main actors who use forests in different ways for a wide variety of reasons (Islam and Sato, 2018: 144). Despite this, the Rohingya are intentionally excluded from this power equation. Perhaps as a result, the forestry on Teknaf peninsula suffered significant losses of forest cover.

Social Forestry in Bangladesh – Rohingya not Welcome

An SF program was started in Bangladesh in 1981 under the CBFM program of the Forest Department (FD). (Asahiro, 2018: 129). The 1994 Forest Policy, the Forest (Amendment) Act of 2000, and the 2004 Social Forestry Rules are considered milestone achievements for the implementation of CBFM in Bangladesh. (Nath et al., 2016: 17). They started with the purpose to protect the forest from over-utilisation and as an incentive for the local communities to take part in conservation programmes. The community forestry programmes have been instrumental in producing essential resources and income for the rural poor, who depend on forest resources. Evidence shows that these programmes have been successful in helping to alleviate poverty in Bangladesh (Zashimuddin 2004). Community forestry also plays an essential role in environment conservation, in addition to generating income and employment through better access to resources. Khan and Begum (1997) showed that participatory forestry in Bangladesh has reduced distrust and conflict between forestry officials and local farmers, encroachments on government lands, and rates of deforestation (Nath et al., 2016: 21).

The destruction of the TWS in Teknaf by the Rohingya is a result of their exclusion from the process of participatory governance of the forest resources. This highlights the importance of inclusive and participatory governance regimes, which are needed to ensure that transboundary forest commons are governed sustainably and equitably.

The decision-making pertaining to the management of forest resources around the refugee camps in Teknaf were not inclusive, participatory or representative. They excluded the key actors and indeed the key user of the forestry resource, the Rohingya. The Rohingya should be included in the process of decision-making, especially as they're highly forest-dependent. In this way, both parties could negotiate their social traditions of using the forest with the local knowledge of sustainable use to produce collective ecological knowledge of governing the forest resources. Inclusive, participatory and

representative decision-making is needed to prevent further damage to the resources upon which both the Rohingya and the local communities rely.

The Rohingya's social traditions of forestry resource organisation needs to be negotiated with the wider government-community regimes of governance. Due to the difference of topography between the flat Rakhine state and the hilly Teknaf district, the Rohingya's indigenous knowledge of forest use is inadequate, as demonstrated by the practice of pulling out tree roots, which in hilly areas increases the chance of landslides during monsoons. The inclusion of Rohingya would therefore have the much-needed effect of exchanging localised knowledge to address unsustainable practices like roots-pulling. In this way, representatives from the Rohingya and Teknaf communities could cooperate to produce collective ecological knowledge of sustainable and efficient use of the forest commons, suited to Teknaf's topography.

The Rohingya resorted to environmentally unsustainable practices to support their livelihoods predominantly due to their lack of economic opportunities (Rahman, 2018: 122). Due to their lack of knowledge of the environment, survey by Rahman (2018) shows that 87% of the Rohingyas in the buffer forest either cut trees, twigs, and branches of trees or cultivate sun grass on the hills of the TWS (Rahman, 2018: 122). These are later sold on local markets to generate essential income for the Rohingya to meet the household expenditures. The Bangladesh government refuses to recognise the Rohingya as refugees. As a result, they are denied social welfare, education, healthcare and aid to incentivise economic activity. The refugee camps are isolated, ridden by poverty and inadequate sanitary conditions. The expansion of the camps come at the cost of the forest cover. The rapid expansion of the camps resulted in the degradation of the forest cover surrounding the three camps by 2283 ha. It is estimated that approximately 4000 acres of forested hills have been cleared to make way for the camps (Hassan et al., 2018).

The destruction of the SF has a negative impact on the relations with the local Bangladeshi communities. In the study by Datta (2015), among 40 key respondents from the local people, 44% believe that deforestation activities involved Rohingya refugees. It is clear that the Rohingya are blamed for the deforestation. Given that the SF was meant to serve the needs of the local forest-dependent communities, the tensions are understandable. However, it is precisely due to the exclusion of the Rohingya that such unchecked deforestation was allowed to take place. The Bangladesh government and local communities have underestimated the vital role of the forests in supporting the Rohingya's livelihoods.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Given the reasons of the rampant deforestation rooted in the exclusion of the Rohingya, the Bangladesh government and other forest users embedded in the processes of hybrid governance should consider several ways to mitigate the situation. First of all, the Bangladesh government should

accept the Rohingya as refugees and grant them Bangladeshi citizenship. Their stateless condition dwarfs their opportunities to act as meaningful economic and social agents. Given that their dire need to cut down the trees stem from their desolate living conditions, the Bangladesh government should set up and accept funds to provide food, shelter and basic sanitary equipment in camps. Should a long term solutions be realised, the ban on primary education must be lifted. The Rohingya should also be included in the national health plan to cover their medical expenses. It is clear that only such a comprehensive package of social and economic incentives can mitigate the environmental disaster that has been unleashed in Bangladesh.

The essential component of hybrid governance is inclusivity. Governments, NGOs, municipalities, private actors, companies, local users and indigenous communities, all of who are stakeholders of forest resources, must be invited to the table to negotiate their interests to ensure sustainability. The case of exclusion of the Rohingya is classic example of how political meddling inhibits genuine efforts at empowering forest users to govern the very resources upon which they rely. As Rahman (2018) rightly points out, issues of concern for the Rohingyas could only be mitigated or effectively resolved through cordial talks held between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Both the forest resources and the Rohingya crisis are transboundary in nature. They cut across national boundaries, levels of governance, public-private and state-community divides. As such, only complex, inclusive solutions can revert the damage that's been inflicted on the forests in Myanmar and Bangladesh. The Rohingya must be recognised as active agents in (re)shaping their environments. The deforestation in Bangladesh after the two waves of migration have been largely a result of unchecked over-utilisation of the forest resources by the Rohingya. However, wider socio-economic conditions were at play, which shifts the blame away from the Rohingya towards unbalanced power dynamics in Bangladesh. SF is based on the principles of hybrid governance and therefore, if successful, must not be used as a tool for marginalisation. Win-win solutions can be achieved only with an honest recognition of the forest users, whose voices must integrated in governance strategies.

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