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Building Peaceful Coexistence Between Rohingya Refugees And Buffer Communities In Langsa City And East Aceh

Yulia Rina Wijaya¹

Abstract

The arrival of Rohingya refugees in East Aceh in 2015 is different, in terms of number and people's response. From the first week to the beginning of the third month, aids flow in daily, piling up at government warehouses. So many people from the Langsa City and neighbouring areas come to see the refugees or offer helps. Spontaneous social solidarity is evident out of collective memories of Tsunami disaster and spiritual connection. Impact of Rohingya refugees presence that receive humanitarian aid from many local, national and international organizations which put refugees too special and full of aid and attentions is creating jealousy from local community who live in poor condition, lack of attention and has minimum access to basic need services. This situation generates conflict resistance, economic transaction, infection disease outbreak and criminal act. The impact of the refugee's presence is not only limited to legal, political and humanitarian issues, but involving local cultures due to its interaction increasingly open. Refugee Camp location's proximity to local people's residence positions the people as buffer community which should be considered as main stakeholder.

The interaction between the refugees and the people requires a dialog media, so they are able to understand each other and decline the resistance of social and economic conflicts. The cultural dialogue and campaigns has become a medium that effective to build peace between them.

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Rohingya And Ethnic Conflict In Myanmar

Rohingya is a minority ethnic group in Myanmar living amongst the majority Buddhist population. There occurred conflict in 2012 between Buddhist Rakhine communities and Rohingya Muslim communities in the Northern State of Rakhine, Myanmar. Some sources say it is an ethnic rivalry that both parties condemn. The main reason remains unknown, although many commentators believe the trigger is the rape and killing of a Rakhine woman and the subsequent killing of ten Burmese Muslims by Rakhine people. Amnesty International and human rights groups look at the Myanmar handling critically and believe there are random arrests of Rohingya people, in spite of formal appreciation of US government and EU authorities. The Myanmar Government enforces systematical discrimination of Rohingya community for decades. Aljazeera data (January 2014) shows that around 800,000 Rohingya Muslims live in Myanmar. Eighty-percent of them live in western state of Rakhine. The Myanmar government rejects the citizenship of most of them. The United Nations deems that Rohingya community is the most violated minority group in the world.

Discrimination triggers the exit of Rohingya people from Myanmar territory by crossing Bengal Strait towards destination countries such as Malaysia and Australia. UNHCR data indicates that the number of refugees crossing the Bengal Strait increases sharply after ethnic rife in June 2012. Around 34 thousand people leave Myanmar within one year period. The sea voyage and the arrival on land are not smooth as in commercial trip. Human smugglers put them on the same boat as Bangladeshi immigrants in order to cut cost. Fighting between people from the two ethnic groups often occurs at sea. A Rohingya refugee in Kuala Langsa Camp says that he knows who killed his father during a fight at sea. Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia as either temporary or final destination country always refuse refugees in their areas. It is the traditional fishermen of Aceh who abide by their own traditional laws that come to the rescue of refugees and ignores national and international law on refugees and despite the Indonesian Admiral's statement that saving refugees is only done under emergency condition when refugees really need help. The fishermen's act leads to evacuation of immigrants to Aceh when they bring them ashore. In time, the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia get their act together to deal with humanitarian crisis of Rohingya people. The two countries allow refugees to remain in their territory with one caveat – after one year they must move to another country. In more specific terms, the government of Indonesia is willing to let refugees stay for one year because IOM pledges to provide supports to meet basic needs such as shelter and logistics, while UNHCR is responsible for protection and processing refugee status.

It is not the first time Aceh hosts Rohingya refugees. In 2009, around 400 Rohingya people arrive in East Aceh and the immigration office, IOM and UNHCR deal with these refugees. Langsa City government establishes a Task Force chaired by District Secretary to deal with Rohingya refugees arriving in May 2015 with number three times as many as refugees in 2009. This Task Force engages relevant district government agencies, such as Health Agency, Social Agency, Disaster Management Authority, Immigration Office, and the Police. The Task Force makes one major breakthrough in that. It opens up ample room for all parties who care for refugees and want to contribute. Hence this time around, the local and national government and non-government organizations play important roles in managing refugees in Aceh. International organisations such as UNHCR and IOM with a mandate to manage refugees and migrants must also work under the Task Force coordination.

Humanitarian and religious organisations providing services for refugees in Langsa City and East Aceh district are: Yayasan SHEEP Indonesia (YSI), Dompet Dhuafa, JRS Indonesia, MDMC, Save The Children, ACF, Yayasan Geutanyoe, FPRM Aceh, Insan TV, Peduli Muslim, PKPU, Peduli Umat, WVI, Majelis Ta'lim Assuni, BSMI, Gema Rencong 165, Sinergi Foundation, Islamic Relief, CMC and MSF. They perform many services such as: health services and infection control; refugees children education; psychosocial and capacity building for refugees; economic empowerment; basic skill training; and construction of temporary shelters for refugees.

Refugees And Local People

Rohingya and Bangladeshi refugees transitted East Aceh in 2009 and 2012 with a much smaller number (150 people). Then, there was not much media hype perhaps because the number of refugee is so small. IOM, UNHCR, District Government and the immigration authority then dealt with them. The arrival of refugees in 2015 is different, in terms of number and people's response. And the media (print and television) is paying close attention to the waves of refugees in Aceh this time, talking about their ordeal at sea: being swayed by rough seas on leaked boats, almost drown of overload, without sufficient food, being rejected by neighboring countries like Singapura and Malaysia!

Love Euphoria For Refugees

There is much media coverage about Rohingya refugees being out at sea on their own, and fishermen from Aceh are vigilant. They look out for refugees while fishing. It is the ultimate deed to helping people who are on dire situation or so close to death, like finding these refugees at sea swayed by the wild sea. Such action is sanctioned by the religion,

particularly when they help fellow Muslims. Policies are the last things in fishermen's mind. They do not need to worry about immigration regulations, or international policies or commitments. This is purely humanitarian! Nobody should stop them or blame them for taking decisive, heroic action by towing the refugee-filled boat that would have otherwise drowned to a safe port.

Once at the port, local people welcome the refugees with open heart. At fishermen port of Julok in Kuala Guelumpang Village, Nurus Salam Subdistrict, East Aceh, local people prepare a feast. It is a big party really late at night. Local women rush to take care of dirty, smelly and weak children refugee. They feed them, bath them and put decent clothes on them. Men and young people look for discussions partners amongst refugees. They ask for information about their ordeal at sea, how long they have been on the damaged boat without any crew and other questions. Discussions proceed using gestures. That night, there is indeed a big feast for the refugees, to welcome fellow Muslims from far away, and to free them of months of ordeals out at sea. Welcome fellow Muslims, you are safe in our land!

At Kuala Langsa Port, the first site to accommodate refugees in Langsa City, stories of Kuala Langsa fishermen heroic deeds of dragging refugee boats ashore keeps reverberating. The fishermen become suddenly popular. Local, national, regional and international, even university campus journalists come to interview them. From the first week to the beginning of the third month, aids flow in daily, piling up at government warehouses. For one week, the normally quiet street that connects Langsa City to Kuala Langsa Port is congested. So many people from the Langsa City and neighbouring areas come to see the refugees or offer helps. Spontaneous social solidarity is evident out of collective memories of Tsunami disaster and spiritual connection. People want to see with their own eyes and then talk about it at coffee shops. Many volunteers come, and mingle with visitors, and it is not easy sometimes to differentiate between them. Fundraising and aids venues for refugees are erected in city street corners and busy areas. Volunteers stand in traffic lights with used mineral water or food boxes asking for donations from motorists and pedestrians on behalf of refugees. People keep coming to see the refugees daily. They want to visit fellow Muslims who are in dire situation, and bring gifts for them. Some people bring clothes, others bring food, money, mobile phone and even watches. It seems that local people are in love with the refugees (particularly from Myanmar-Rohingya). They take photos, talk (although they do not understand their language), and take them home for dinner, as if they are inviting fellow Muslims who are visiting from far away. There are certainly other reasons for them to do so, for example some want to have a refugee as a husband or wife. Yet in general, the main reason for them to welcome the refugees is charity and the idea that

they are of the same religion (ihwanul muslimin or fellow Muslims) who needs help in difficult time, and these local people want to share the burden. In time, humanitarian organisations start to arrive with their own programs. Some provide logistics, healthservices, education and religious supports. UNHCR and IOM and non-government organisations dealing with refugees – are startled (unprepared) for the enthusiasm of local people. They are impressed by the enthusiastic and serious humanitarian re-sponse shown by local people. They simply have never seen such enthusiasm beforeanywhere else in Indonesia.

When Envy And Hate Come

In time, the story changes. Problems appear. The first relates to social envy amongst local people. Abundant aids for refugees do not go well with the local people, despite initial pity and readiness to help the refugees. Now seeing the abundant aids for the refugees, local people feel jelous. People feel that they have not had due attention from the government. Poverty around them becomes blatant when compared to what refugees get. Many local people are poor. They get very little attention from the government, while the refugees, who are foreigners, not Indonesian citizens, who come to their land bring many problems, burden and issues, yet they enjoy special treatment.

The local village government officials are disappointed because they are not involved, and they feel that they cop the negative impacts of refugees. They get offended when security guards stop them and ask them where they are from and what they want when they visit the refugee camps? Their feelings of being envious, disappointed and offended grow stronger. At coffee shops, during prayer time and village meetings, they talk about the situation. Some people, particularly traders, see opportunities. What they do is to double the price when refugees buy something from them.

Some traders even note meticulously the aids coming to the camps. Once aids arrive, these traders come to the refugees to buy aid goods from the refugees cheaply or barter expensive goods of the refugees with cheap goods they bring. There are even lootings of refugee goods by local people out of envy and jealousy. The second relates to day-to-day refugee attitudes. Lifestyle that does not go well with local tradition creates gaps and dilemma amongst the locals, and government officials involved in the refugee management. Refugee lifestyle is undiscipline and difficult, they defecate anywhere, they are anti-healthy lifestyle, they wear clothes once and then throw them away, they spit anywhere and they live on their own rules. In the beginning, people, government officials and volunteers have sympathy for them, because refugees after all are people who are experiencing hardship, spending much time on sea, or because they have different cultures back home. But such

feeling dissipates in time when education, information are given, and refugee attitudes do not change. The longer it goes, their attitude seems to worsen, for example selling aid goods and fleeing refugees.

There must be other reasons than fleas, there could be infections. Subsequent screenings reveal sexually-transmitted diseases amongst young refugees, one of whom is only 15 years old. Kuala Langsa Camp is for men, while 1 km away LhokBani Camp is for women and children. Kuala Langsa is an open camp, where anyone can come and go at will, including refugees themselves. Thus, there is ample room for refugees to interact with the locals. Many young girls and mature women come and talk to refugees because they want to get to know them. Local young girls often ask young Rohingya men to go for a walk and tour the area. Such open relations and interactions between refugees and the locals allow opportunities for sexual transaction. Refugees actively engage in sexual acts quite early in their life. Revelations of sexual contacts surface and cause anger in Kuala Langsa Camp. Refugees with sexually-transmitted diseases are known to have sexual relations with the locals, and the chain of infection is spreading and becomes more difficult to tract. The security guards only find out during night patrol when they discover same-sex couples, subsequently inform them about Aceh culture and Islamic law and instil fears amongst the women. Do they get punishment for what they have done, because they are not aware of local culture of law? Disconcerting health attitude and sexual orientation have many causes. Cultural background and life pressures may have contributed to them. This is why dialogues are important to help them change attitudes, although it is by no means easy.

Building Peace Between Refugees And Buffer Communities

The impact of the refugees presence receiving humanitarian aid from various local agencies, national and international position them is very special condition with abundant of help and attention. It raises jealousy of local communities whose lives are still poor, lack of attention and lack of access to basic services. The situation certainly raises the resistance of social conflict, economic transactions, the spread of infectious diseases and crime. There used to be 1,233 Rohingya and Bangladesh Refugees who landed in Aceh and finally accommodated in 3 refugee camps, the camp Kuala Langsa and Lhok Banie as part of Langsa City, as well as Camp Bayeun in East Aceh District. After the 3rd month post their landing, the numbers reduced by about 150-200 people each month, so at the end of December 2015, the number of refugees who served in three camps are: Kuala Langsa (74), Lhok Banie (73) and Bayeun (98), bringing the total Refugees per December 2015 was 245

people. Here is a table of reduce number of the refugees from August (3months after landing) through December 2015

No	Name of Camp	Number of Refugees				
		Agu'15	Sept'15	Oct'15	Nov'15	Dec'15
1.	Kuala Langsa	638	212	133	80	74
2.	Lhok Banie	162	151	107	90	73
3.	Bayeun	433	279	188	120	98
	Total	1.233	632	328	290	245

The table indicates that since the beginning Indonesia is not considered as their destination country. The syndicate of human smuggling and trafficking has always been around and use various new methods to attract the refugees to follow their offers.

During the period of August-December 2015, YSI identified following organization as those providing responses for the refugees Langsa and East Aceh District. Those are:

No	Name of Organization	Focus of intervention
1	Taskforce (SATGAS) of Refugees Intervention of Langsa City	Stakeholder Coordination for Refugees Intervention in Langsa City.
2	Working Unit (SATLAK) of Refugees Intervention of East Aceh District	Stakeholder Coordination for Refugees Intervention in East Aceh District
3	Geutanyo Foundation	Supporting clean water, Psychosocial (live stock, soap production, etc), Documenting Activities of Refugees Intervention (since the Refugees landed and camp activity)
4	Forum Peduli Rakyat Miskin (FPRM)	Psychosocial Activities in the camps
5	Yayasan SHEEP Indonesia (YSI) www.sheepindonesia.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Infectious Diseases Control for refugees ▪ Health Promotion for Refugees ▪ Health Promotion for Buffer Communities ▪ Advocacy ▪ Cultural Dialogue between refugees & buffer communities
6	Domet Dhuafa	Psychosocial for children, Hygiene Promotion, Shelter Construction, Advocacy

No	Name of Organization	Focus of intervention
7	JRS Indonesia	Psychosocial for adult refugees (Handy Craft Production, make up stylist training, sharpening gem stone), Refreshing for Refugees, Advokacy
8	Save The Children	Psychosocial for children refugees
9	Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Center	Psychosocial for children refugees
10	PKPU	Supporting clean water, shelter construction, Advocacy for refugees
11	Peduli Muslim	Shelter Construction for refugees
12	Bulan Sabit Merah Indonesia	Health Service & Building Health Clinic at Relocation Camp in Timbang Langsa
13	Gema Rencoonng 165	Psychosocial for children and adult
14	ACF International	Psychosocial for children refugees
15	Insan TV	Psychosocial for children refugees
16	Peduli Umat	Psychosocial for children refugees
17	Wahana Visi Indonesia	Supporting Non Food Logistics (Fan and bed)
18	Majelis Ta'lim Assuni	Psychosocial and Religious Activities for refugees
19	Sinergi Foundation	Children refugees Education
20	Islamic Relief	Food Logistic Support for refugees
21	Children Media Center	Psychosocial for children refugees
22	Medicins Sans Frontiere (MSF)	Basic Health Service (Screening and Health Service) for refugees

The table above indicates that most of responses are focusing to the refugees, which is a common phenomenon in the mist of refugees flees situation. In the first 3-6 months, focusing on refugees is a fine thing. However considering refugees handling will take more than one year, then build a harmonious coexistence between the refugees and buffer communities is a crucial thing to be done. Therefore YSI implements Cultural Dialogue between Refugees and Buffer Communities which covering both, refugees and buffer communities.

Cultural Dialogue between Refugees and Buffer Communities is part of pro- motive efforts which aim at “Building a Harmonious coexistence between Refugees and Buffer Communities”. This dialogue is done through three activities, namely the Cultural Festival of Rohingya and Aceh, Radio Talk Show and People to People Meeting.

Cultural Festival of Aceh and Rohingya; Implementation of this activity involves the local community of Bayeun Village near the Bayeun Camp. The involved groups are: Mothers Groups, Todler and Kindergarten Kids Club, Elementary and Junior High School Students around the Bayeun Camp. The results of these activities are: positive interaction

between the community and the refugees in the camp through various activities is able to reduce the social impacts which began to escalate like: refugees selling assistance goods to the communities, negative stigma against unclean habit amongst the refugees, social jealousy that lead to camp robbery by some member of communities. This activity carried out on November 26, 2015 at the Bayeun Camp. The activity includes: traditional game of Rohingya and Aceh for children, culinary cooking of Rohingya and Aceh by mothers groups, Traditional Acehnese dance by Kingerkarten children, elementary and junior high school, Dancing and Singing of Rohingya, etc. In terms of organizing the event, YSI involves all presence NGOs whose psychosocial concern, namely: ACF International, Save the Children, JRS Indonesia, Dompot Dhuafa, Children Media Center, Peduli Muslims, Geutanyo Foundation, FPRM, PKPU, Insan TV, Islamic Relief, GEMA Rencong 165. This is the first time for the entire NGO involves to conduct same activity, which coordinated by YSI. There are about 650 people involved in these activities (including refugees and communities).



- a. Radio Talk Show; It is also part of dissemination efforts related to the presence of the refugees in Langsa and East Aceh District more broadly (not limited to the buffer villages). Talk Show, which last 1 hour always gets at least 3 interactive questions via interactive phone from listeners. The number of interactive listeners as well as the content of question show that many people (common public) do not yet understand about who the Rohingya and Bangladeshi refugees are, why they flee, and how government policies address them. The Talk Show which done every week during the month of November-December (8 times) is able to provide better understanding related to main common public questions, which are who are the Rohingya and Bangladesh Refugees, as well as government policies in responding their presence.



The Talk Show takes following various themes: 1) Who are the Refugees; 2) Rohingya Culture and its problem in their original country; 3) Health Care of Refugees; 4) Government Policies related to Refugees Intervention; 5) Role of Humanitarian Organizations in Refugees Intervention; 6) Refugees and Cultural Adaptation within Aceh Communities; 7) The Role of Refugees Intervention Taskforce (SATGAS); 8) Shelter Construction for the Refugees. Each of these themes addressed by keynote speakers who are competent in the subject, such as: Representative of refugees and fishermen community who helps the refugees landing at first, Cultural Figure of Aceh, Physicians of Government Health Center (Puskesmas), Chairman of Government Taskforce and NGOs.

- b. People to People (P2P) Meeting; P2P is a Socialization Media between the refugees and Timbang Langsa Community as the buffer community in relocation area in near future (February 2016). P2P uses the momentum of Maulid Nabi SAW (celebration of the Birth of the Prophet) which is filled with a series of activities for children, mothers groups and husband groups for 3 days (28-30 December 2015). Timbang Langsa Community experiences direct interaction with the refugees who will soon be entering the village. Both, the community and the refugees get a good media to get to know the culture and customs of Aceh and Rohingya. Interaction between refugees and the community is done through Rohingya Culinary Cooking for the community to celebrate the Maulid Day, as well as the society of Timbang Langsa who also cook some Aceh Culinary for the refugees. Meanwhile, Children refugees and Timbang Langsa children join some competitions like: Reading a short verse of the Qur'an, Story Telling of the Prophet, and Moslem Fashion Show. Timbang Langsa community says that Maulid Celebration with the refugees is the most colorful celebration they have ever had.

Cultural Dialogue which done through those three activities are able to decrease the community negative stigma against the refugees. On the other hand, the awareness among the involved stakeholders is built, that the buffer communities will be more susceptible if they are not given sufficient knowledge about Who are the refugees and the Government's policy to respond to the conditions.

Conclusion

Aceh is a cozy and friendly transit for Rohingya refugees. This is a view shared by refugees impressed by government and NGOs attention and supports in their struggle to meet basic needs. Refugees become an inherent part of the history of civilization in Aceh. They are accepted as brothers and sisters, and not just mererecipients of aid for survival, as they are guided into the culture and traditions of lo-cal people. The latter show enthusiasm to learn about the culture and tradition of ref-ugees which, although different, must be respected because they are fellow human beings. The refugees change and realize more clearly their goal, although where they are heading next remains a mystery for local people, government, and humani-tarian workers who have become friends. What the government and NGOs are doingis to ease their way and give them enough support to continue their journey.

The arrival of refugees inevitably raises the issues of interaction. So we need media dialogue to bridge the gap of understanding between those two communities. Based on the experience of YSI, Cultural Festivals, Radio Talk Shows, and People to People Meeting (P2P) are some effective efforts to build a harmonious understanding, so that conflict resistance can be reduced and peace can be built between the refugees and the buffer communities.

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