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Research Paper

UNHCR REFUGEE POLICY, OPERATION OF NGOs AND WOMEN REFUGEES' EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

In this research work, the researcher will consider the various development programs regarding women refugee which are organized through UNHCR, NGOs and other related agencies in the international context and within India. It is noteworthy to say that, between 75 to 80 percent of the world's refugees are women and children and many of them have been living in camps and emergency situations for generations, in between India also is not the exception. Most of the time the inability, disability, and loss of a male head person in the family lead economically self-sufficient poses and threat to men themselves and to their families too. Hence, refugee women need to be prepared for productive activities through education and training, income generation activities and other types of empowerment. But unfortunately, the policies and strategies to incorporate women have not yet been implemented sufficiently in India to bring about the real improvement in the lives of refugee women. The present research work will prove that accessing women refugee to skill development training programs help them to increase their positions in accessing to knowledge, resources and gaining decision-making power and to find safer job, and in fact, self-sustaining plays a key role in protecting them from dependence on unsafe and unsustainable income generations option and lead to protect them from gender-based violence within the family as well as in workplace. In fact, more state and international development level programs through international non-governmental and governmental agencies and reviewing UNHCR's livelihoods programs in India for the empowerment of all types of refugee women can make them more independent and protected to be needed.

KEYWORDS: India, Women Refugee, UNHCR, NGOs, Skill Development Training

INTRODUCTION

The economic, social and cultural rights of each and every person are given by the Universal Declaration of Human Right in Article 22, which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. These rights also are very important in the lives of refugees particularly women refugees

because their overall development is not possible without the enjoyment of these rights which are given by the 1951 Refugee Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees but India is not a signatory of this Convention. On the other hand, Article 21 of the Indian Constitution gives the right to life and personal liberty to every person including foreigners. This scope of this



Article is widened by the Supreme Court of India to include some of the economic, social and cultural rights such as the right to livelihood, right to education and etc, and these rights are really necessary for the development of an individual. In fact, relating to women, "Empowerment" means a process which those women are in disadvantaged positions, they find more opportunity to increase their access to knowledge, resource and decision-making power and raise their awareness of participation in their communities, in order to reach a level of control over their own environment. Women and men have varying access to, and control over, knowledge and resource. Unfortunately, most of the women refugees have been excluded from business and they lack business skills. Therefore many specific initiatives to empower women that address gender inequalities are necessary.

Education is another factor which has very important place in women refugee's empowerment as it gives them ability to grow, to develop and to get some work for earning their livelihood. Article 26(1)¹ of the same Convention also insist of this right for everyone, but unfortunately there are so many constraints in getting right to education to refugee girls and women for instances; there are limited access to higher education level, economic conditions, lack of sufficient facilities for education, social set up which contribute girl refugees in household work and lack of time and energy after doing household works, most of the schools are far away from the camp and settlement, early marriage and Language problems. In many refugee populations, women refugees as head of families have to look after their dependents. Hence it becomes necessary for them to get educated and engaged in some occupation.

Occupation² is equally important for survival and it is dependent on education of the women refugees. But evidence shows that most of women refugees who are educated up to primary level are engaged in non-technical work like domestic work, agriculture labour and etc. an approximately equal number are housewife. In fact, getting access to education for refugee women is difficult and earning is essential for survival. In many cases the income generating work chosen by refugee women is not dependent on education at all as access to education is difficult. Women utilize either traditional skills or acquire new skills to better their lives. On the other hand, there are so many hurdles in getting employment in India. And many refugee women are dependent only upon the assistance provided by the

UNHCR or crash doles provided by the government, which is inadequate to survive. Therefore in the absence of education and employment facilities, it is better to encourage women's participation in skill training programmes.

THE ROLE OF UNHCR AND NGOS IN WOMEN REFUGEES EMPOWERMENT IN THE INTERNATIONAL SPHERE

In the international context, UNHCR is one of a network of UN funds, programs, specialized agencies, and commissions. Along with UNHCR, NGOs in different size are the source of funds and style of operation. Some are international, some are national, but have international activities; some others are solely nationally or locally based. For the first time, the importance of NGOs' role in protecting refugees was recognized by the UN General Assembly through adopting UNHCR's Statute and called on the High Commissioner to establish contact with "private organizations" which now are known as NGOs, to deal with refugee questions and to help coordinate the efforts of those organizations.

Today, UNHCR works with more than 500 NGOs as implementing partners. Most NGOs working with refugees provide material assistance and assist in the establishment and maintenance of camps and other settlements, putting them in a position to monitor and report on rights violations that may occur in the camps or settlements. There are many other types of private professional or religious-based organizations which offer legal counseling or representation to asylum-seekers, visit detention centers, assist resettled refugees and advocate for individual refugees and for national laws and procedures that will implement their country's international obligations. NGOs may not be specifically mandated through international conventions to offer protection to refugees. In fact, they perform an urgent and valuable service that can make a critical difference in the effective protection of refugees.³

In the case of women refugees' development, in 1991, UNHCR's Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women created the imputes for subsequent resolutions, advising that special efforts may be needed to resolve problems faced specifically by refugee women; and urging that refugee status determination officials be given training regarding the claims of women asylum seekers.

Meanwhile, NGOs, themselves have looked at their own roles in implementing policies that will allow for more effective programs for these women. Internationally the focus of NGO involvement has been the NGO Working Group on Refugee Women. The Working Group, a coalition of interested individuals from about 100 NGOs throughout the world, keeps its members informed of the development and convenes meetings to coincide with the executive committee meeting at UNHCR. In 1988 an international consultation organized by the Working Group and brought together about 150 representatives from refugee women's groups, NGOs, intergovernmental organizations and governments to consider how refugee women's issues can be more effectively addressed by the international community. Five major themes were considered as protection, health, education, employment and cultural adjustment, participant developed specific recommendations pertaining to this areas.

In fact, the development of policies and guidelines related to the protection and assistance to refugee's women and children provides a useful framework for increasing the capacity of the international system to respond to the needs of these populations. But, it should be kept in mind that adoption of the policy in refugee women by UNHCR and its effective implementation will solve only part of the problem, therefore there is also need to be designed similar policies by a range of other institutions and the coordination between different agencies with different experience improved responses to the needs of refugee women. The sensitivity of all related agencies and institutions to all areas relating to refugees women and children must be increased and their capacity in integrating these issues into their own planning and program implementation must also be developed.⁴

On the other hand, for many refugee women particularly those who are the head of household, obtaining sufficient income to support their families are really important factors which completely depend on family composition, existing work opportunities, refugees and host country cultural constraints and other factors. In fact, refugee women in developing countries like their host, national counterparts are in integral part of the family's economic activities whether those entail assisting in food production, marketing goods or providing services such as cooking, and laundry of other family members who are engaged in wage labour.

Theoretically, there are a number of ways that refugees can supplement their household income. These

includes; employment in the local economy or with assistance agencies, agriculture activities, bartering, an establishment of trades or small businesses and participation in skill training programs and formal income generation projects.

In fact, Susan Forbes stated in her book, refugees take into accounts their hope for repatriation and resettlement, generally they prefer not to commit significant resources to a project in the country of asylum and if the principal goal of a refugee is a resettlement in the third country, other strategies like working for a voluntary agencies from the desired resettlement country, job as a domestic for an expatriate worker may be attracted. And finally towards women refugees whose culture generally prohibits employment outside the home will attempt to pursue strategies that permit them to work within their household compounds.⁵

In fact, women's involvements in income generating activities and their self-sufficiently clearly defined as "women's development". Therefore involvement of women refugees in marginal economic activities or in handicrafts and sewing projects can be a clear illustrative.⁶

There is noteworthy to say that, many skills that women bring with them are not immediately or directly relevant to their experiences in refugee camps or settlements. Although many of their skills are transferable, refugee women often need the training to undertake new roles to support themselves and their families. But there is really important that the training courses must be relevant to women refugee's need and it should be marketable in the refugee context and directly concentrate on productive goals. Therefore, as it is clear, education and skill training provide numerous benefits like what was reported in the NGO Consultation Refugee Women:

- Increases a woman's income – earning potential, thus improving self sufficiency.
- It will be useful when the refugee women return home.
- Enhancing the likelihood of resettlement
- Alleviating the oppressive monotony of camp life.⁷

In this regard, there is a need for certain approaches to planning and implementation women refugee's related program in reach to the success of their income generating and self-sufficiently. For instances, many income generation projects for refugee women have been mislabeled and their primary goal must be income generating not social services. In addition,

the staff and participants in these projects must have a mutual understanding of the project's goal and outcomes. They also must have the great knowledge about the refugee population and build the relative skills and interests of those particular women refugees and further to address their cultural constraints would cause difficulties for them and the next issue is having the good knowledge of the host country situation and its market government structures and so on can improve the likelihood of projects success. And finally to anticipate the problems and solved in the way of implementation of projects like marketing difficulties, difficulties in obtaining raw materials, quality control problems, transportation problems inadequately trained staff and lack of skills among participants and so forth.⁵⁸

SKILL TRAINING FOR WOMEN REFUGEES IN INDIA

In many countries, refugee women face increased challenges in accessing to income generating and self-sufficiency which lead them to engage in sex work. And in this regard, among refugees, women and children are at higher risk of exploitation, sexual abuse, and labor trafficking. Despite the ability to engage in the informal economy, refugees report frequent exploitation and they have been found to be particularly vulnerable, accepting underpaid and undesirable positions.⁹

In the case of India, there are different development programs like RCDP projects in developing Afghan and Somali women refugee in Delhi with the support of BOSCO or other livelihood programs through UNHCR, UN Refugee Agency and its partners and ACCESS Development Services as a national livelihoods promotion organization. But on the other hand, development agencies have had very limited involvement even like UNICEF as an agency committed to providing relief and development assistance to women and children because of primary UNHCR's responsibility to assist and protect refugees. We also have to be aware of the impact of mass immigration on the countries with the weak economy like India. Therefore to study the actual operations of UNHCR and other related governmental and nongovernmental agencies in light of the need of women's refugee through development oriented programs and to identify obstacles and recommends to be needed.

In developing country like India, the refugee women naturally experience the same problems as do other women in the country, that is, poverty, lack of adequate food and safe drinking water and large families. There is

no doubt refugee women face some more problems due to their refugee situation. Refugee situations often call for new skills and occupation for women. Many those skills that women have with them are not immediately or directly relevant to their experience in the refugee camp. Therefore they need the training to undertake new skills to suit their new roles to support themselves and their families. Skill and education training are very important as they provide numerous benefits to women refugees. Moreover, through different skill training programs which are organized for women refugees, there are many obstacles faced by the refugee girls and women in getting the access to skill training which are including;

1. Inadequate resources, teachers and classes.
2. Cultural constraints sometimes prevent them from accepting work or undertaking training that takes them out of the household.
3. practical problems also constraints their participation in skill training, including a need for child day-care, and lack of time and energy after doing household work and or jobs as a wage earner.
4. Education problem, many skills require some minimum qualification. If that is not possessed by the refugee girl and woman then she would not get access to skill training. Therefore equal access to educational programs is an important aspect for getting skill training.
5. The other problems are household responsibilities, lack of time and energy and lack of information about the program.

women refugee through promoting their full participation in planning, implementation, and evaluation of all refugee programs, issuing trained female staff across the organization working for women refugees can achieve to equal treatment between men and women refugees. Participation helps them in rebuilding self-confidence and self-esteem as well as it reduces feeling of isolation and also reduces lethargy and depression. Participation of refugee women in program designing makes them self-sufficient and also independent. Further, the participation of refugee women in decision making and program implementation is a necessary step to ensuring that they are effectively protected, obtain assistance on an equal footing with men, have the opportunities to lead productive, secure and dignified lives, and are able to provide assistance when needed to vulnerable groups.

POTENTIAL LOCAL AND NATIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT TRAININGS TOWARDS WOMEN REFUGEES IN INDIA

UNHCR conducts registration refugees and RSD in a timely and efficient manner and protect the growing number of people of concern in India through outreach services, including legal, social and educational support in areas where they reside. It focuses on responding to people with particular needs through collaboration with local NGO and community-based networks. The Government of India permits UNHCR mandate refugees to apply for work permits and long-term visas. Refugees have access to basic government services such as education and healthcare. The UNHCR Office in India works closely with the Government of India, non-governmental organizations and members of civil society in ensuring that asylum seekers and refugees in India are not involuntarily returned to their countries of origin, or of former residence and have access to international protection. UNHCR along with its partners and civil society provides different services to support refugees in health, legal counseling, education, livelihoods and vocational skills.

They try to assist by mediating between refugees and employers, but their influence is limited. In addition, in India income generating projects and vocational training provide an income to those most in need of support and can enable refugees to acquire relevant vocational and language skills. In India, a business grant programme introduced in 2012 has proven to be a success, with 40 out of 42 small businesses – half of them owned by women – still sustaining themselves. The project has been expanded this year with more slots and higher grants. In addition to this project, renewed income-generation programmes in India will reserve a designated number of spots for persons with disabilities, and persons who due to psychosocial problems cannot work on the labour market.

Besides of UNHCR, DON BOSCO¹⁰ offers education services and offers language classes, counseling and support for livelihood activities including vocational training. BOSCO works very closely with youth refugee. UNHCR supports income generating activities to help refugees live a life with dignity in India. KOSHISH is a good example in making the traditional clothing which produce by women refugee. Moreover, women protection is high on UNHCR's agenda. UNHCR along with its partner organization and Delhi police also

has been organizing self-defense training for refugee women. The training program aims at empowering women by equipping them with basic martial arts and techniques.

Lack of legal document and job opportunities make Burma women refugees most vulnerable. The Burmese¹¹ women work as housemaid, weaver at handloom industry, selling vegetables alongside of the road, working at restaurants, framings and small trading. At worst, women are involved in selling drugs while many end up as sex- worker. Therefore, the women's organizations such as All Burma a Democratic Lushai Women Organization (ABDLWO) and Central Chin Women Organ (CCWO) initiated small income generation for women by running handloom industry, swing trainings, making traditional weaving and swing products. CCWO is also running on English speaking class as a vocational training for the young men and women who want to continue their study or improve their English skill. There are many other examples like Chin Women Organization (CWO) has conducted English classes and chin language. They have training programs on human rights and women rights. More TOM as an NGO based in Delhi which was established in 1992. The basic objectives of TOM are to organize workshops and training programmes, Consultations, conferences and conventions on substantive/political issues around which struggles and campaigns are taking place in the sub-continent.

Another projects is the project has received the backing of the Burmese Women of Delhi (BWD)¹² and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), this project has developed a cell phone based solution to track reproductive tract infections (RTI) among women living in marginalized communities like coastal fishermen communities, refugee women from Myanmar and Somalia living in India, female sex workers, tribal communities, etc. The solution allows community health workers and medical officers to identify sexual and reproductive health incidents more effectively, and deliver care in a timelier manner. The result of this project will determine the role of ICT¹³ in overcoming the challenges of reporting and tracking of RTI among the women living in these marginalized communities. Further providing training in stitching. Knitting and tailoring which has conducted through Zomi Women Union which provides women with marketable skill that open a way for their living expenses. There is another offering class from kinder garden to 8th grade for those youth people who have limited access

to school due to financial or legal reasons by SAD Burmese School. Other examples are holding two days training for Burmese parents on the issue of child welfare and development by Burmese Women Delhi and Skill upgrading in food preparation for women by Grassroot Development Network that to train how to cook Indian food, baking Chinese food, seasoning fruits and vegetables preparation and making Mizo and Burmese food. The another project is KSDF business project with selling "MOMO" through renting a room by furniture, cooking equipment and the raw ingredients to launch this business by Kuki ethnic group who are presenting unemployed.

Moreover, regarding to Afghan women refugees, BOSCO as UNHCR's implementing partner in India, has been supporting Afghan refugees since 2002 in acquiring vocational skills and finding work in the informal sector. Afghan refugees after completing training can find suitable jobs or, even start their own businesses. BOSCO Self Reliance Programme has given a new hope of life to distressed Afghan refugees. Many cultural programs are organized by the various refugees towards Sri Lankan refugees, and Lo- Point Green Program which has organized by same organization, to educate and empower the young people to protect and nurture earth. Another example is towards livelihood programme offered by ACCESS. The ACCESS team work with the women through identifying their skills and aspirations and helping women to take their products to the market. Through creating an income-generating activity for refugee women that recognize their skills, interest and capacities. As a result of this program four Afghan women together cooked up an idea that would give them and their families a measure of much-needed financial independence through UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and its partner ACCESS Development Services.¹⁴The Refugee Community Development Project (RCDP) is another innovative refugee community led project based in New Delhi. It was developed by the UNSW Centre for Refugee Research in partnership with the Somali, Afghan Refugee communities and UNHCR in New Delhi. This project incorporates livelihoods, education, women's safety and social support initiatives. This Project is built on the basis of human rights principles and community development through focusing on safe livelihoods and sustainable outcomes. The aim of this project was to develop and trial an innovative community based protection response to the protection of women and girls at risk and other vulnerable refugee groups. Central to the model was its

focus on utilizing the knowledge, skills and capacity of the refugee population to enable them to plan and provide services for their own community. Under this project there were many factors which cause and contribute to heightened risks of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), which are including the lack of safe livelihoods options, limited educational pathways, social isolation and adverse community attitudes. The result was the establishment of an innovative community based response which is led by the refugee community at all stages of project design, implementation and evaluation, with support from CRR, BOSCO, UNHCR and implementing partners. Core project activities include education classes, women's groups across South and North Delhi, vocational training classes, and biannual recreational activities which have had a direct and positive impact on psychosocial well-being.

Toward Pakistani – Hindu refugees who are residing in Rajasthan, there is a big unemployment specifically among women refugees but many are already skilled craftsmen's and skill labourers. In this situation women find themselves stuck at refugee camp and further they have to stay in camps to take care of children and belongings. Therefore the Pakistan Hindu Relief Program (PHRRP) on October 2015, as an umbrella project of multiple U.S based Hindu organization has donated a swing machine unit to refugee camp. The refugee camp has a master who will train how to cut stitch and assemble cloths for retail market, the raw material and cloths will be given by the retail market shop owners along with design specification. This program empowers Hindu women who are skilled in swing and can work, hence this program boost clothing swing business at refugee camp.

There are other types of refugees like, Tibetan refugees who are living in settlements in India. They face widespread unemployment and other workforce challenges. Many young Tibetans and skilled professionals have left in search of better opportunities overseas which cause brain drain and threat the preservation of Tibetan culture. Towards Tibetan refugees, the EDOTS program seeks to create sustainable livelihood opportunities through two primary components: first through an agricultural development program, which works with farmers to improve organic production, and second is a workforce development program, which consists of skill development delivered through career centers and entrepreneurship development delivered through a sub-

program called Empowering Tibetan Businesses.¹⁵ The Tibet Fund¹⁶ also supports CTA's Tibetan Career Center (TCC) to provide career counseling and guidance to the unemployed youth by organizing intensive workshops for high school students and parents alike. TCC provides counseling including relevant assistance in preparing quality resume, cover letters and job applications. The Career Planning Workshops encourage students to explore options based on their interest and aspirations and educating parents about post-secondary school options for their children. All these vocational trainings, new enterprise developments and career counselings were funded by the U.S. State Department. And there are many other projects in different areas in India towards refugees and specifically women refugees.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, the policies and strategies to incorporate and develop women have not yet been implemented sufficiently to bring about the real improvement in the lives of women refugees in India. Therefore, India must conduct, develop and implement more skill development training towards women refugees specifically to lead them to the safer job and sustainable income generation. For achieving this purpose, India needs to have more corporations with other state and international NGOs and governmental agencies to create the real improvement in women's refugee's lives. Participation in skill development training can help women to increase their positions in accessing to knowledge, resources and gaining decision-making power and further can reduce women refugee's psychological problems, including depression and stress if women refugees to undertake new skills to suit to their social and cultural situations. However, a lack of resources limits the projects' scale and refugees' wages, and many still struggle to find jobs after completing such training. In response, UNHCR needs to review its livelihoods programmes in India to make them more suited to refugee and market needs. Further, what is now needed is to ensure that the protection and economic independent of girls and women refugees remain a high priority for UNHCR and all other relevant stakeholders, both in and beyond the Dialogue location.

In this regard, there is a need for more participation of women refugees in the decision-making process which has many benefits for them through building self-esteem, rebuilding self-confidence, reducing the feeling of isolation and reducing depression and dependency. It can avoid many expensive mistakes

because if refugee helps with programme design, and self-sufficiency of women refugees which is a key goal in most refugee assistance settings. And further, it promotes protection through building the values and sense of community. And this is not possible except with ensuring the full participant of refugee women in the design and implementation of these programmes and integrating them into all development plans and projects that target women and Monitoring projects carefully to ensure that they provide sufficient household income and do not focus on marginal economic activities.

Notes:

- ¹ *This Article states that "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit", retrieved from: http://www.claiminghumanrights.org/udhr_article_22.html, (accessed on: 18 July 2016)*
- ² *Under 23 of the universal declaration of human rights 2 everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection. (4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.*
- ³ *Ms. Kate Jastram and Ms. Marilyn Achiron, UNHCR, REFUGEE PROTECTION: A Guide to International Refugee Law, 2001, P:36-37*
- ⁴ *Susan Forbes Martin, Refugee Women, published by: Zed Books Ltd, London & New Jersey, 1992, P:102*
- ⁵ *Susan Forbes Martin, Refugee Women, published by: Zed Books Ltd, London & New Jersey, 1992, P:50-51*
- ⁶ *Ibid, 1992, P:57-58*
- ⁷ *Susan Forbes Martin, Refugee Women, published by: Zed Books Ltd, London & New Jersey, 1992, P:48-49*
- ⁸ *Ibid, 1992, P:62-63*
- ⁹ *US Dept of State Human Rights Report – Pakistan, retrieved from; <http://www.refworld.org/docid/517e6df418.html>, (accessed on: 18 March, 2016)*
- ¹⁰ *DONBOCOINDIA, Bosco Information Service, retrieved from: <http://www.donboscoindia.com>, (accessed on: 17 November, 2016)*

- ¹¹ Ordered by the House of Commons, *DFID Assistance to Burmese Internally Displaced People and Refugees on the Thai- Burma Border, Tenth Report of Session, Vol: II, 2007.*
- ¹² Mikrogranty.cz, *Sponsor a Burmese Micro Projects*, retrieved from: http://www.mikrogranty.cz/burma/catalog/seo_sitemap/product/, (accessed on: 18 November 2016)
- ¹³ India: ICT for monitoring health among refugee women, retrieved from: <https://techieswithoutborders.wordpress.com/2015/05/29/india-ict-for-monitoring-health-among-refugee-women/>, may 29, 2015, (accessed on: 17 November 2016)
- ¹⁴ Report from UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *Catering start-up empowers Afghan refugee women in Delhi*, 8 March 2016, retrieved from: <http://reliefweb.int/report/india/catering-start-empowers-afghan-refugee-women-delhi>, (accessed on: 14 March, 2016)
- ¹⁵ Sambuddha Bhattacharya, *Q&A: Developing Entrepreneurship in Tibetan Settlements in India* – retrieved from: <http://www.technoserve.org/blog/qa-developing-entrepreneurship-in-tibetan-settlements-in-india>, (accessed on: 19 June, 2016)
- ¹⁶ The Tibet Fund.org, *Employment and New Enterprise Development*, retrieved from: <http://tibetfund.org/programs/community-economic-development/>, (accessed on: 19 June 2016)
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