

'Building capacities of local communities to mitigate problems created by the Rohingya influx in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh' is a project undertaken by Research Initiatives Bangladesh (RIB) and supported by the Misereor, Germany. The main objectives of the project is to build up capacity of the host communities to face the problems due to Rohingya influx in the locality and to search an agreeable and logical way to repatriate the Rohingyas to their own country followed by the policies of the Government of Bangladesh. The one-year project activities are divided into two periods: 1. May 2019- October 2019 (1<sup>st</sup> six months) and 2. November 2019- April- 2020. The activities are divided according to the phases. The activities of the project at field level were launched in June, 2019.

- The main tools applied at the community level are: Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Right TO Information (RTI) for the host community
- Participatory Action Research (PAR) for the Rohingya community



Currently 12 Participatory Action Research Groups are formed at the field level; 6 groups are from host communities and 6 groups from Rohingya community. 6 groups are composed with females and 6 with males. 6 groups were formed under Ukhia Police Stations and 6 under Teknaf Police Stations.

### **Challenges in forming local groups:**

Generally people were not interested to talk with us without financial benefits. Then we decided to form the PAR groups in the host community with the support of locally elected representatives. Union Parishad (UP) members were also non-cooperative. A UP member behaved rudely with us; the other one advised not to form groups with local community people- he thought that the opinions of local peoples carried no value to decision making platforms. A women UP member helped us cordially and she helped to form a female PAR group in her locality. But after the death of Jubo League leader Faruque by suspected Rohingya terrorists near her residence (Jadimura, Nhila, Teknaf), she advised us to leave the area.. Another woman member of Palongkhali UP, Ukhia also cooperated with us. She asked her son (Degree student) to help us; but bargaining on financial benefits, food and others, we could not form the PAR group there as well. Finally by making independent visits and explaining our purpose we were able to form six (6) PAR groups in host community.

In the Camps, the Head Majhis and other Majhis of the blocks helped us very cordially to form the groups. Understanding the objectives of our project, they said that this was the first instance they were allowed to share their opinions with an organization.

Some of the discussion points of these meetings are mentioned below:

### **Host Community**

- Unemployment among the day-labourers- Rohingya men works with a very few wages

- Traffic jam on the roads
- Broken roads
- Loss in small business due to shops started by Rohingyas
- Prices of daily necessities shot very high
- Social instability and insecurity including violence
- Increasing risk in health and hygiene
- Environmental risk
- Harassment by security forces in the roads
- Rohingya influx was a boon for the local literate community but not for the illiterate

## **Rohingya Community**

The people of Rohingya community marked some problems facing them:

- Lack of pure drinking water and sufficient number of bathrooms and wash room
- Lack of arrangement of technical education among the youths
- Living in a very small and limited place
- Living with the mental agony of refugeehood

They also cited some opportunities provided by Bangladesh Government and other organizations, like-

- Cordial assistance of CiC Offices
- Support of local government authorities
- Employment of some Rohingya men with some organizations
- Permanent arrangement of medicine
- Arrangement of food and housing

The members of the PAR groups of Rohingya community were very glad to participate with a program like this. They welcomed us and commented that they felt as they belonged to a common humanity; they realized for the first time that their opinions also carried some values.

Our PAR groups have been greatly energized by our work. Local communities have thus far felt left out of development activities especially rights-based activities. Their knowledge of the RTI Act through which they could make Governments and public authorities accountable empowered them to make applications. Rohingyas have not felt included in making decisions about themselves but in taking up PAR discussions they felt some sense of agency growing in themselves. They look forward to continue this new found self-confidence and apply them in their daily lives. Rohingyas expressed a wish to dialogue with host communities on problems they face.

RIB has worked with Rohingyas in registered camps before but this is the first time they are working with host communities. Our field coordinators were at first unsure of the response from Rohingya community but in engaging with them they saw their full commitment to the process and saw how intimately they are interacting with RIB on the basis of mutual trust.

This has been a learning experience for all concerned but it is still at an embryonic stage. The one dialogue that was held between local communities and development partners was an excellent example of mutual learning. Local communities felt that they could voice their concerns and communicate effectively. Development partners learned a lot about the difficulties and challenges that local communities felt and what their needs were, which could be addressed by appropriate service delivery mechanism and future agenda setting by such partners. Further continuance of such dialogue we believe will contribute towards and set a pace to developing a rights discourse in humanitarian action.