



## Running Head: Mitigating Refugees' Social Exclusion

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### Abstract

The 2017 unprecedented pouring of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslim refugees into neighboring Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, fleeing violence related to a retaliatory military crackdown in western Myanmar (Burma), created a major humanitarian crisis. Sympathy and solidarity were expressed worldwide, alongside a flood of humanitarian aid. However, their decades-old plight as socially excluded poor and marginalized outside Myanmar, particularly in host countries of Southeast Asia, has remained eclipsed. Youngsters, preferred targets for drug traffickers, participate as mules in smuggling a heavily consumed methamphetamine (*yaba* pills) proceeding from Myanmar. Such deviance (being part of the supply chain), which not only is a criminal offence, but also blamed on the entire community, is likely to exacerbate its marginalization. A collective punishment of these forcibly displaced would make them shift to becoming forcibly relocated and confined to Thengar Char, a remote and underdeveloped island in the Bay of Bengal known for being prone to flooding. Although important, criticism and condemnations may be insufficient. This article addresses recreational sports as a tool of social inclusion among other already known benefits, and is based on secondary data. In so doing, it seeks to link it with the key role of social policy in providing responses to the needs of a vulnerable population in a protracted situation. Plentiful leisure time available looks undervalued. There is a predominant monovalent activity with a gender discrepancy in participation. The article offers a perspective on mitigating their exclusion, drawing on a hierarchy of prepotency, and minding that social inclusion is neither the focus of social policy nor recreational sports a panacea.

**Keywords:** Rohingya Muslim; Refugees; Forced Relocation; Social Policy; Social Exclusion.

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## Introduction

There are well-established facts about the forcibly displaced worldwide. They represent over 65 million people, with most hosted in developing countries as refugees (22.5 millions) and asylum seekers (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR.org], 2017). Considered the worst refugee crisis since World War II by the United Nations, it is characterized by a devastating humanitarian crisis. Given the protracted nature of the phenomenon, it requires a significant mobilization of resources, and is costly. Resettlement to a third country is a lengthy process which may take up to 10 years, and make asylum seekers and their dependent children survive in limbo in transit countries. Meanwhile, some end up in detention centers where conditions, varying from acceptable to appalling (Bartlett, 2009; Missbach, 2017), are conducive to malnutrition, poor health, and even death (Quintley, 2017; Ross, 2017).

In addition to poverty, refugees also live in distress in their settlements (Batha, 2017). Empathy and legendary hospitality toward them tend to decrease overtime. The strain their growing numbers and long-term presence puts on local infrastructure and resources is heavily felt by governments, and already impoverished host communities. For most, their absorptive capacity is challenged with such a burden.

Authorities indicated that, in one week, 22,000 Rohingya Muslims fled Myanmar's Rakhine state to Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, following a fierce military crackdown. It resulted into 65,000 new arrivals three months later – October 2016. After coordinated insurgent attacks at different locations in Myanmar (Burma) on August 25, 2017, an exodus of Rohingya to densely populated Bangladesh occurred on a massive scale, with more than 670,000 refugees (UNHCR, 2017). While there is a need to ease the burden of host countries, donor fatigue also sets in. Therefore, the economic integration and self-reliance of the forcibly displaced has been envisaged. This is an

important, but highly challenging shift in social policy, for which wellbeing is the focus rather than social inclusion.

Social inclusion is associated with opportunity and, in contrast, social exclusion has to do with an absence of connectedness and participation. In defining social exclusion, the notions of restriction to accessing opportunities and limitation of the capabilities required to capitalize on them were emphasized (Hayes, Gray, & Edwards, 2008). In the Australian policy context, inclusion has been conceptualized highlighting four key dimensions, encompassing the opportunity to (1) participate in society through employment and access to services; (2) connect with family, friends and the local community; (3) deal with personal crises (e.g. ill health); and (4) be heard. Being disadvantaged in the first place and having to grapple with multiple disadvantages increase the risk of being socially excluded (Australian Government, 2012).

Distinct from the concept of poverty, which is a distributional outcome, social exclusion is a process for which the word “denial” is important in defining. Such a process is multidimensional, relational, dynamic, complex, and context-specific (Silver, 2007; 1994; Frazier & Marlier, 2007). It occurs when a particular group is excluded by mainstream society through the denial of entitlement to resources, and services, and the denial of the right to participate on equal terms in social relationships, in economic, social, cultural, or political areas (Hills, Grand, & Piachaud, 2002).

A coping mechanism, also a means of expressing resent, is the use of prohibited substances, commit crime, and resort to violent behaviors (being intoxicated or not), which in turn enhances the exclusion process of youngsters, and too often young males (Savelsberg & Martin-Giles, 2008; Jackson & Cameron, 2009). Socialization choices, such as peer group relations are also involved in the process. Whatever the sources of the exclusion, e.g. imposed or self-inflicted, a vicious cycle may lead to a marginalization from society, which is contrary to inclusiveness.

Exclusion appeared as a new term in France, where it took its contemporary meaning after having been previously used to refer to groups of disabled and destitute (Silver & Miller, 2003). Although social exclusion and inclusion are divergent in their definitional approaches, a unifying element is the characteristic of social exclusion as a process, rather than a static end state (March, Oviedo-Joekes, & Romero, 2006).

Prospects for inclusion appear bleak when hosting communities have little to nothing to offer to long-term guests, and disapprove the external help they are granted under the form of humanitarian aid equating it to pull factors. As a result, some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had to pull out from Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh in 2012.

Moreover, the participation of young Rohingya as mules in drug smuggling – a criminal activity attributed to limited livelihood opportunities (ACAPS, 2017) – has had the effect of exacerbating the hostility toward them. Their influx as refugees, which is associated with the soaring of drug misuse and addiction in the country, does not help their fate (Ganguly & Miliate, 2015; Das, 2017). As a consequence, their relocation to Thengar Char, an isolated island in the Bay of Bengal, has been contemplated by the authorities in Bangladesh since 2006, but also condemned by Human Rights advocates (Kullab, 2017; “Myanmar’s Rohingya stuck in limbo”, 2017; N. Thompson, 2017).

In addition to a human rights standpoint, their social exclusion which is not a new topic (Akm, 2011), raises socio-psychological issues. Being knowledgeable of the plans or statements made about their undesirable presence, causes a firsthand-felt pain. Besides the feeling of being rejected, such negative stimuli could enhance the one of being valueless. A sense of unworthiness has the potential to lower self-confidence and increase despair. A census in camps, even though for humanitarian supplies purpose, can be a reason to raise alarm, and spread anxiety among refugees fearing relocation (Sattar, 2016).

Barred from avenues for good education, decent income, and

climbing the social ladder like other members of society, the socially excluded are left with the avenue for non-legally accepted means of earning a living. Advising honesty and refrain from getting involved in illicit activities is totally correct. However, actions speak more than words, and in the long run, they could be priceless. When proper opportunities are scarce or simply denied, can solely good advice move beyond the stage of a placebo effect to protect from harm's way? What else can reinforce good advice? Could recreational sports have a mitigating impact on a thickening exclusion?

Recreational sports refers to non-professional competitive physical games or activities performed without the expectation of a financial reward. Acknowledged as key constituents of social life, sport, physical activity, and play were found to have an impact on healthcare, education, and criminal justice (Parker & Vinson, 2013). Caution was underlined about the limits of their impact (Kelly, 2011).

With concerns over their likeliness to have profound implications for youth development, this article aims to address the relevance of recreational sports as a social inclusion tool within the reach of a marginalized refugee population. It does so in relation to the paradox of furthering their exclusion with a geographical isolation, in response to a reflection of their current social exclusion in Bangladesh.

The conceptualization of welfare as unlimited in scope is not a shared viewpoint as reflected in practice, with regard to wellbeing. Accordingly, the idea of 'welfare' refers primarily to physical and material wellbeing because emotional and spiritual life, not less relevant areas, are normally considered to be beyond the scope of the social services to provide (Spicker, 2013). It begs the following question with regard to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh: Should social policy adapt its scope to a particular protracted situation, in which a refugee population is faced with adverse restrictions, and threatened by a collective punishment because of the deviant behavior of some of its members? And if so, how?

This article argues that a comprehensive social policy frame is of utmost importance to the forcibly displaced. A frame of reference into which recreational sports is apprehended, and implemented as a tool to mitigate the effects of a drastic exclusion inflicted to a particularly unwelcomed diaspora, would be relevant to pursuing the wellbeing goals. It also posits that an increased participation in recreation sports is unlikely to be disruptive, and would fit into a meaningful leisure time perspective.

In making such an argument, I first provide a succinct outline of the methodology, and then present empirical data on the daily life of Rohingya refugees whose fate looks gloomy. Then, I discuss the possible mitigating impact of recreation sports in this theoretically informed article. A hierarchy of prepotency, which is about a set of interdependent needs as proposed in Maslow's theory of motivation (Maslow, 1968), provides an enlightening framework.

## METHODOLOGY

### Procedure

The study was limited to Bangladesh, and focused on exodus waves of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar. Data were derived from secondary sources and consisted of both quantitative and qualitative empirical and non-empirical studies. The former ones used a variety of research designs and samples, encompassing large samples, such as surveys, and smallest ones as well documenting life histories.

I exploited peer-reviewed studies and non-academic published documents (NGOs' reports), along with formats, such as audiovisual documents (documentaries, videos, photo essays). I equally took into account a range of firsthand sources of authoritative knowledge. These are the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics which runs censuses of refugees and asylum seekers, United Nations agencies (OCHA,

UNHCR, UNICEF), the government of Bangladesh (GoB), and the international organization for migration (IOM).

Religious and secular NGOs and public media disseminating humanitarian news, grassroots voluntary actors, human rights and community activism contributions were not left out. The rationale was that social welfare activists and aid workers have direct contacts in the field, with some in charge of aid distribution in camps. Also, reports from news agencies are informative, provide interviews with experts, and contribute to updating what was known on some topics and populations of interest without necessarily striving for sensationalism, or being deceptive. Looking at discrepancies, similarities, and recurrences in reports on populations of refugees and asylum seekers was a way to address information validity. Overall, I consulted diverse and reliable sources.

There was no measure set for the social exclusion of the population of concern. Contrary to poverty, it is more difficult to quantify.

## RESULTS

### **Cox's Bazaar district: A southern Bangladesh resort town hosting Rohingya refugees**

For its proximity with Myanmar's Rakhine state and location which is near the Naf River that divides Bangladesh and Myanmar, Cox's Bazaar district is the main and immediate point of entry of Rohingya Muslims fleeing violence in Rakhine state. With the exception of a "self-settled" minority integrated into local communities (UNHCR, 2007), most live in two types of camps, the official and unofficial ones. Statistics about the Rohingya refugee population in both kinds of settlements change rapidly owing to new arrivals and unauthorized emigration to other countries, such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Thailand.

It was estimated that between 75,000 and 90,000 Rohingya or more had fled Myanmar since October 2016 in relation to counter-insurgency operations. As of March 15, 2018, the number of arrivals reported by the IOM Needs and Population Monitoring (NPM) since the most recent wave (August 2017) was 671,500 (ISCG, 2018). With registrations no longer carried out since the early 90s, over 90% of them are not legally considered refugees by the GoB.

### **Refugee welfare provision**

Although some European embassies have kindly made monetary donations, the provision of refugee welfare mainly rests on the UNHCR, the GOB, national and international NGOs, and charities. Social policies implemented provide for their material wellbeing (food, housing and relief supplies), and access to services (health care, education, criminal justice). There are clearly differences in entitlements to assistance and living conditions in official and informal camps. In contrast to the latter, residents in official camps are registered and count with food ration cards, access to medical and legal services. On the other hand, the unregistered ones live in makeshift camps of tiny mud houses and tents informally set along the border with Myanmar's Rakhine state (e.g. in Balukhali, Leda, Teknaf).

These informal settlements are commonly described as unhygienic, cramped, lacking basic amenities, food insecure, and offering little protection from harsh weather conditions and wild animals in low-lying areas (Das, 2017; Sattar, 2016). Some NGOs made unwelcomed improvements in water, sanitation facilities, nutrition, immunizations, and housing.

Because the policy of government-run schools is to only admit those having identification documents, primary school access is restricted to registered children and those of refugees with more time



of residence (kutapalong and Nayapara camps). Free access to formal education is not universal, unless parents use forged papers, and it is made available until the age of 12 (sixth or seventh grade). Restrictions are not put on attending religious schools (madrassas). An analysis of Rohingya refugees' protection risks highlighted the difficulties about accessing formal education at both primary and secondary levels. As a result of its prohibition, education is informally provided in overcrowded and under equipped classrooms, by insufficiently trained volunteers teaching a school curriculum which is limited to Burmese, English, and mathematics. Recreational activities are also limited (UNHCR, 2007). Most recent estimates about education indicate that there are 453,000 children in need of education, and 5,200 teachers are needed. Children represent 54% of the population of refugees, and many are put to work both at the household level, and outside to generate income (fish drying industry), and even into bonded labor (ACAPS, 2017).

Dire conditions in refugee camps have been attributed to limited access to food, education, and work opportunities (Pagano, 2016). Formal employment being prohibited, permits are not issued. Lesser food intake (eating smaller portions, skipping meals), sharing, selling, and exchanging food rations, borrowing money, fuel wood collection for selling purpose, and begging (unmarried women) are part of the common coping mechanisms (Mahapatro et al., 2017).

## Daily life

Camp residents are not entirely dependent on humanitarian aid, but rather largely. Those who manage to work in hard-labor jobs (day laborers in agriculture, rickshaw pullers) have very limited options, are underpaid, and are at disadvantage in terms of fair remuneration, for receiving lower wages than the locals (Joyce, 2017; ACAPS, 2017). It was also reported that a close proximity to construction sites, salt

fields, or a port provided better opportunities to earn a living for some residents in Kutapalong, Nayapara, and Leda camps (Ali & Khan, 2017).

Earning an income, however, cannot be taken for granted among encamped refugees. According to this same source, employment seekers have to travel to Cox's Bazaar. And when they are not lucky enough to get an opportunity to be hired in paddy fields, grocery stores, or families requiring domestic help, they have to go back to their camp the same day. They do so after having spent money for the roundtrip travel which cost 280 taka –local currency – and may return to the camp penniless. An entire day of labor in paddy fields generates about 300 Bangladeshi Taka, a little less than US \$4.

Non-work time is spent sitting idle all day long with little food to eat and reminiscing the losses back home. Newly arrived, in particular, express their needs for basic goods and services owing to their more precarious situation of emergency. This is reflected in the following quotes (Joyce, 2017), “I miss my country and my house... We had a lot of food to live on, but now we are helpless here...”... “All I want here is food, clothes and a house and I will be happy” (Anonymous female refugee).

Playing cards is a form of recreation. Except for soccer games, recreational sport programs and facilities are scant and improvised. Young residents play soccer, a well-appreciated diversion, and even managed to organize encounters with other refugee camps (see tables 1 & 2). The UNHCR offers a limited help. As stateless persons, they find that holding soccer competitions is one of the freedoms they have (Thompson, 2017). It is also important at an emotional level for acting as a temporary relief of sadness and anger.

### **Illicit activities and related threats**

Other occupations among young Rohingya consist of prostitution,

mainly female, or training to enroll and fight in the ranks of Rohingya insurgents (“Rohingya militants in Bangladesh camps,” 2017). Various insurgent groups have sanctuaries in Bangladesh (Ganguly & Miliate, 2015). Renamed Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) to advance their cause, but declared a terrorist organization by the Myanmar government, insurgents are harshly retaliated against using a guerilla style in Rakhine state, Myanmar. In Bangladesh, ARSA is perceived as a threat for its links with home-grown Islamic networks. Other groups identified were Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) and Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF), known for their militancy and connection with refugee camps as fertile grounds for recruitment of dissidents (Utpala, 2010).

Sex trafficking is another threat to youth development. Recently, an undercover investigation revealed that younger teenagers are lured into prostitution by some Rohingya women, under the false promise of paid employment in town (“The Rohingya children trafficked for sex,” 2018). Engaging in prostitution willingly, more frequent in female-headed households, was referred to as survival sex and was attributed to restrictions in movement and employment (UNHCR, 2007).

Other young refugees, both males and females, participate in drug smuggling activities as mules that involve migratory movements between Myanmar and Cox’s Bazaar porous border. This area was acknowledged as a prime location for drug trafficking to which Rohingya refugees are vulnerable (ACAPS, 2017). *Yaba*, the cheaper synthetic drug of choice (between \$1.50-\$8 USD), which has significantly displaced weed and heroin since 2007, is processed in Myanmar’s laboratories. The easy to smuggle little pills, consisting of a combination of methamphetamines with caffeine, is swallowed or ingested by snorting after being crushed into powder.

Its two-million daily consumption is a growing problem in Bangladesh, where millions of pills are confiscated annually at the border with Myanmar and blamed on refugees. For granting favorable

conditions to operate (overpopulated, labyrinthine, night time curfew, absence of police, extreme poverty), smugglers considered the camps their biggest weapons (Bremner, 2018). The side effects of *yaba* – a Thai expression for crazy medicine or madness drug – include depression, paranoia, and violent psychosis. There are serious concerns for the future of Bangladeshi youth, representing 50 million, as the *yaba*'s addiction destroys their lives (“Inside Bangladesh’s”, 2017).

In Bangladesh, drug smuggling, which is a criminal offence, is punished with jail time up to twenty years (Human Rights, 2008). Figures reported in Cox’s Bazaar prisons alone account for 88% of the prisoners being Burmese (meaning from Myanmar), unregistered, and with no legal status (“Rohingya women exploited”, 2015). Their involvement in the aforementioned activities carried out inside Bangladesh and/or at the border with Myanmar enhanced locals’ intolerance towards their presence perceived as a threat to their security and a heavy burden on the country’s resources (Barrister, 2012). In a related analysis, four dimensions of security threat posed by the presence of Rohingya refugees were highlighted as military, economic, social, and environmental (Imtiaz, 2010).

### **Government hardening stance**

In January 2017, the government took preventive measures, emitting orders to border districts about restricting refugees’ freedom of movement and pushbacks to their assigned boundaries. Toughening their spatial seclusion, would prevent that they spread out and mix with the locals, and allow to identify the “illegally infiltrated” in the country (“Bangladesh restricts movement”, 2017).

Emerging in 2015, their controversial forced relocation to Thengar Char, Bay of Bengal, seems more real than just a threat (Kullab, 2017). Its planning has been evolving with the planting of

trees, in order to shield the land of 2,430-hectares in Hatiya Island, Noakhali district against tides and flooding likely to occur during the monsoon. The transfer order was issued by the Cabinet Division on January 26, 2017 and posted online (Sattar, 2017). Thengar Char has often been described by outsiders as unsafe (presence of pirates), and unfavorable to livelihoods (absence of potable water; unsuitable for agriculture).

## DISCUSSION

### Successful social exclusion, and challenged youth development

Despite disapproval and harsh criticism of the relocation plan to Thengar Char, it is a fact that Bangladesh, likewise most other ASEAN countries, is not signatory to the UN Refugee Convention. Regardless of international laws or other kinds of external pressure, Bangladesh cannot be constrained to provide all refugees with access to education, health care, paid employment with full benefits, free movement, etc.

Meanwhile, with nothing productive to keep busy at, there is a daily felt hostility to endure along with the unwillingness to go back to Myanmar for safety reasons. In light of such key domains of integration as employment, housing, education, and health sectors of a conceptual framework (Ager & Strang, 2008), Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are socially excluded.

As theorized in sociology – particularly the sociometer theory – seeking inclusion, and conversely, avoiding exclusion, is an essential human need which not only is a development trait, but also has been linked to survival benefits (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Besides sociobiology (Kurzban & Leary, 2001), psychosocial and physiological perspectives on inclusion and exclusion have shed light on experiencing the pain of separation, rejection, and social exclusion. They are considered shared characteristics that overlap

with the physical pain systems of humans (Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2005; MacDonald & Leary, 2005).

Refugee youths in Bangladesh are more involved in drug smuggling through playing a mule role than problematic drug use as a coping strategy action to deal with unemployment and the stress of economic deprivation. This does not seem to be in contradiction with theoretical frameworks of social structure and the general strain theory (GST) developed in criminology in relation to crime and deviance. They appear relevant to explain social exclusion with their emphasis on strains such as the loss of valued possessions, or other positive stimuli, negative treatment by others, or underachievement of goals (Agnew, Robert, & Brezina, 2010).

What can be expected in terms of youth development, more specifically fostering positive youth development in the above described context? The importance of promoting youth development to counter an increase in the risk for problem behaviors, such as drug misuse, aggressiveness, and delinquency is not a new topic. In a review of research studies on youth sport, potential benefits found were physical health, psycho-social development, and motor skills acquisition (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2007). Their research has highlighted positive development throughout competence, confidence, character, connections, and compassion/caring, known as the five Cs. More than fun and physical fitness, youth sport participation encompasses the five Cs. Fitting that frame, sports appeared as a solution to social inclusion and inspired youth programs, especially in developed countries (Kelly, 2011).

A person who is not employed, in education, training or family caretaking, is not considered involved in production. This coincides with one of the dimensions used by researchers from the London School of Economics (LSE) to measure social exclusion (Saunders, 2003). Therefore, the space for unproductivity left by social exclusion could be filled and transformed to obtain positive outcomes.

## Recreation sports: necessity or luxury?

Can a socially disadvantaged encamped population heavily dependent on free supplies, afford the luxury of regular sport practice? Worth knowing is that many unregistered in unofficial camps are at the brink of food insecurity. Hence, it makes sense to be worried about too little food to eat in squalid camps, lack of equipment, risk of injury, and hard work for no perceived reward sport practice may imply. Nevertheless, it does not appear strong enough to impede further involvement with recreation sports. Considering that it is doomed to failure because one has to secure, first, enough rations of rice, flour, cooking oil, and a soap bar, prior to envisaging leisure is arguable.

Nutrition and physical recreational activities go hand in hand in the efforts at strengthening the immune system. Not mutually exclusive, they may reinforce each other and attain synergies for body and mind rejuvenation. Engaging with exercise is likely to lead to an inexpensive active lifestyle, personally rewarding in the long-term, when compared with the possible costly consequences of a sedentary one for health outcomes and successful aging.

Maintaining muscular strength or cardiovascular fitness does not necessarily lead to highly risking trauma to body's extremities. A well-established fact is that risk injuries associated with sports can be minimized or prevented. Making time for proper warm-up and cool-down sessions allows for the stretching of muscles, joints, and connective tissues, and is as important as wearing appropriate protective gear and footwear. These are recommendations common to most sports and people who practice.

Research studies have consistently shown that the health benefits outweigh the possible risks for players. Engaging with recreational sport would be an opportunity for Rohingya refugees to learn how to use the ample time they have for proper rest, which will allow their muscles to recover, repair, and rebuild. It also applies to proper advising on training in accordance with a regime adjusted to respective levels

as beginners, intermediate, and advanced. And lastly, connecting with the nutrition aspect, refugees are provided with packs of biscuits high in energy, enriched in vitamins and minerals as part of general food distribution. Besides, there are programs designed to support them in improving their nutrition. With its link to a number of health benefits, recreation sports may also act as medicine.

### **Recreational sports in a five level hierarchical pyramid**

Even though their basic needs are provided for, their prolonged presence in a hostile context goes beyond emergencies and relief. Therefore, welfare provisions must adapt to the protraction in order to achieve an encompassing wellbeing, a goal which could be maximized, and thus, allow to fulfill the principle of effectiveness. Emotional wellbeing may not be solely fulfilled with the elimination of material deprivation. It appears more difficult for recreational needs to fit in an urgent humanitarian assistance scheme. Nonetheless, their connection with sports practice that is of relevance to emotional wellbeing, can be highlighted through a theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1968).

A theory of human motivation developed in psychology, established a hierarchy of needs, and how needs can be satisfied simultaneously or not, meaning that they are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, the satisfaction of lower needs relating to the physiological ones (oxygen, food, water) does not exclude the higher ones referred to as growth needs. It holds true for other kinds of needs that belong to the lower ones, for example safety and esteem (see pyramid illustration).

Recreational activities, by often boosting individual confidence through an awareness of self-improvement and meaningful accomplishments relate to self-esteem needs. Higher than the physiological needs, but still located at the level of deficiency needs in the pyramid, they encompass confidence, self-esteem, achievement, and respect.



An increased participation of refugees in recreation sports could modify negative perceptions of them that strengthen the pull factor argument. Welfare provisions make them appear to locals as passive recipients of free handouts, leading an easy and cozy life, but incapable of forging a meaningful life. Investing in sport practice produces a more active leisure time into which the infusion of passion and creativity may associate with self-realization needs. At such level of Maslow's hierarchy, it may bring a sense of purpose likely to have a weakening effect on the pull factor argument.

There is another way of diluting the imagery of secluded passive recipients of humanitarian aid that stick to them, and relates to the level of deficiencies. It would consist of being actively involved in the implementation, organization, revision, and improvement as needs arise, and finally own recreational sport, which of course, has nothing to do with an insubordination. By owning it, they can also put to use their creativity, which connects to the self-actualization (or self-fulfillment) needs located at the top level of the pyramid. It could be achieved, not by defying humanitarian actors, but through cooperating.

There is no guarantee that all refugees will excel in their leisure activities and feel it rewarding to the point of being self-actualized. This would be an oversimplified picture. Nonetheless, playing soccer was felt as an ephemeral, but soothing moment for negative emotions that are always around: “--- the sadness and anger is away.... It always come back.” Personal reward should not be totally discarded. A young soccer player admired by teenagers for scoring goals reported that it as a personal reward. Besides a title or a medal, it is an achievement to take pride in.

Finally, engaging with regular recreational sport activities, kept simple and adaptable, is important from a balanced perspective on wellbeing. Otherwise, wellbeing would be stuck with material deprivation at the first level of the pyramid – the deficiency needs.

## **Affordable out-of-school recreational activities**

There is a gap to fill not in terms of after school activities, but out-of-school ones. As previously mentioned, education opportunities are shut at the age of 12, and are not accompanied by measures to avoid the NEET status which stands for not-in-education, employment or training (Thompson, 2011). This is where an increased participation in recreation sports would fit. Limited access to secondary education leaves many out of school. And, assuming that all of them cannot be committed to family care (e.g. elderly, little children), or paid work, time does not appear as a barrier to be involved in recreation sports. On the contrary, time is an abundant resource to make the most of. It may convert into an opportunity to counter exclusion from organized sports in schools.

Another aspect is about affordability. Is recreational sports far too expensive to afford? It is not about motor cross, car racing, and ice skating, or building modern golf courses and tennis courts or Olympic style stadiums. Culturally appropriate and comfortable gears can be donated. Having free access to facilities that meet safety requirements at a convenient season is what matters. Flooding and landslides are concerning when intense tropical cyclones hit, or during the monsoons season (May-October).

By building on their fishermen background, and making the most out of the natural environment, sophisticated facilities will not be needed for the practice of such activities as roaming, swimming, adapted water polo, netball, and table tennis. Their used fishing nets would lower the costs, in addition to keeping them busy at their repair. More experienced adults could assist with that task. Youths and adults involvement in both playing and non-playing roles could represent another opportunity for intergenerational collaborations in leisure time.

In accordance with a social conflict analysis of sports which points out a socioeconomic status (Macionis, 2012), low-tech activities, aside

of individual choices, should be accessible to Rohingya refugees. Therefore, soccer fits their social standing. Also, important to bear in mind is that the execution of a given exercise can be simple, but have complex potential benefits, and this is what matters the most.

### **Recreational sports for all**

Rohingya women, who appear underrepresented in soccer practice and teams encounters, are involved in the male dominated *yaba* smuggling. In a study of female dealers conducted in England and underpinned by the concept of 'doing gender', it was found that relationships and identities along with women's gendered social positions were important in their strategy for keeping dealing hidden (Fleetwood, 2013).

If it is about to stay out of trouble among successful female dealers, such a way of performing respectable femininity as concluded by the author, does not appear relevant as far as recreation sports is concerned. Soccer is no longer a man's world, and women nowadays are more and more involved in diverse sports without having their gender taken into account.

Not all interested residents can be selected to join soccer teams and represent their refugee camp. Hence, the importance of widening the space for soccer practice and diversifying sport activities to allow a more inclusive participation. It does not require a structured setting such as a league, or being able bodied. The constantly changing demography of this population should not be a reason to leave some components behind.

### **Valuing leisure time to bridge divides**

Desperation for quick cash, which is understandable, makes of young refugees easy targets for criminal and insurgency related activities.

Participating in illicit and criminal activities surely provide financial gains and can, to some extent, help tackling income poverty with an increased purchasing power. Crucially, for how long, and at what cost?

Besides the high risk taken and an uncertain future of a life behind bars, recidivism, addictions, and perdition, such kinds of activities are associated with stigma, another common form of social exclusion (Allman, 2013). They only add insult to injury. Being stigmatized is not conducive to be heard and have some barriers removed. Instead, it is more likely to strengthen an already existing lack of connectedness and participation experienced among camp residents, and this is what social exclusion is about.

Furthermore, adding value to time has to do with values. For example, performing a triathlon as a recreational sport, learning boxing or any martial arts, implies challenges for self-improvement, personal overcoming, and lessons for life. The hard work and discipline involved are neither intended at hurting nor conducive to taking lives. On the other hand, investing time in easy moneymaking as mules, or learning how to use an AK-47 to kill as recruits, and then ending up in jail or being killed, contributes to destroying lives. As long as it does so, and leads to increases in crime rates, distrust, and social isolation, it appears valueless.

In countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, death penalty is the punishment for drug smugglers, and in most cases, it is not negotiable. In the Philippines, the current government has zero tolerance, and thus far, thousands of persons involved with drug trafficking have been simply executed by special squads.

Playing sports could hold a transformative potential by connecting perceptions to the observed reality. There could be a shift from watching enviously young Rohingya refugees in athletic action to participating with them in soccer, basketball, volley ball or parkour. It may occur among some hostile and biased locals receptive to turning the “freebies magnet” off. This is another perspective on how

engaging with recreation sports could pave the way for healthier and peaceful interactions, likely to lead to the creation of bonds among refugees, and between refugees and non-refugee populations. Without boosting social inclusion, sport may bridge divides, a connection which would not be a step backwards, or trap them in a vicious cycle of marginalization.

## CONCLUSION

For decades, Rohingya refugees living in dire conditions in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, have been experiencing a *de facto* social exclusion made explicit and official. The delivery of social welfare to refugee camps which is absolutely necessary, has been associated with a magnet for freeloaders, and perceived as incentives to come and stay for good. Youngsters' participation in drug smuggling worsens hostility toward them, wastes their lives, and serves to justify the marginalization and relocation of an entire community that does not make the largest profit from the illicit activity.

Undoubtedly, the drug mules caught were not innocent bystanders. Yet, it remains important to weigh whether it is about misguided youth or ruthless criminals, and easy targets as recruits for insurgency related activities or radicalized terrorists. Serving time in prison means that they are suffering the consequence of their own actions, which is more direct than the social exclusion they have been experiencing for years. After or prior to being put behind bars, they also deserve the opportunity to walk away from a low life, rather than enduring a collective punishment.

This article has addressed the paradox of fighting refugees' social exclusion with another form of exclusion, consisting of planning to confine them to a remote island which is not accessible all year long. In so doing, it has put a focus on the relevance of recreational sports as a tool for mitigating their social exclusion, in relation to welfare

policy. Research has highlighted the health and social benefits of sports and recreation, capacity for educating and building character as well. Recreation sports surely does not compare with such key aspects as food, fuel, clothing, housing, education, and medical care when wellbeing is addressed and informed. However, a less impervious social policy to comprehensiveness, showing an adaptive capacity to refugeehood, remains important for wellbeing.

In their pariah-like existence, the extent to which young refugees are engaged in productive activities such as education, employment, or training make them fit the NEET status, and has implications for youth development. Low school enrolment, and enrolment limited to fifth grade, exclude most youngsters from participating in sporting school and recreation. If health and age, required clothing, footwear and transportation do not seem to be major barriers to participating in recreation sport, personal time available is both a resource and a leisure opportunity insufficiently exploited. It is overwhelmingly dedicated to soccer encounters, with a notorious absence of female teams.

Some refugee women – often widows – sit and yammer about their material deprivation. In their struggle for survival, single mothers engage in drug mule and prostitution related activities. Young girls, sexually exploited since their early teens, get involved in prostitution too – a situation which is degrading and amenable to change. It leads to suggest that female potential to participate in sports, and physical recreation should be capitalized upon. Girls with lesser time of residence, and single parents who are eager toward financial help, tend to be inveigled. For being a magnet more vulnerable to exploitation and sex trade, opening more space for them should be a priority.

Since rolling out an unwelcome mat to Rohingya refugees is more the norm than the exception, the freedom they have to play sports should be a more inclusive avenue to optimize. In other words, it should not be strictly limited to holding soccer competitions, but broadened enough to encompass more recreational activities, all

genders and bodies. Overall, recreational sports programming and divulgation are within reach, but appear overlooked.

Numerical data on Rohingya refugee mules were not made available. Officers of the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) declined to provide specifics in their interviews, but commented that Rohingya refugees represent the majority of carriers, and only made mention of court convictions. This kind of restriction could be due to their code of ethic, or to lacking a special authorization. Despite this limitation of the literature review conducted for this study, substantial facts were not missed and supported the analysis performed, and the conclusions as well. Importantly, exercising the right to recreation sports is not meant to be the road to ensuring social inclusion, which has more to do with structural factors. Still, from a policymaking perspective, it remains an interesting aspect of wellbeing to take into account in the alleviation of refugees' plight. Therefore, even though recreational sport is unlikely to shield them from all kind of exclusion, it can and should be apprehended as a tool for mitigating some effects of their social exclusion in the hosting communities. Knowing that the societal makeup accommodates for these refugees a sense of disconnection from the broader community, it appears relevant to integrate recreational sport into social policy.

The pursuit of such logic suggests the recommendation of a shift from low to higher priority on sport participation, and from that stance, an emphasis on values is paramount. In the end, the dignity of hard work without losing dignity, and hurting humanity is invaluable. More efforts through research action are needed to establish the role active, satisfying, valuable recreation sports could play in weakening the complex web of misery that maintains the vicious cycle of Rohingya refugees' heavy plight. What is observable thus far, is that they tend to mutate from the world's most persecuted minority victim of atrocities, into "invaders", "leeches", "trouble makers", socially excluded, and marginalized outside Myanmar.

Table 1. A soccer competition in Cox's Bazaar

<b>Event</b>	Kutupalong competition 2017
<b>Winner team</b>	Nayapara camp
<b>Title won</b>	Best Rohingya team in Bangladesh
<b>Individual title awarded</b>	(Man of the match (voted by teammates

Source. Own elaboration. Data derived from Thompson, N.A. (2017).

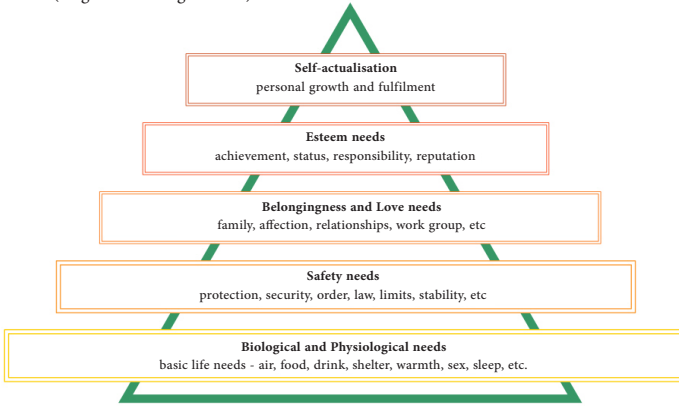
Table 2. Soccer based comparison

<b>Teams/players</b>	<b>Official camps</b>	<b>Unofficial camps</b>
Number of teams	Eight	Eight
Play in an annual World Cup-style competition	Yes	Yes
Emotional impact of soccer on players and spectators	A momentarily joyful escape from painful realities derived from a prized diversion, forgetting about their exile	Ibid
Athletic equipment	Handouts collected at the UNHCR or acquired by own means	Often wear flip-flops or play bare foot
Opportunity for Best players	Not allowed to play in the official Bangladeshi league Recruited sometimes	Ibid
Felt and expressed disadvantage	-	Feel underequipped. Defeat attributed to lack of boots.
UNHCR contribution:	Provision of balls, trophies, track pants and refreshments.	Ibid

Source. Own elaboration. Data derived from Thompson, N.A. (2017).



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs  
(original five-stage model)



© alan chapman 2001-4, based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- ARIF: Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front
- ARSA: Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
- DNC: Department of Narcotics Control
- GoB: Government of Bangladesh
- IOM: International
- NEET: Not in Education Employment or Training
- NGOs: Non-governmental organizations
- NPM: Needs and Population Monitoring
- OCHA: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
- RSO: Rohingya Solidarity Organization
- UN: United Nations
- UNHCR: United Nations High Commission for Refugees
- UNICEF: United Nations Funds for Children