



Workshop Narrative Report

Listening to Refugee Voices Towards Better Future for Refugees

Organised by

ActionAid Association (India)



Supported by

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1. **Title:** Listening to Refugee Voices: Towards Better Future for Refugees
2. **Date and Time:** Monday, 13th June 2022, 2:30 pm to 7:30 pm
3. **Location:** India International Centre, Delhi
4. **Background:**

The number of people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes due to war, violence, persecution or environmental calamities have been on the rise in the past 10 years. Even during the pandemic, when movement restrictions were abound and the international community had appealed for ceasefires to facilitate COVID response works, the absolute numbers of displaced people has been rising. By the end of 2020, 8.24 crore people or more than 1% of all people globally, were forcibly displaced. This sharp rise means that 1 out of every 95 person on earth in 2020 were forcibly displaced compared to 1 out of 159 in 2010.

India also has a significant number of refugees and stateless people, although determining their exact number can be difficult due to the lack of substantial legal framework concerning identification and registration of refugees in India. As per UNHCR reports, there were more than 2.1 lakh refugees or persons of concern residing within India at the end of October 2021. The same report also suggests that there has been a rise in asylum seekers approaching UNHCR India due to violence and instability in neighbouring countries of India.

India although having a long history of receiving refugees, mostly from neighbouring countries and from African nations, is not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. Instead 'refugees' in India are often governed by the jurisdiction laid down under the Indian Foreigner's Act 1946 and India's Citizenship Act passed in 1955 and amended several times thereafter, most recently in 2019. This puts refugees and asylum seekers arriving in India under the same bracket of foreigners, immigrants or tourists depending on their citizenship document or the lack of it. Despite this, India at different points of her history has granted certain rights to refugees and asylum seekers belonging to specific groups like the Tibetan community or Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka.



The complicated legal framework under which refugees live in India creates access barriers to basic rights of nutrition, education, healthcare and livelihood. Field et al. (2019) states that even those who hold various valid documents like refugee cards and long-term visas often face difficulties with respect to their rights of residency, education attainment or access to sustainable livelihoods. They lack access to public services and face harassment as ‘illegal immigrants’ in the absence of knowledge of legal provisions. This forces many refugees to resort to the informal livelihood options where they work under inhuman conditions and face violence too. Refugee children too are engaged in such work.

The lack of widely accepted legal documents is one of the major challenges that the refugees face while trying to lead sustainable livelihood in India. The government of India grants refugee status on a case by case basis and asylum seekers coming from countries which do not share a border with India have to first register themselves with the UNHCR offices in India. Upon registration, the UNHCR provides them with a blue coloured document that states that their refugee status is under consideration, but this blue document is also of no use when it comes to access to housing, finance or communication services. In recent years, the lack of Aadhaar cards has become a major challenge for refugees in accessing bank accounts or mobile phone connections.

Women refugees are worse-off when it comes to access to basic rights of livelihood, nutrition, education, etc due to their social position at the intersection of gender and refugee status. Women and girls make up an estimated 48% of all forcibly displaced people worldwide. The everyday structural discrimination and violence that women and girls face across the world are further exacerbated in times of conflict and displacement. They are often targeted for sexual abuse and exploitation and face rampant gender-based violence, with little recourse to authorities and legal mechanisms. ActionAid Association’s 2021 work titled “Women refugee voices from Asia and Africa: travelling for safety”, highlights the structural challenges that women who are forcibly displaced face and the inadequacies of the response of governments and other stakeholders, irrespective of the country of origin, ethnicity, and religion of the refugee community.

5. Program Schedule:

Time	Session	Resource Persons
2:30 pm onwards	Registration	
2:45 pm to 3:00 pm	Welcome Remarks	Kumkum Kumar, Head of Programmes, ActionAid Association
3:00 pm to 5:00 pm	Seeking Refuge: Stories of Hope, Resilience and Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puja Marwaha, CEO, Child Rights and You • Selin Mathews, Associate Protection Officer, UNHCR • Hindu Singh Sodha, Founder, Universal Just Action Society • Nasreen Chowdhury, Assistant Professor, Delhi University • Louis Albert, Regional Director, JRS South Asia • Siddhartha Pande, Programme Head, Save the Children
5:00 pm to 5:15 pm	Tea Break	
5:15 pm to 5:30 pm	Video Screening	
	Book Launch	
5:30 pm to 7:30 pm	Women Refugee Voices from Asia and Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandeep Chachra, Executive Director, ActionAid Association • Ephraim Tan, Head of Programmes, UNHCR India • Samia Zennadi, Co-Founder, APIC Editions • Puja Marwaha, CEO, Child Rights and You
7:30 pm onwards	High Tea	

6. Audience:

The workshop was attended by a variety of actors working on the issues of refugees and forcibly displaced communities from government, people's movements, civil society organisations, academia, media and international organisations. The workshop also brought together voices from the refugee and displaced communities residing across India. Members of the host communities from refugee settlements near Delhi also attended the workshop.



7. Learning Goals:

- To analyse the laws, policies and programmes and institutional mechanisms available to refugee communities for their stay, protection and welfare measure in the Indian context.
- To understand better the challenges faced by the different refugee groups in accessing basic needs and welfare provisions including nutrition, education, housing, healthcare and livelihoods, etc.
- To understand the challenges faced by women refugees due to their double marginalisation in terms of gender and refugee status.

8. Workshop Proceedings:

The workshop began with Ms Kumkum Kumar, Head of Programmes, ActionAid Association welcoming all participants. She set the context for the workshop by presenting the contemporary scale of displacement and forced migration across the globe. Even during the restrictive pandemic year 2020, as per reports by UNHCR-the UN Refugees Agency, 11.2 million people were forcibly displaced due to conflict, violence, persecution, and threat of war. This figure stood higher than what was reported for 2019 when the pandemic and its associated movement controls were still an unimaginable idea.

With the Taliban taking control of Afghanistan and military dictatorship returning to Myanmar, refugee movements across South Asia witnessed an enormous increase. The war in Ukraine since the beginning of 2022 brought back the refugee crisis to Europe. While conflicts in these three countries have emerged as significant causes of displacement of people, ongoing refugee crises have continued in West Asia and Africa. According to data from UNHCR, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide rose close to 90 million by the end of 2021, propelled by new waves of violence or protracted conflicts in countries including Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Myanmar, Nigeria, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition, the war in Ukraine displaced 8 million within the country this year and more than 6 million refugee movements from Ukraine have been registered.



After stating the figures related to forced displacements across the globe, Ms Kumkum Kumar reflected on India's history in dealing with refugees. The Indian people have been welcoming of refugees for long. Almost a thousand years back Zoroastrians who were persecuted in their homeland found their refuge in the Indian subcontinent. In comparatively recent times, India also welcomed refugees from Pakistan during partition and Bangladesh when the new nation was being born. Although not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, India has been receiving refugees, mostly from the neighbouring countries and Africa. Two refugee communities in particular – the Sri Lankan Tamils and Tibetans have received various forms of support from the union and state governments.

However, the legal framework for recognition and acceptance as refugees in India is complicated. Refugees in India are often governed by the jurisdiction laid down under the Indian Foreigner's Act, 1946 and India's Citizenship Act passed in 1955 and amended several times thereafter, most recently in 2019. This puts refugees and asylum seekers arriving in India under the same bracket of foreigners, immigrants or tourists depending on their citizenship document or the lack of it. With this context in mind, Ms Kumkum Kumar welcomed to the dias the eminent panellists for the first session of the workshop.

Ms Puja Marwaha, the Chief Executive Officer of CRY chaired the first session of the workshop. She started the discussion with reflecting on the statistics related to the global refugee population. She went on to share a memory from her recent visit to Kochi in the southern Indian state of Kerala, where she had visited a synagogue whose walls were painted with murals depicting how the locals had welcomed Jews persecuted from their homeland to live and practice their faith in the Indian subcontinent. With this picture in mind, she opened the discussion and asked the panel members to deliberate on where India stands now. Is India still welcoming of refugees or has India, like many other nations, become more restrictive and protectionist?

The first panellist to respond was Ms Selin Susan Mathews from UNHCR – the UN Refugee Agency. She began her presentation with discussing the importance of celebrating World Refugee Day. Every year on 20th June, World Refugee Day is celebrated to honour



the strength, resilience and courage of people who have been forced to flee their home due to conflict or fear of persecution. It is also an occasion to celebrate the empathy and compassion of people belonging to the host communities who have been welcoming of refugee populations. Ms Susan also shared the statement made by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, who had said that the count of people forcibly displaced reaching 100 million is a record that should not have been set and should act as a wakeup call for governments world over.

Refugee and asylum seekers have multiple challenges to face and it is not easy to rebuild one's life in a new country. The major challenges that they face includes but not limited to language barrier, lack of adequate housing and sanitation facilities, lack of access to basic services like education and health, including psycho-social healthcare due to the trauma that they have undergone in their forced displacement. Access to decent work, economic opportunities and financial inclusion also are low for refugee populations. Many face the threat of unnecessary detention, arrest and probable deportation due to lack of documentation. Trafficking becomes another risk for refugees, especially women and children. The COVID-19 pandemic has further multiplied these challenges for refugees and asylum seekers.

Refugees are not a monolith community. There are age, gender, racial, religious and other intersectional identities that play into the lives and living conditions of refugees. Understanding these specific challenges and taking into account their perspectives is crucial for framing any policies for refugee communities. Refugees and displaced people are best placed to know what is best for them. Participatory methods need to be developed and used to understand what is needed to be done.

Ms Susan said that although women and girls constitute half of the refugee population, they are often clubbed together as a minority group along with the elderly, people with disabilities and other ethnic minorities. Refugee women and girls are especially vulnerable in conflict and crises as gender inequalities are exacerbated during such events. Despite the vulnerabilities faced by refugee women and girls, they are not passive victims. Women refugees often run crèches, care for orphaned or lost children and provide safe spaces for



other refugee women who face sexual and gender based violence. Not only that, women refugees also run small businesses and manage the household expenses, with however little they have to spend.

As numbers of refugees continue to rise and reach new records with increasing lengths of time in displacement situations, finding sustainable solutions for refugees become critical. Most refugees want to work and use their skills in order to provide for their families and make their own decisions on their lives, finances and futures. A resilience based humanitarian approach by engaging host communities and refugees are needed to develop and implement policies to resolve the challenges of the day. This helps in developing programmes that address the causes of dignity and compassion in aid. Ms Susan concluded by saying that humanitarian response needs to move away from short term aid based on needs, such as handing out food and blankets, to long term solutions that leverage the skills and capacities of refugee populations, so that they are better set to achieve sustainable social and economic success.

Professor Nasreen Chowdhury was next to respond who examined the question of refuge and sanctuary through the lens of belonging. She begins by saying that refugees' perception of a sense of 'belonging' to the host country and the host population, is the result of shared ethnicity and culture. But at the same time, the perception of the asylum state that refugees imply 'temporary' status or 'uprootedness' is an impediment to the interests of the refugees. The assertion that refugees are 'uprooted' and 'alien' describes the precarious status of the refugees in the asylum state. This sense of uprootedness is tied to the loss of identity, including cultural identity. The loss of homeland is readily linked to a presumed loss of cultural identity which is often 're-rooted' with ties to 'home' or 'homeland'. Because of the lack of favourable status in their country of asylum and of the innate need to belong, refugee communities look inward and seek reaffirmation of their 'lost' identities while in exile.

Scholars have different opinions on whether refugee identity should be tied to the territory of their country of origin. Those who believe that belonging is tied to land tend to perceive repatriation as a means of reasserting the sense of 'belonging'. Whereas others tend to

believe that ‘uprooted’ identities can be ‘re-rooted’ in exile and that refugees should not seek reaffirmation of ‘old’ identities through acts of repatriation; rather, they should assume new ties in their country of asylum through acts of emplacement. Few studies on refugees and transnationalism challenge ‘rooted-ness’ and territoriality as the defining point in population movement. Recent research raises a critical voice against viewing repatriation as an essential process of ‘uprooted’/‘de-territorialized’ identities, seek to regain lost identity in countries of origin.



1: Mr Hindu Singh Sodha speaking during the first session of the workshop

In South Asia, the state formation, shared several common trajectories of belonging. The Sri Lankan and East Pakistan experiences of state formation have had adopted models of cultural homogenization with centralized and strong unitary states, which contributed to persistent tensions between political structures and the aspirations of some minority groups resulting in separatist struggles fuelled by state repression and violence, which, in turn, created the conditions of refugee flow. India was a common host to these two refugee



groups. The Chakmas and Tamils were housed in different campsites in Tripura and Tamil Nadu, respectively. The issue of ‘belonging’ of refugees in exile was determined by the asylum state, a determination that also shaped the trajectories of repatriation. Refugee claims on belonging are based on the perception that refugees have equal rights during exile by virtue of the shared ethnicity and culture between refugee groups and the host population. Moreover, the patterns of repatriation can be explained at multiple levels, leading to certain questions.

After Professor Chowdhury spoke on how cultural links and identities determine refugee flow and asylum status, Mr Hindu Singh Sodha threw light on an often forgotten group of people who are now refugees in India – Hindus who stayed back in Pakistan during partition. During the Indo-Pak war of 1965, more than 90,000 Hindus from Pakistan had migrated to India. Although there was an agreement by the government of the two countries to repatriate them back to Pakistan, none of the migrants decided to go back. Subsequently refugee status was accorded to these groups of people who had fled Pakistan in fear of religious persecution. Gradually, more and more asylum seekers from Pakistan have come to India since then. In spite of that, there have been no direct efforts by the government of India or the state governments to set up camps for these refugees since the late 1970s as had been done in the case of partition.

The current movement of asylum seekers across the border has been impacted by the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution which gave special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Mr Sodha said that, since the abrogation, the Pakistani government has stopped the train services between Pakistan and India and the only option left for asylum seekers to come to India is by crossing the Wagah border by foot. These asylum seekers come to India by getting a tourist visa or a pilgrimage visa, which is easier to obtain. Once they have entered India, they have the option to visit the FRRO within the duration of their visa and declare that they are being persecuted due to their religious identity in their home country. The refugees and asylum seekers from Pakistan face uncertain future when they are in India. This is mainly because these groups do not migrate together as a family. While certain members of the family migrate first and obtain their asylum seeker or refugee status in India, others stay back. Gradually over a process of around 20 years, the family as



a whole get to migrate to India on some visas that they can obtain and seek refugee status and apply for citizenship in India.

Mr Sodha, who was once himself a refugee from Pakistan, pointed out why India is morally obligated to grant refugee and citizenship to minorities fleeing religious persecution from Pakistan. He said that at the time of partition, there was no referendum by the people to state where they would want to stay. The partition was a rather top-down process which eventually ripped apart families. After the new states were formed, if one faced religious persecution in the country that they had chosen or forced to choose to live, it is very natural that they would try to migrate to the other country where they have familial ties. Mr Sodha also mentioned that India had already set a precedent when the government had accepted refugees of south Asian origin from Uganda who faced persecution in the African nation. Thereby, he ended by stating that the Government of India needs a sustainable policy dealing with the issues of refugees coming from any part of the world.

The next panellist, Father Louis Albert, spoke on the issues of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka. He started by saying that contrary to popular perceptions, there are cultural differences between the host Tamil population and refugee Tamil groups arriving from Sri Lanka. The year 2023 will mark four decades since the first refugees arrived in India from Sri Lanka. Currently there are three different generations of refugees living in India. The first or the oldest generation were born, brought up and married in Sri Lanka and they came to India because of their ethnic conflict. This generation still long to go back to their home in Sri Lanka where they can cherish their roots and culture.

The second generation were born in Sri Lanka but came to India when they were infants. They have grown up in India and now have married in this country as well. The first generation were victims of a majoritarian ideology in Sri Lanka, while the second generation are victims of xenophobia in India, post the assassination of the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. But as per Fr Albert, the third generation of refugees have the worst condition – as they are victims of their own identity. They do not find a sense of belonging either in India or in Sri Lanka. Most of the refugees from their generation put their hard-earned



savings in getting themselves transported to another country, sometimes illegally, in order to start a new life.

All hope is not lost for the Tamil refugee communities in India. The state government has started offering refugees the options to enrol themselves at public colleges and universities and also providing hostels to them. The government has also decided to upgrade their houses from thatched roofs to cemented roofs and has kept a corpus aside for the livelihood generation of refugee women. Fr Albert also pointed out the role the refugee women from Sri Lanka played in the aftermath of the tsunami in 2004. Several NGOs and CSOs had trained refugee women to become counsellors who then provided counselling services to the Indian people who had lost their family members due to the tsunami. The coping mechanism that refugees have learned due to their situation helped them in empathising with others who were facing humanitarian crisis.

The last speaker for the first session, Mr Siddhant Pande spoke about the particular vulnerabilities that children in refuge face. Access to education becomes the biggest challenge for refugee children, not just in India but also abroad. The biggest challenge that refugee children face in attaining education is the language barrier in the host country, especially when they have no ethnic or linguistic connect with the host community. Children also face acute shortage of food and are vulnerable to fall victims of child labour and human trafficking.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the problems faced by refugee children. Refugee children in particular did not have access to online modes of education and hence like many other poor and vulnerable children, they had dropped out from school during the pandemic. As income had significantly reduced during the pandemic among the refugee groups, children had become victims of child labour. Child marriage and vulnerability to human trafficking had also increased among girl children belonging to refugee groups.

The second session the workshop began with a video screening of a collection of images from refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh. Photojournalist Mahmud Rahman took these photographs during September to November 2017. These photographs were

published in ActionAid's book titled 'Women Refugee Voices from Asia and Africa: Travelling for Safety'. The book has been edited by ActionAid Association and published by Routledge. The book was launched at the workshop with many of the authors and contributors being part of the launch ceremony.



2: Launch of the book "Women Refugee Voices from Asia and Africa"

The second session of the workshop was chaired by Sandeep Chachra, Executive Director of ActionAid Association (India). The other speakers for the session included Ms Samia Zenadi from APIC Publishers, Algeria, Mr Ephraim Tan from UNHCR India and Ms Puja Marwaha of CRY. Mr Chachra started by saying that the global refugee system seems to be failing the refugees and asylum seekers as it struggles to cope with the challenges of large-scale displacements, mixed migration flows of asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons, and migrants, and protracted situations of conflict and displacement. Moreover, a growing number of people, including displaced women and children and refugees living in slums in urban areas, are unable to access the protection and support mechanisms set up under this system.



Women and girls make up an estimated 50 per cent of all forcibly displaced people worldwide. It is widely agreed that they are extremely vulnerable in displacement contexts. The everyday structural discrimination and violence that women and girls face across the world gets further exacerbated in times of conflict and displacement. They are often targeted for sexual abuse and exploitation and face rampant gender-based violence, with little recourse to authorities and legal mechanisms. In addition, they are denied or are unable to access services and resources as well as education and job opportunities. When people are forcibly displaced, and resources and opportunities are at a premium, women and girls are usually the first ones to bear the brunt. It is widely acknowledged that addressing vulnerabilities specific to women is central to effective responses to refugee movements.

There are several international resolutions which emphasise the need to enhance protection for refugee women and girls and enable them as independent actors. The Conclusion on Refugee Women adopted by the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in its 39th session in 1988, for example, elaborates on the special vulnerability of refugee women and the problems they face, notably in the area of physical security. It calls for the need to promote the participation of refugee women as agents as well as beneficiaries of programmes on their behalf.

More recently, the Global Compact on Refugees adopted by the United Nations General Assembly states that women and girls may experience particular gender-related barriers that call for an adaptation of responses in the context of large refugee situations. Yet standard policy approaches to refugee situations have been largely homogenising. They do not consider the differential needs and circumstances of women, sexual minorities, children, and persons with disabilities. This allows for discrimination, exclusion, and violence based on gender, sexuality, caste, class, ability, and other similar factors which may exist within refugee populations to be ignored or worsen. It also leads to the invisibilisation of certain sections of the population to a system which cannot see them, thereby depriving them of access to aid, education, healthcare, and livelihoods. For example, in most refugee responses, registration to receive aid and other services is done in the name of the head of the household, typically a male member, regardless of the power

dynamic within the household which can be critical in determining whether women can access these services.

When one talks to the refugee women, the detrimental effects of gaps in protection policies and welfare programmes are laid bare. These women belong to different age groups and are of diverse nationalities, religions, and ethnicities, but their experiences in displacement are remarkably similar. They have faced tremendous atrocities and hardships, both in the process of fleeing to safety and seeking asylum and while living in camps or slum-like situations in new countries. They remain at high risk of intimate partner violence as well as sexual and gender-based violence by other men from within the communities or from local populations in host countries. They are very likely to be excluded from decision making spaces due to societal constraints and patriarchal norms and because they are not seen as being representative of their communities. In situations where women are keen to or have been pushed into taking leadership roles by their circumstances, for instance in the case of women who may have lost their husbands in conflict, they are not provided the avenues and means to fulfil them.



3: Ms Samia Zenadi joining virtually from Algeria for the second session of the workshop



Most of the women we spoke with do not have access to decent livelihoods and their families are either entirely dependent on aid or on the meagre incomes of the male head of the household. This further impedes the choices and freedoms available to women. They and their families are thus trapped in a cycle of poverty and violence that is not only pernicious for women but even for the families and communities. Despite being out of the dire straits that forced them to move, they are beset by a near-constant state of uncertainty and anxiety about whether their future generations might lead better lives.

What these women want is to be able to earn a living, to feel safe in camps, to be able to access education for their children, and healthcare for their families. They want to be able to lead a dignified life without fear of being harassed by authorities or of being detained or arrested.

The international community has attempted to come together and address these concerns and move forward. In adopting the Global Compact, member states of the United Nations committed themselves to easing pressures on host countries, enhancing refugee self-reliance, expanding access to third country solutions, and supporting conditions in countries of origin for safe and dignified return. The New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants has also asked countries to review policies which criminalise borders and detain asylum seekers while their applications are being processed and to work towards ending the practice of detaining children.

Despite countries reiterating their commitment to refugees, the most divisive systemic issues persist. There is still no roadmap on how countries will share the responsibility of hosting refugees, including financing in the short and long term, and how governments would be held accountable for their obligations. Given that 85 per cent of the world's refugees are concentrated in low- and middle-income countries, the pressure on the system is immense. But the total population of refugees is only 0.35 per cent of the global population, and, therefore, refugee sharing arrangements would greatly assist in releasing this pressure. There are promising signs. In recent years, a few governments have adopted innovative policies to accommodate and integrate refugees, including facilitating their absorption in the formal workforce. Some countries have also experimented with regional models, aligning their policies with those of their neighbouring countries to ensure better



policy outcomes. Furthermore, there is a fair amount of research happening on the ground in refugee camps and at the sites of displacement, analysing what works and what does not. A combination of these policies and learnings adapted to local conditions and to the needs of communities could help attempts to transform the system along.

In his work, for example, Alexander Betts focuses on the impossible choices that refugees are presented with, including encampment, usually in bleak locations with very limited prospects, urban destitution, or perilous journeys. He then presents ideas for expanding their choices through enabling environments, which include access to education, connectivity, electricity, transportation, capital, and livelihoods, and setting up economic zones which allow refugees to work. He also talks of a preference matching model which would enable refugees' destination preferences to be matched with state preferences based on certain factors such as skills and languages. He explores the idea of providing humanitarian visas as a legal means for asylum seekers to travel and avoid irregular, perilous journeys.

On the other hand, the World Refugee Council is pushing for the institutional transformation of the refugee regime, beginning with the setting up of a Global Action Network for the Forcibly Displaced. They have also suggested that the norms for refugee response be reiterated and expanded through the development of an additional protocol to the 1951 Refugee Convention and an evidence collection body be established in the form of an Intergovernmental Panel on Refugees and Displaced Persons. On the questions of accountability and finance, the council has recommended repurposing seized assets from regimes whose actions have forced people to flee and using them for the benefit of affected people and establishing new forms of financing such as refugee sovereign bonds and equity investment funds.

The refugee system needs to be more responsive and decentralised with a robust partnership between refugee communities, governments, private sector, media, and civil society. It needs to evolve in conjunction with better migration policies as the violation of the human rights of migrants has a cascading effect on other groups on the move. All migration must be in safe and dignified conditions. And people who are displaced due to persecution,

conflict, or environmental degradation must be provided special protection in the form of safe escape routes, access to asylum-seeking processes, first aid and life-saving assistance, housing, and other basic services such as education and healthcare, and livelihood support. Good refugee policies are politically, economically, strategically, and morally defensible. Politically, if governments manage their borders well and establish transparent mechanisms to accept, process, and resettle refugees, they can prevent refugee inflows from rising to crisis proportions and assuage any fear among their citizens. Their willingness to respond in this manner is also a signal to other countries, particularly their neighbours, and can induce positive incentives for cooperation. Economically, the effective integration of forcibly displaced people can contribute to economic development in the host country, and alleviate potential costs associated with providing infrastructure, services, and resources in camp conditions. Strategically, the resolution of conflict situations can depend on finding durable solutions for displaced populations. A swift and efficient response to refugee movements can also be vital to maintaining peace and security in the neighbourhood as most refugees flee to neighbouring countries for asylum. Morally, the protection of persecuted, conflict-affected people is one of the basic tenets of humanity. To deny them asylum and sufficient assistance to live in dignity and security is a violation of fundamental human rights.



4: Participants discussing the policy futures for refugees in India



At the heart of these policies should be the millions of refugees who are looking for protection and for a chance to rebuild their lives. We need to see them more clearly and hear their stories more closely. The more stories we listen, the more we challenge our prejudices.

9. Key Takeaways:

- Refugee and asylum seekers have multiple challenges to face and it is not easy to rebuild one's life in a new country. The major challenges that they face includes but not limited to language barrier, lack of adequate housing and sanitation facilities, lack of access to basic services like education and health, including psycho-social healthcare due to the trauma that they have undergone in their forced displacement. Access to decent work, economic opportunities and financial inclusion also are low for refugee populations.
- Refugees are not a monolith community. There are age, gender, racial, religious and other intersectional identities that play into the lives and living conditions of refugees. Understanding these specific challenges and taking into account their perspectives is crucial for framing any policies for refugee communities.
- Refugees and displaced people are best placed to know what is best for them. Participatory methods need to be developed and used to understand what is needed to be done.
- Refugee women and girls are especially vulnerable in conflict and crises as gender inequalities are exacerbated during such events. Despite the vulnerabilities faced by refugee women and girls, they are not passive victims.
- Most refugees want to work and use their skills in order to provide for their families and make their own decisions on their lives, finances and futures. A resilience based humanitarian approach by engaging host communities and refugees are needed to develop and implement policies to resolve the challenges of the day.
- Humanitarian response needs to move away from short term aid based on needs, such as handing out food and blankets, to long term solutions that leverage the skills and



capacities of refugee populations, so that they are better set to achieve sustainable social and economic success.

- The refugee system needs to be more responsive and decentralised with a robust partnership between refugee communities, governments, private sector, media, and civil society. It needs to evolve in conjunction with better migration policies as the violation of the human rights of migrants has a cascading effect on other groups on the move. All migration must be in safe and dignified conditions.

10. Expense Summary:

Please see attached budget utilisation report