

COMMUNICATION IN EMPOWERING: PARTICIPATORY EMPOWERMENT MODEL OF ROHINGYA IMIGRANTS IN LHOKSEUMAWE ACEH INDONESIA

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Abstract

Beberapa waktu lalu sejumlah perahu yang sarat dengan pengungsi Rohingya bermigrasi dari Myanmar ke Malaysia. UNHCR meminta negara-negara terkait untuk menerima Rohingya sebagai pengungsi dan mengedepankan hak asasi manusia dalam merawat mereka. Indonesia merespon dengan membangun penampungan dan menampung pengungsi Rohingya di Aceh. Menggunakan etnografi komunikasi sebagai metode dengan perspektif Interaksionisme Simbolik dan teori Konstruksi Realitas Sosial, artikel ini menjelaskan model pemberdayaan pengungsi Rohingya di Aceh berdasarkan praktik komunikasi. Hasilnya, orang Aceh dan sukarelawan menafsirkan keberadaan pengungsi Rohingya menjadi tiga bagian utama. *Pertama*, Rohingya sebagai orang Muhajirin yang bermigrasi dari daerah sumber. *Kedua*, Rohingya adalah tamu yang akan dilayani. *Ketiga*, Rohingya dipandang sebagai berkah dari Allah SWT. Karenanya upaya pemberdayaan yang dilakukan oleh relawan dipandang berhasil. Dalam praktiknya, para relawan menggunakan strategi empati yang mencoba memahami kehidupan keras pengungsi Rohingya dan memposisikan diri mereka dalam kondisi para pengungsi. Pemberdayaan pengungsi Rohingya menggunakan komunikasi personal dan komunikasi komunal. Kedua praktik komunikasi tersebut digunakan terhadap para pengungsi yang mengikuti program pendidikan etika, pendidikan bahasa Inggris, kebersihan, pertanian dan menjahit.

Keywords: *Rohingya Ethnic Group Migration, Empowerment Model, Communication, International Refugees*

Introduction

Distressing conditions were seen among the faces of Rohingya on the boat that they used to Malaysia. Due to the limited navigation skills, overloaded boats exceeding the normal capacity, and bad weather, Rohingya re-

fugees stranded in several places. Indonesia has become one of the places sheltering stranded Rohingya refugees. Aceh, one of the regions in Indonesia, has become a focal shelter location, the largest, for the refugees in Indonesia. The number of Rohingya refugees in Indonesia, as of May 2015 from the data released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a press conference, was 1,700 people.¹ The government of Indonesia through its Minister of Foreign Affairs, RetnoMarsudi, then subsequently coordinated with Malaysia as well as Thailand and at the same time held a dialogue with Myanmar, being the home country of the Rohingyas, in its attempt to handle the issue on the migration of this ethnic group.

One of the important conclusions drawn from the dialog held by Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand is the provision of the temporary shelter for Rohingya Refugees for one year. This is what has been carried out by the government of Indonesia in connection with the handling of the refugees in Indonesia, Aceh in particular. The handling of international refugees is not new to Indonesia. Indonesia once handled refugees from Vietnam in Pulau Galang, Batam, Indonesia. The number of refugees from Vietnam, from 1979 to 1996, in Pulau Galang amounted to 250,000 people.² The shelter locations for the Vietnamese refugees were far from local residences, isolated in general.

Having learned from past experiences, Indonesia tried to build shelters for Rohingya refugees properly due to some concerns over their saddening conditions stranded in Aceh. The shelters are built in the region of Blang Abo, Aceh. The locations of the shelters were built close to local residences. This measure was taken by Indonesia as an enforcement of international human rights as mandated by the UNHCR. Not only limited to being sheltered, the Rohingya refugees also receive empowerment. The concern here is that providing trainings for the Rohingyas has not been an easy task because there are differences in terms of culture between the Rohingyas and Indonesians, Acehnese in particular. In addition, limited access to education has made it difficult to communicate in English with the Rohingyas. These

¹ Kompas.com, accessed on 19 July 2016, at 07.54 A.M

² Detik.com, accessed on 19 July 2016, at 08.20 A.M

cultural differences and lack of the ability to communicate raise the question: which communication based on an empowerment model should be given to Rohingya refugees.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The study on migration has been long discussed in the academic world. One of the cases on migration that has drawn the world's attention and the media internationally is the migration of Rohingya ethnic group. Some of the Rohingyas gradually migrated to Malaysia by using boats. Malaysia becomes the main destination for Rohingya refugees because there are about five hundred thousand Rohingyas residing in Malaysia.³ Most of them work as labors.

Research often views Rohingya refugees from the angle of law and international relations. Most of the research talks about the laws and regulations in Myanmar that fail to accommodate the existence of the Rohingya ethnic group. Additionally, other research looks at how receiving countries of Rohingya refugees accommodate them from the international law angle. Furthermore, a study conducted by Liliansa and Jayadi⁴ discusses the absence of Indonesia from the international Refugee Convention and its protocol in 1967, which makes it unobligatory for Indonesia to provide permanent shelters for international refugees such as the Rohingyas. This condition might be taken into consideration by other countries in determining the provision of permanent shelters for refugees such as the Rohingyas.

Ullah⁵ states that the research conducted on Rohingya refugees is very limited in number. His research on the historical background of the Rohingya and how it relates with their current situation basically looks at how their conditions becomes so worse because of the government in their home country, Myanmar. The research, which was conducted in Bangla-

³ Kathleen Newland, "Irregular Maritime Migration in the Bay of Bengal: The Challenges of Protection, Management and Cooperation", *Issue in Brief* No. 13: IOM and MPI (2015).

⁴ Dita Liliansa and Anbar Jayadi, "Should Indonesia Accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol?", *Indonesia Law Review*, Vol. 5 No. 3 pp.324-346 (2015).

⁵ Ullah, Akm Ahsan, "Rohingya Refugees to Bangladesh: Historical Exclusion and Contemporary Marginalization", *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, 9:139-161 (2011).

desh, has shown that the Rohingya ethnic group was forcefully banished from Myanmar through various physical violence backed by the government of Myanmar. This is one of the reasons why the Rohingyas must flee their country. As the aforementioned research has stated⁶, the study on the Rohingyas as refugees has been very limited. Such a theme may be seen as unattractive among researchers.

A study conducted by Letchamanan⁷ regarding the empowerment of Rohingya refugees discusses how education is received by the refugees, especially among 15-year-old teenagers, in Malaysia. That study gives an input to this research in terms of better education quality for Rohingya refugees and access to information through the internet. A study by Farzana⁸ illustrates the situation in the shelters for Rohingya refugees. A critique is raised in order to improve the quality of shelters as part of the effort to protect Rohingya refugees. The authors through this paper try to elucidate the empowerment model for the Rohingya refugees, carried out by the people of Indonesia, in Aceh.

This study is slightly different from all the research mentioned previously as regard to its approach on communication by utilizing the method for phenomenology incorporating the Symbolic Interactionism perspective and Social Construction of Reality towards the effort to empower Rohingya refugees. This paper also takes an empowerment concept proposed by Kartasasmita⁹ into account, which basically states that empowerment means to enable someone to exercise the right to fulfill his/her basic needs, such as food, clothing, education, and healthcare as well as happiness and freedom from fear, and to be part of the society. That can be achieved only if there is the effort to increase awareness, enhance knowledge, and hone skills. The

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Hema Letchamanan, "Myanmar's Rohingya Refugees in Malaysia: Education and the Way Forward", *Journal of International and Comparative Education*, Vol. 2 Issue 2 (2013).

⁸ Kazi Fahmida Farzana, "Voices the Burmese Rohingya Refugees: Everyday Politics of Survival in Refugee Camps in Bangladesh", *Petranika Journal Social Science and Humaniora*, 24 (1) pp. 131-150 (2016).

⁹ G Kartasasmita, "Pemberdayaan Masyarakat: Konsep Pembangunan yang Berakar pada Masyarakat", *The paper* was presented at the Sarasehan DPD Parta Golkar Tingkat 1, East Jawa, Surabaya, Indonesia (15 March 1997).

subject of the empowerment program must participate actively in the programs that have been designed accordingly so that such an effort will be fruitful.

There are several approaches to such an empowerment program. The one that this paper uses is the communist approach as illustrated by Cary.¹⁰ The assumption that is used in the communist approach is that the interest of community members in their effort, participation, and problem solving is geared towards fulfilling the needs of the community, and there is a need for a holistic approach in the attempt to empower the community. At this point, a counselor will play a role in providing alternative solutions, while the community members are the ones possessing the rights to decide for the best solution. The main driving force in this approach is community participation.

The Social Construction of Reality perspective that is elaborated by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann¹¹ essentially discusses the symbolic relationship between one's awareness and other individual awareness in their coexistence. In line with Berger's and Luckmann's view, Herbert Blumer¹² reveals that the Symbolic Interactionism perspective talks about individual actions that are based on the definition they give on an individual, object, or surrounding environment that they face. This perspective also says that individuals are able to adjust their actions based on their interpretation of the behavior of others.

This paper uses the method for phenomenology. Through in-depth interview and observation on the activists and Rohingya refugees, the researchers tried to obtain data in accordance with the main focus of the research method as presented by Moustakas.¹³ Moustakas¹⁴ said that main fo-

¹⁰ F.T. Nasdian, *Pengembangan Masyarakat*. (Jakarta: Departemen Sains Komunikasi and Pengembangan Masyarakat Fakultas Ekologi Manusia IPB and Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2015).

¹¹ Berger, Peter L and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall, 1966).

¹² Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall, 1969).

¹³ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design Choosing Among Five Traditions*, (Thousands Oaks: Sage Publication, 1998).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

cus of phenomenological research is understanding meaning of experiences in consciousness. Researcher should bracket his mind while gathering information about the meaning of the experiences. This method usually uses deep interview and observation to gather all of information. This method guides the author to describe empowerment model of rohingya refugees in Aceh.

Research Findings and Discussion

The Existence of Rohingya Refugees in Indonesia

The first existence of Rohingya refugees in Indonesia, particularly in Aceh, can be traced to 2009. The number of the refugees at the time was smaller compared to those in 2015. Acehnese fishermen were the first to see boats crammed full of emaciated people. They pulled the boats inshore to the land of Aceh. The first wave of Rohingya refugees was accommodated in Kuala Cangkli, Aceh, Indonesia. There were three hundred thirty two Rohingya refugees recorded safely arrived in Aceh, Indonesia in May 2015. That, assuredly, did not include those who died on the boats, lurching in the rough sea for months just to reach for a better life than the one they had in their own homeland, Myanmar.

“They [Rohingya refugees] once came in a small number in 2009. But then, they came in a much bigger number in 2015. There were 332 Rohingya refugees. They were first accommodated in Kuala Cangkli, Aceh [Indonesia]” (Interview with Zainal, Rohingya Refugees Organizer Activist, May 2016).

The existence of Rohingya refugees in Indonesia is undeniably connected with the social and political conditions which have forced the Rohingyas to flee their country, Myanmar. Amendments to the law that govern the civilians in Myanmar have been the political stimulus to the situation. The amendments to the law deny Rohingya citizenship in Myanmar. The denegation of the Rohingyas, legally and politically, restricts the life of the Rohingyas, who are mostly believers of Islam. The government restricts access to many crucial aspects including opportunities in education and healthcare. This situation leaves them no choice but to escape the country and find a new hope in another land where they can live a better life. There has been a general presumption that many Rohingyas have been driven into

the arms of people smugglers.

“The root-cause of the problem [Rohingya refugees] started in Myanmar when the civil law system was changed. [The Rohingyas] was erased from the law which automatically resulted in the non-existence of the Rohingya ethnic group. They were deprived of their rights. The Intelligence suspected the human-trafficking business in the migration of the Rohingyas” (Interview with Zainal, Rohingya Refugees Organizer Activist, May 2016).

Indonesia was not specifically the originally intended destination of the Rohingyas migrating from Myanmar. There are quite a number of the Rohingyas in Malaysia. Malaysia is the new land of hope for the Rohingya. Many of the Rohingya now work there and have a better life than before in Myanmar. This reality then encourages the Rohingyas who still try to survive in Myanmar to migrate to Malaysia. Nevertheless, they have not always been lucky considering the storms, poor navigation skills, huge waves, overloaded boats that could make them drift on the boats in the middle of the rough sea for months, until they finally managed to reach the shore of Aceh, Indonesia. Even after they arrived in Indonesia and received all sorts of help such as food and shelter, there were quite a few of them who actually escaped from the shelter and left for Malaysia. It reconfirms that Malaysia is indeed the land of hope of the Rohingyas. Indonesia then became the unplanned transit place.

“[The Rohingya] were first heading to Malaysia. They were here [in Aceh] for a while, then directly left for Malaysia. There were about 30,000 Rohingya refugees in Malaysia. They earn a living there” (Interview with the Rohingya Refugees Organizer, May 2016).

The Characteristics of Rohingya Ethnicity in Aceh

The Rohingyas generally have a temper in nature. They can get emotional easily over small matters. The occurring conflicts due to that reason are not just verbal in nature, but also non-verbal. They can get physical and use wood as an instrument to hit. Even fatal incidents leading to death can occur over an oversimplified matter to the Rohingyas. Death is seen as a simple matter, as simple as burying a dead body in the ground. Such conditions are caused by the hard life they experienced in Myanmar and during the migration. Many of them died while they were migrating, and dead bodies were tossed in the sea. The Rohingyas went to such an effort in order to

survive, which shapes them into having a violent and hot temperament.

“They are so violent, like to pick a fight, and can kill each other when fighting. They like to hit with wooden objects. To them, death is a normal thing. If they die, just bury the body in the ground. They live such a hard life that it molds them into having such characteristics” (Interview with Zainal, Rohingya Refugees Organizer, May 2016).

Aside from being violent, the Rohingyas did not show any hygienic behavior when they first came. They defecated anywhere, and they did not care about it. They even defecated next to their beds. Even when toilets were already provided, some of them still did it in front of the toilet door. This was the condition that some of the NGOs activists responsible for the Rohingya refugees had to go through in Aceh. This perplexed the activists when they first came to Aceh. However, there has been an improvement in time. The Rohingyas, who were once used miswak to clean their teeth, now have started to use toothbrush and toothpaste. The Rohingyas need time in the adjustment process with the new culture in Aceh.

“When he was sheltered in LhokSukun [Aceh], he pooped indoor, next to his bed. When the toilet facility was provided, he pooped in front of the toilet door just because his friend was using the toilet” (Interview with the Management of Shelters for Rohingya Refugees in Aceh, May, 2016).

The Rohingya refugees in Aceh did an adjustment to the new habit of doing things taught by the activists in the shelters. Their short-tempered characteristic and lack of interest in hygiene are slowly eroding and becoming better. The activists taking care of the Rohingyas realize that the short-tempered, violent, and unhygienic characteristics were caused by lack of access to education. They did not gain access to education that most of them are so far behind. In their homeland, there was the tendency that made them so far behind. The indicator of this is their perception on the ideal age to get married and how to properly behave and live a healthy life. It is considered shameful if one has not gotten married at the age of 15. Then this becomes the normal norm, and there was even one who has already had two children by the age of 15. There is the trend that the government of Myanmar just sits idly by while all these take place.

“Being fifteen and not yet married is considered a shame [for them]. As if therewere a mass dumbing down on purpose there [Myanmar]. But things are

different with them compared to when they first came. They got better” (Interview with the Rohingya Refugees Organizer, May 2016).

The Rohingya ethnic groups in the shelters are known for their communality. This is apparent when they were about to enter into a conflict. Conflict will happen when they are in group. When they are alone, however, conflict rarely happens. Even though they are communal, their sense of belonging towards others in their family tends to be low apparently. A marriage bond between a Rohingya man and his woman is not meant to be kept forever. This is apparent when a husband left his wife just like that and went to Malaysia for a better job. The husband disappeared without a word. A marriage bond tends to be regarded in a loose manner in the culture of Rohingya. Again this may be caused by the hard life and lack of education they experienced.

“They [the Rohingyas] don’t dare to take away what’s not theirs, they dare when their friends are with them. They don’t really care for each other; for instance in a marriage, the husband just abruptly left for Malaysia without caring for his wife’s life” (Interview with the Rohingya Refugees Organizer, May 2016).

The majority of Rohingya ethnicity is believers of Islam. They are able to memorize the surahs in the Quran, but they may not be able to read it. This is because the study method that they choose is by listening and memorizing. Only less than five percent of the total Rohingya refugees in Aceh ever tasted formal schooling and learned English. It becomes a hindrance for communicating. The Rohingyas have been taught a number of things by the activists. However, they do not just automatically put what has been taught into practice. For instance in agricultural-related activities, they have to be given a concrete example on how to plant crops such as watermelon. If the harvest produces good quality, they will want to plant it. Today, they have shown much better attitude and behavior compared to when they first came. This is marked by the trade relations between the Rohingyas and the local people.

“Less than 5% could read. They [the Rohingyas] can recite the Quran but through listening. They couldn’t read the letters written in the Quran. Now the conditions are better than previously. Some of them become traders in the market” (Interview with the Rohingya Refugees Organizer in Aceh, May

2016).

The Handling of Rohingya Refugees in Aceh

In Aceh, specifically, there are a number of parties involved in the handling activities of Rohingya refugees, such as non-governmental agencies, like ACT, the Regional Government of Aceh, UNHCR, and IOM. The first two institutions are from Indonesia, while the last two are international organizations. UNHCR is a UN body that deals with international refugees and performs tasks, such as recording and registering all Rohingya refugees in Aceh, so that they have a clear status as international refugees. Meanwhile, IOM and Indonesian NGOs as well as the Regional Government of Aceh provide a place to live and provide for their daily needs.

The Regional Government of Aceh provides them with areas where shelters can be built for the Rohingya refugees. These shelters are the result of cooperation between the Regional Government of Aceh and NGOs, such as *Aksi Cepat Tanggap*, or known as ACT (Fast Action Response). The shelters were built in one month after the first influx of Rohingya refugees arrived in Aceh. The ACT did it by hiring a number of workforces from the Java Island due to not enough number of local workers needed to complete the shelters during the course of a month. IOM, as a UN affiliated body, also helped with the facilitation of electricity for the shelters, as well as water and food supply. Because of the collaboration between these parties, the shelters for the Rohingya refugees are well equipped and even better than the ones in Malaysia, as said the Rohingya Refugees Shelter Organizer in Malaysia.

The Rohingya refugees receive empowerment through trainings to develop skills ranging from sewing, farming, and English to personal development like practicing good behavior. This surely is not an easy task considering the traits of the Rohingya ethnicity that in general differ from the Acehese. In addition to the Rohingyas who tend to be more violent, there is also a challenge in communicating due to language barrier. Less than five percent of the total number of Rohingya refugees ever received formal education and could communicate in English. The rest can only use their native language, which is Burmese.

“The empowerment is given in a number of forms, such as sewing, farming, and English through trainings. The challenges that need to be overcome are the communication and attitude” (Interview with Zainal, Rohingya Refugees Organizer in Aceh, May 2016).

The people of Aceh welcome the Rohingyas as if the Ansar (the local inhabitants of Medina) welcomed the Muhajirin (the local inhabitants of Mecca who emigrated to Medina as history recorded). The emigration is regarded as hijra from Mecca to Medina in the terminology of Islam. A common religious background encourages openness and nobility among the people of Aceh towards the stranded Rohingyas in Aceh. There are many among the Acehnese who have given help with more than they could actually offer. This happens perhaps because of the distressing conditions of the Rohingyas when they first arrived in Aceh. Moreover, the people of Aceh may see this as a way to give back after all the help they received post-tsunami in 2004. When Aceh was hit by a tsunami in 2004, the region received a massive amount of help and the people there could eat bread and drink milk without breaking a sweat. The people of Aceh today feel that the Rohingyas are a godsend from Allah SWT that they can serve and help. The people of Aceh believe that the incoming Rohingya refugees are a blessing from Allah SWT.

“We [the people of Aceh] welcome the Rohingyas like the Ansar welcomed the Muhajirin. We believe that God sent them [the Rohingyas] to us so that we can serve and help them, just like when we were helped after the tsunami. Their arrival brings blessings upon us” (Interview with the Rohingya Refugees Organizer, Aceh, May 2016).

Becoming an activist that handles the Rohingya whose characteristics are so different from the Indonesians in general is not that easy. The activists should be very empathetic towards the life and struggle of the Rohingya ethnic surviving for a better life than the one that they had in their homeland. Not everybody can handle the characteristics that may seem uncivilized according to the common values and cultures of the Indonesians. However, the activists still give their best in carrying out the empowerment. There are several parameters that are used by the activists to measure the success of the empowerment process. Improvement on skills such as sewing or English may be seen directly in their ability to sew or communicate.

Other skills such as farming can be measured from the harvest and perseverance in terms of taking care of the crops. While adjustment of attitude and behavior may take longer compared to the other skills, the resulting progresses gradually appear.

Violence is seen as normal to the Rohingyas. Not only has it occurred between individuals, but violence may also surface in marriage life. It is quite common to see parts of houses become deformed because of quarrels that married refugee couples did. The activists and the Commission for Women and Child Protection are advocating to stop this. The communication practices to change a character that tends to be violent and short-tempered cannot be done in a short time.

There are at least two communication strategies that are carried out by the activists to face this. First is through a home visit for the adult category. Home visit is a strategy that involves activists visiting the houses of the Rohingyas, one after another, in a shelter location. During each visit, the activists ask how they are doing and what kind of food that they are cooking. This is done to build close personal relationship as if becoming part of the family. After that, the activists promote behavior considered acceptable in the attempt to change the violent and short-tempered characteristics into more friendly and well-mannered ones. Second is through compassion, which means showing love and care to the Rohingyas while planting the importance of behaving in a friendly and well-mannered way. Such a strategy is used on children. There is another effort implemented in order to encourage the Rohingya to apply the skills and behavior to become better, and it is done through collective activities, which are designed to build personal relationship among Rohingya individuals and between the activists and the Rohingya refugees. An example of such activities will be cooking together.

“There are several strategies used to change the characters of the Rohingyas and to develop their skills, such as through a home visit while promoting, through compassion while influencing their characters and thirdly, doing activities together such as cooking” (Interview with the Rohingya Refugees Organizer, Aceh, May 2016).

The Empowerment Model for Rohingya Refugees in Aceh

The Meaning behind the Existence of Rohingya Refugees

The presence of Rohingya refugees is highly regarded by the people of Aceh as a positive experience despite differences in culture. In line with Berger and Luckmann,¹⁵ the symbolic relationship between individuals is influenced by their coexistence, which by definition is built on the basic interpretation of each other's action.¹⁶ In the context of how the people of Aceh regard the presence of the Rohingya refugees, the symbolic relationship can be divided into three. *Firstly*, is the Rohingya refugees as the Muhajirun to the people of Aceh who position themselves as the Ansar. As it is derived from and in compliance with the exegesis of the Quran that the Muhajirun was well-welcomed and -served by the Ansar, so this promoted Muslim brotherhood during the emigration (hijra) of Prophet Muhammad SAW. The common religious background shared by the people of Aceh and the Rohingya refugees, which is Islam, also plays a role here.

Secondly, is the Rohingya refugees as guests that must be served. This view relates to the tsunami disaster that once hit Aceh in 2004. The people of Aceh at the time received generous help from others. The people of Aceh could enjoy food and drinks without any hustle after the tsunami, which brings us to the notion that the arrival of Rohingya refugees as guests who must be served in the same manner as the people of Aceh were served after the 2004 tsunami. The people of Aceh believe that Allah SWT sent the Rohingyas as honorable guests who must be served as a payback of all the kindness they received post-2004 tsunami.

Thirdly, is Rohingya refugees as a godsend from Allah SWT. This notion is backed by the fact that the presence of the Rohingya refugees has given positive impacts to the people of Aceh neighboring the shelters, such as receiving aids or donation from external parties. This is seen as a form of appreciation to the people of Aceh who have been willing and able to welcome and care for the Rohingya refugees in Aceh.

¹⁵ Berger, Peter L and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*.

¹⁶ Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*.

Communication Practices in the Empowerment Model for the Rohingya Refugees

Most of the Rohingya refugees cannot communicate in English or Malay. They only speak Burmese, the native language of Myanmar. Such condition presents challenge in implementing the empowerment program. Furthermore, their violent and unhygienic characteristics add to the list of challenges faced by the activists. To tackle these conditions, the activists have developed an empathetic strategy. The empathetic strategy is an attempt to gain a deeper and more holistic understanding on the conditions faced by the Rohingyas. What sort of background that drove them out of Myanmar and the struggle that they went through in the sea are the aspects that the activists try to comprehend when they perform their duty as counselors.

The activists, through their empathetic strategy, have built communication practices to empower the Rohingya refugees in Aceh. The communication practices are divided into two as the following: *Firstly is personal communication*. The practice of personal communication is done by visiting the refugee families, one after another. Then the activists will ask how the families are doing, what they cook for the day, and other questions that strengthen the personal bond shared between the activists and the Rohingya refugees. The personal communication practice aims to change the violent and short-tempered characteristics of the Rohingyas. Through the practice, the Rohingyas are taught how to behave properly towards others, such as exchange greetings and asking for permission when they want to borrow something.

Secondly is communal communication. The practice of communal communication is basically done by engaging in collective activities, such as cooking together. The Rohingya refugees enjoy this type of a communal activity. It aims to create feelings of closeness among the refugees as well as between the activists and the refugees. Other activities, such as English learning, agriculture training, and sewing are also performed with this social communication based approach. Through these two communication practices encapsulated in the many forms of empowerment, the once hardly bearable characteristics of the Rohingyas, such as being violent, short-tempered, and unhygienic, slowly fade and turn into more friendly and sanitary characteristics. Both practices correspond to the empowerment concept introduced by Kartasamita (1997) saying that empowerment embraces the feelings of safe-

ty and happiness aside from just the physical needs, and also correspond to the community empowerment approach described by Cary (Nasdian, 2015) saying that the empowerment of a community requires active participation from the community itself. What has been done by the activists is to empower the Rohingya refugees through the provision of physical facilities, creating the feelings of safety, happiness, and enhancing knowledge as well as stimulating refugees' participation in the empowerment.

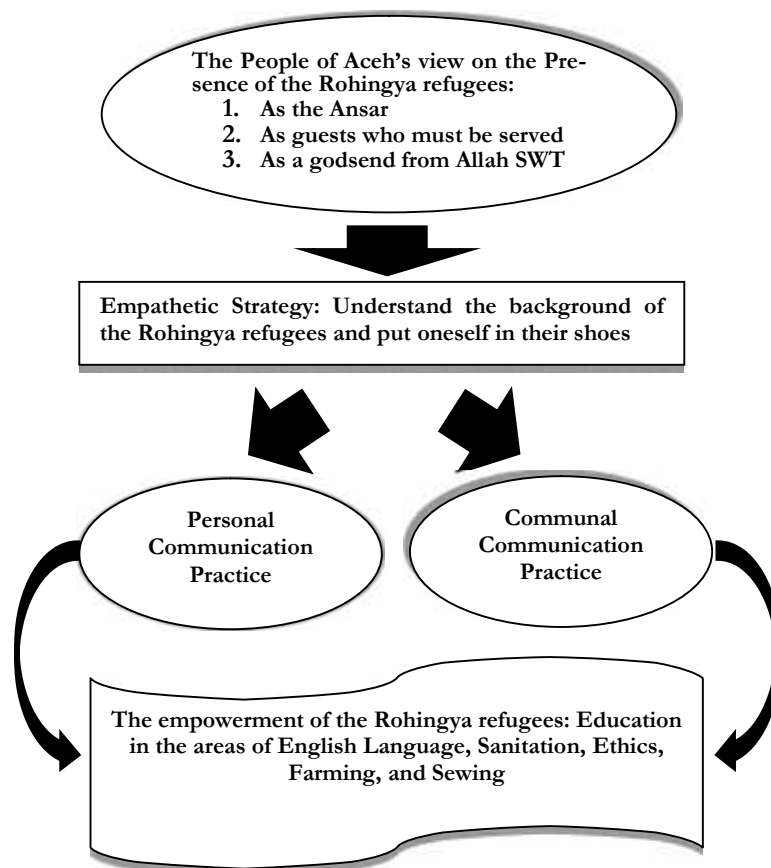


Figure 1. Model of Empowerment based on Communication for Rohingya Refugees.
Source: the Researcher

Discussion

The existence of Rohingya refugees is no longer a domestic problem for Myanmar alone, but also has become an international issue, for the Southeast Asia region at the very least. Several countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand are deeply involved in the crisis of humanity in Myanmar that has forced the Rohingyas to embark on dangerous migrations to other countries by crossing the sea. The tough conditions made them stranded in several places including Aceh, Indonesia. UNHCR has put an emphasis on the need for shelters that prioritize humanity for Rohingya refugees. Indonesia, in response to the request of UNHCR, then built a number of shelters equipped with complete facilities ranging from housing, healthcare, and playground facilities over the course of a month.

The shelters for the Rohingya refugees in Aceh become one of the best shelters for them, considering the fact that compared to the ones in other countries, such as Bangladesh, for instance, they are sheltered in slum areas, which are relatively similar to the conditions where they come from. This is not to demean other countries' governments because there is no legal obligation for both Bangladesh and Indonesia to provide facilities for international refugees. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Bangladesh are not tied to the international convention on refugees. However, the cry for humanity as UNHCR puts forward has summoned a number of countries that are willing to accommodate the Rohingya refugees, Indonesia included.

Together with IOM and the Regional Government of Aceh, the national NGOs such as ACT have built various physical facilities to accommodate the Rohingya refugees. And not just that, the activists and all authorized parties also give empowerment to the refugees. The positive views on the presence of the Rohingya refugees as well as the empathetic attitude of the activists have laid a solid foundation for the empowerment program. The feelings of comfort shared among one another are built through personal communication practice. That is also strengthened by communal communication practice. By incorporating the two communication practices, the Rohingya refugees are able to follow their English, farming, and sewing trainings well. Furthermore, they are much better treated as humans. They are given safety and comfort. In line with the UNHCR call for help, Indonesia

has implemented the shelters for the refugees properly. Nonetheless, it does not mean that the problems stop here.

The given international deadline is one year. After that, they have to find a place to stay. However, even though that one year has been exceeded, there are still Rohingya refugees that stay in Indonesia. This does not mean that Indonesia has exempted itself from the task, but the real question is finding the final resolution to this problem. Up to this point, Myanmar has not yet shown signs to resolve this problem by reaccommodating the Rohingya ethnicity socially, culturally, and politically. UNHCR also has not given any real measures needed to be taken. Many of the Rohingyas in Aceh fled to Malaysia, despite the fact that Malaysia has not yet released a statement to accommodate the Rohingya refugees so that there is no more stateless refugee. Up to this point, the seriousness and commitment to solve the Rohingya, the most-wronged ethnicity in the world, refugee situations are still left unanswered.

Conclusion

The handling of Rohingya refugees in Indonesia is in compliance with the UNHCR mandate to prioritize humanity. Various physical facilities ranging from housing, sanitation, playground, and healthcare facilities are built in Aceh, Indonesia to accommodate Rohingya refugees. In addition to the physical facilities, the refugees also receive empowerment. Cultural differences have been one of the challenges faced in the empowerment program. The violent behavior and inability to communicate in Malay or English are also considered as challenges. The empowerment model is initiated by developing empathetic attitude among the activists, who then continue with the implementation of personal and communal communication practices, which are then incorporated in the empowerment program offered to the refugees. Such empowerment includes trainings on ethics, English, farming, and sewing. The refugees are also taught the importance of maintaining health and environment. It has been a successful endeavor and resulted in positive impacts. The Rohingya refugees are now more well-mannered and equipped with skills gained from the empowerment program.

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