
The Impact of Afghan Refugees on the local people of Balochistan

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Abstract

The present research examines the impacts of Afghan refugees on the local people of Balochistan. The prolonged refugees had generated sever changes in the social, economic, environmental, political and cultural aspects on the host society. The factors included in the study were; health, education, economic, shelter, social disorder, insecurity, unemployment, spread of arms, cheap labour force. Universe of the study was Balochistan. The nature of study was qualitative and purposive sampling was used to collect the data. Tool of the data was an interview schedule. The interviews were conducted with the local administrative personnel's and key informants of the selected areas. It is found that protracted refugees had left out drastic impacts on the local population both socially and economically. Their health, education, economic activities, water and sheltering were badly affected by the refugees. The local people felt insecure in their own residential areas due to the presence of refugees.

Key Words: Afghan Refugees, social impacts, cultural impacts, economic impacts, Repatriation.

Introduction

Refugees are one of the key factors in the distribution and composition of the population growth in a country and it leaves out drastic changes in the socio-economic, environmental, political and cultural aspects of the host communities. However, the effects on the mentioned aspects are seemingly insufficient as documented in the local, national and international levels, mainly in the third world countries because the data required for the assessment of impacts has never been collected or published sufficiently, mainly the negative impacts of protracted refugees. The protracted refugees in poor developing countries are considered burden and are the key actors bringing out social changes in the country.

According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (“Refugee Convention”), a refugee is a person “who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country”. The Protocol to the Refugee Convention of 1967 prolonged the concept of a refugee and by regional conventions in Africa and Latin America, to take into consideration of people who had escaped battle or other forms of violence in their birthplaces.

In the Economic Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) area Iraqis are the largest population of convention refugees. Refugee Convention did not protect the vast majority of the Palestinian refugees as well, which will be explained in this section (UN, 2009).

Worldwide, 68.5 million people were displaced forcefully owing to oppression, conflict, war or generalized violence by the end of 2017. Hence, the record of the forcibly displaced population remained at a high record in 2017 as well. In spite of this, the forcefully displaced population were 68.5 million and the refugee population was 25.4 million. From this 25.4 million refugees, 19.9 million refugees are under the mandate of UNHCR and the remaining 5.4 million Palestine refugees come under the mandate of URWA. Internally Displace people are 40.0 million and asylum seekers are 3.1 million.

Subsequently, the biggest refugees’ population of the world are comprised of Syrian (6.3 million), Afghanistan (2.6 million), South Sudan (2.4million), Myanmar (1.2 million), Somalia (986,400 people), Sudan (694,600 people), DR. Of the Congo (620,800 people), Central African Republic (545,500 people), Eritrea (486,200 people) and Burundi (439,300 people) (UNHCR, 2018).

According to UNCHR official webpage, 1,395,592 Afghan refugees were registered in Pakistan till August 2018. Among them 801,221 lived in KPK, 319,242 lived in Balochistan, 161,042 lived in Panjab, 63,104 lived in Sindh, 33,340 lived in Islamabad, 13,735 lived in FATA, 3,903 lived in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and 5 lived in Gilgit Baltistan. (UNHCR, 2018 August).

It won’t be unjust to claim that most prevailing problems in Balochistan are caused by Afghan Refugees. Local Baloch and Pashtun communities, who once enjoyed cordial relationships with

one another, have entered into a long-lasting tussle just because of Afghan Refugees. In present time, Afghan refugees are illegally settled in every nook and corner of Balochistan and creating a number of problems.

Fundamentally, the settlement of Afghan refugees had paved the way for terrorists who have badly shattered the peace of Balochistan and the number of militant activities have also increased to a greater extent. The tragedies of Bomb-blast, target killing, abduction for ransom, dacoits and robberies are now happening on daily basis. The local pacifist people are now in a state of fear and aversion.

Moreover, the presence of Afghan refugees had increased the ratio of drug smuggling in the province such as charas, opium is planted and prepared in Afghanistan and are smuggled to Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and European countries by using the land route of Chaghi District. Tens of thousands of Kilograms of the narcotics are smuggled overnight to Pakistan and to other countries through their agents based in Chaghi District. This has badly affected the youth of Chaghi who are addicted to drugs in abundance.

Similarly, a huge number of Afghan Refugees have settled in various areas of Balochistan and have acquired complete patronage by local Pashtun political parties, which is, through a pre-planned conspiracy, converting the local Baloch population in minority. This illusion converted into reality when Mehmood Khan Achakzai claimed Quetta to be Pashtun dominated area (Hassani, 2016).

The Afghan refugee continuous cross-border migration from Afghanistan to Pakistan is also one of the causes contributing to the spread of polio disease in the country. Vaccinating all the children living in refugee camps and nearby villages in the hostile area along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border is very difficult and mainly cases of polio is emerging from these areas. Afghanis are also involved in illegal money transferring through Hundi and Hawala. Around 45 illegal money changers were arrested in 2015 only, allegedly involved in supporting terrorist organisations who were receiving funds through these money changers. Illegal money is also generated from stolen vehicles that are either sold in parts or half bodies, known as Kabuli parts, which is damaging the legal importers who pay millions of rupees in taxes and duties on import. This illegal channel is on the rise in Balochistan, Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Lahore and other car spare parts markets. The cars that are stolen from any city will be dissembled and distributed in these markets by parts (Khan, 2016).

Literature Review

Watol & Assefa (2018) found that refugees had both advantages and disadvantages. Socially the host community got knowledge and skill from the presence of refugees but they promoted crime and theft. Economically the host community benefitted by selling the local products and buying goods and services but food prices hiked suddenly. Smith (2016) explored the negative impacts of refugees ranging from xenophobia to the rise of the far right, increased criminal activities and shattering effects on tourism in islands. And positive impacts are high fertility due to which young and skilled workers are contributing to economic activities. Jordon Independent Economic Watch (2015) reported that Syrian refugees increased the costs of different sectors like

education, health, shelter, water, energy and housing. They also increase pressure on public finances, threatened the sustainability of quality service provision in the most affected governorates and the most underprivileged part of the Jordanian population vulnerability had worsened. Peter Kirui, P & Mwaruvie, J (2012) Refugee and local community usually battle over the resources, the system of governance and other varied interests. A major security threat to the host country is posed by the refugees. Rahman, U (2010) Refugees created a security dilemma and strain for the host country. Close to this they are associated with arms and drug dealing for the assets and have solid coordination with Islamic fanatics' groups in Bangladesh. However, these refugees had created various economic, social and security problems for the host country. The illegal businesses were common and cheap labouring as well which resulted in lashes and conflict between the hosts and refugees. Additionally, anti-social activities were on the ascent among the unregistered Rohingya evacuee community. The social indecencies in the Rohingya people: business sexual misuse, counterfeit relational unions, the phoney proposition of work, and the predominance of explicitly transmitted contaminations (STI) undermine the neighbourhood public activity and harm the steadiness of the Bangladesh-Myanmar fringe area. Sanjugta (2002) these concerns are the negative impacts of mass refugee influxes which they have on the economy and political security of the country. Even some of the developing nations face socio-cultural change due to the refugee influxes like; a sense of identity is challenged and the more chances of ethnic, religious, racial, linguistic or ideological strains between both communities. Arif Hassan and Mansoor Raza (2011) Afghan Refugees boomed the population of Pakistan and increased the number of Pashtoon which strengthened the Pashtoon culture. There were massive opium cultivation and heroin manufacture in Pakistan and Afghanistan associated with this migration. The culture of heroin and Kalashnikov was speeded due to the trade of heroin and guns in Pakistan. The ultimate result shambled the democratic system and made the youth drug addicts throughout the country. Beside this afghan became the major transporters and helped the poor Afghanis in intercity and intercity buses. The Afghans were unskilled but worked for lower wages. This caused high unemployment rate for the locals. Afghan also invested in fisheries and became boat owners, crews, watchmen, and labours in fish harbours of the country. Ghufuran, Nasreen (2008) Displaced people made the genuine and compromising issue for Pakistan including; economic burden, law & order issues, uplifted drug and Kalashnikov culture, beset demography of N.W.F.P and Baluchistan, stacked urban conveniences, increased joblessness and control over independent companies, especially in NWFP and Baluchistan.

Objectives of the Study

- To explore the socio-economic impact of the afghan refugees on the local people of Balochistan.
- To suggest recommendations for reducing the phenomenon.

Methods and Procedure

The present study was qualitative and exploratory in nature. Tool for the data collection was an interview schedule which consisted purely on open ended questions. The universe of the study was Balochistan and sample was taken from five districts of Balochistan i.e. Quetta, Pashin, Killah Abdullah, Loralahi and Chaghi. The data were analyzed thematically.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Awareness regarding the Afghan Refugees Presence

All of the stakeholders were very much aware of the fact that Afghan refugees were living in their areas because most of them belonged to these districts. Majority of them disclosed that, when they were in their teens, they were told by their parents and other family members about the migrants coming from Afghanistan. So, they all were aware of Afghan refugees inhabiting in their neighbourhoods.

Protracted Afghan refugees

All stakeholders viewed that the Afghan refugees have been living in their premises since 1979 - 1980 after the invasion of USSR in Afghanistan. Although, one of the participants added that after the partition of Pakistan and India, they came here in the form of nomads. In that time Samad Khan Achak Zai had defended the refugees whereas Nawab Khair Bux Marri told that Pakistan did not have sufficient resources to resettle them so why would they be given permission to live in these regions. After the Russian invasion in 1979, the exodus of Afghan refugees transpired. So, it was quite clear from their responses that the Afghans were here from very early on and came in the form of nomads first but after the invasion of Russia, the bulk of Afghans moved to Pakistan especially in Baluchistan.

Afghan refugees as burden for the society

Out of all the stakeholders, only a couple of respondents denied that Afghan refugees were a burden for the society but all the others stated that they had become a burden for the society. One of them expressed his view that like every other issue there were some positive aspects and some negative aspects of these refugees. So, as a citizen of Pakistan, they all were of the opinion that, whenever the refugees come, they do share available resources of the locals although they also contribute in the local businesses. The UNHCR, besides refugees, was also contributing to the local community in educational, health and other aspects of their lives. The stakeholders were of the opinion that they cannot say that the refugees were a burden, although local people had some reservations regarding them. They were of the opinion that refugees had destroyed their agriculture, forests and other areas. The others view that the refugees had also been contributing in the economy whereas UN agencies and others had also provided them aids that had helped them in the health and education sector. However, now refugees own most of the businesses, complexes, markets and capitals of these cities which is a very difficult situation for the locals to accept. And political leaders viewed that they are also booming the population of the province due to which sociodemographic changes occurred in the province throughout. Thus, refugees were considered to be burden by the majority of the stakeholders as they had become the key

players in all of the institutions whether it was political, economic, social or cultural aspects of their communities.

Proportion of Afghan refugees in comparison to the natives

The participants had a difference of opinions in this question. Some of them told that the proportion of Afghan refugees in their area was low as compared to the natives of the area, while few of them replied that their number of refugees and locals were about the same while the remaining stakeholders informed that the number of refugees in their areas was very high as compared to the locals. One of the participants told that the large proportion of refugees was Pashtoon, especially in Killah Abdullah, Pashin, Loralahi and Quetta. Thus, it can be said that the proportion of the Afghan refugees in Pashtoon areas was higher than the other areas of Balochistan. Afghan refugees had left their camps and had shifted to the cities and urban centres. According to the Commissioner, the Afghan Refugees in Balochistan are of two kinds. One of them was permanently living in Balochistan as refugees whereas the other ones were those who were travelling on a daily basis from the Pak-Afghan borders. So, the numbers of Afghans increase or decrease on a daily basis and had no concrete data which could tell the exact proportion of refugees. But most of the political leaders rejected the official figures and told that refugees are more than 40lack in the provinces and they are increasing on a daily bases.

Refugees' registration under the UNHCR or any government/ agencies

Out of all the stakeholders' majority of them revealed that the Afghan refugees were registered in their regions, while others told that some refugees had registered themselves and some were not registered yet. According to the definition given by the UNHCR, external relations officer, a refugee is a person that is registered under the NADRA or UNHCR but there were many illegal immigrants who were not registered. One of the participants explained that there were three kinds of refugees in Balochistan. One that had received national identity card of Pakistan, second were those who received PoR card from NADRA and third ones were those who were living as illegal migrants. Thus, it was observed that all of the Afghan refugees were not registered by either government of Pakistan or UN agency.

Reasons that Refugees joined this area or Community

Most of the stakeholders expressed that the Afghan refugees came due to the ongoing war in Afghanistan after the Russian invasion in 1979. The Pakistani government had opened the borders after bringing a change in its policy on the humanitarian ground. One of the contributors aided that there were two factors which brought these refugees in this society. The push factors were the civil war in Afghanistan and the pull factors were language and cultural similarities, cross border trades and cross borders relatives, as well as the business interests, had also brought these people into Balochistan. It was observed that the similarity in culture, language, religion and tribes were positive factors besides the interests in cross- border businesses which enticed the Afghans to settle in the different areas of Balochistan. These factors had motivated them and a great deal of support was given for not only living in Balochistan for a period of time but also supported them to secure their homeland from the invasion. Pakistani people gave their love,

affection and hospitality to the refugees as well as a determination to fight for the sake of religion.

Refugees boomed community's population

All of the stakeholders agreed that the Afghan refugees had increased their community's population. The refugees had their families before migration and after migration, their children got married and started their own families, therefore, they also had their share of an increase in the human population in these communities.

Situation of health, water and education accessibility after the arrival of refugees

Most of the respondents had explained that the community's existing infrastructure had been used by the Afghan refugees which had put the burden, mainly, on the existing infrastructure including education, health and water resources. The Commissioner of the Afghan Refugees stated that the Afghan refugees were provided with separate facilities by the government of Baluchistan with the help of UNHCR. The coalition of government with UNHCR initiated a project named RAHA to provide basic necessities to the refugees and locals of that area. The Commissioner claimed that 80% of the project was beneficial to the locals whereas only 20% of the project benefited the refugees in those areas. UNHCR disagreed with the commissioners' claim and pointed out that the existing resources of the local population had been affected by the refugees' arrival. In summarization, the health facilities had been used by the refugees besides the lack of beds and other shortage of facilities in the hospitals of these areas. Water shortage in these areas after the influx of refugees and educational institution burden overloaded as well because also used by the refugees' children.

Advantages and disadvantage of Afghan refugees' influxes on local people of Baluchistan

All of the stakeholders explained the advantages and disadvantages of the influx of refugees on the indigenous population of Baluchistan. According to them, the advantages were; learning of labour and marketing skills, business skills, boosted up the agricultural production, boosted the local markets with export materials, cheap export materials' availability in markets and food products availability within a reasonable price range as they were imported from Afghanistan. The disadvantages were; involvement in social evils, homosexuality, drugs smuggling, conflicts with local people, snatching, robbery, sense of nostalgia and homesickness were largely found in them. Besides, they started militant organizations like the Taliban, TTP etc. and were involved in anti-state activities. Moreover, the crime rate multiplied, loss of respect and identification, loss of tolerance in society, lands & personal properties were occupied, illegal occupation of resources of the local people. Aside from all these problems they were also involved in estate marketing in order to launder money. However, it was clear from the responses of the stakeholders that the presence of Afghan refugees had both advantages and disadvantages for the local communities. However, the disadvantages were more as compared to the advantages of creating more problems for the local people instead of benefitting them. A couple of the representatives of administrative side expressed that if one had to talk in terms of percentages then out of the 100%; the Afghan refugees had added 70% of the disadvantages and 30% of the advantages for the local people of Baluchistan.

Afghan refugees' influx affected the daily wages of local labours

All of the stakeholders agreed that the Afghan refugees had a severe effect on the daily wages of their local labour class. The main reason behind is that the Afghan refugees worked for lower wages as compared to the locals. Besides the low wage aspect, they were more skilled in other aspects like; catering, construction, housekeeping, agriculture in comparison to the local labourers. Afghans were more hardworking than the local people consequently they effortlessly captured the labour market.

Afghan refugees' arrival increased the unemployment rate in Baluchistan

Some of the stakeholders denied the notion that Afghan refugees' arrival had increased the unemployment rate in Baluchistan although some of them assured that Afghanis had increased the overall employment opportunities in Baluchistan. They explained that Afghan refugees were mostly engaged in private sector activities whether that was labour (both skilled & unskilled) or business whereas they even occupied some governmental organizations.

The presence of refugees increased the price of food products in Baluchistan

Most of the stakeholders did not agree that the presence of Afghan refugees had increased the price of food products in Baluchistan. They believed that the increase in the prices of the products was a global phenomenon and refugees were not responsible for the spikes in prices of food products. However, some of the stakeholders were believed that the presence of Afghan refugee had definitely given the increase in the prices of the food products in Baluchistan. They clarified that as most of the agricultural production and businesses were owned by refugees, therefore, they had hand in the hiked prices of the products in the local markets.

Social alienation, refugees have created in local people

Most of the stakeholders replied with the "no comments" answer hence, reserving their opinions regarding this matter. Some of the people enlightened that the Afghan refugees had generated a high level of social alienation among the locals; this was attributed towards the presence of the refugees in the society which has lost the respect, tolerance, identification among the people which they had before the arrival of refugees. This situation had rendered the local people restless, and the stranger to each other which had, in turn, gave rise to the crime rate in the society.

Social strains and insecurities refugees have created in Baluchistan

All the stakeholders except a couple; told that the refugees had not created any strain and security issues in the Baluchistan because the refugees were innocent and were in fear of state agencies. Others told that the Afghan refugees, on the whole, had created social strains and security issues for the local people. The crime rates had multiplied, loss of respect and identification, loss of tolerance in society, illegal occupation of properties and resources of the local people. Moreover, they were involved in other social vices which were mentioned in the earlier question.

Refugees marginalized the culture of the local people

All of the stakeholders agreed that the local people had been marginalized as many aspects of the local people, like culture, differentiated from the Afghani peoples' culture, however having

similarities in language and religion. The culture of indigenous people was marginalized and the Kandhari or Kabuli dialect was adopted. Similarities had found to be deeply indebted in both cultures. They had intermarried due to the blended population in Baluchistan. The political structure had also been affected because they had participated in the local politics. One of the participants further expounded that the culture of the local people was marginalized by the refugees. The refugees had been living in different regions of the world nevertheless the world had bounded them with restrictions, on the other hand, we had given them free access card due to the similarity in religion. Even though we had different cultural norms, values, customs and traditions.

Government and NGOs role for the repatriation of Afghan refugees

Most of the stakeholders told that the recent decisions made by the government of Pakistan with UNHCR were appreciable on the repatriation of refugees voluntarily. The External Relations Officer of UNHCR stated that according to international law one cannot force anyone to leave or go back to their country if they think that they are in danger. The situation in Afghanistan was dangerous as there were attacks and blasts on the daily basis. Repatriation means the refugees had chosen to go back without any pressure or any negative influence from the host country. If they choose to go, one cannot force them otherwise. The refugees were asked that if they were leaving as per their wish even though each one of them was paid \$200 per person. They were told by the authorities that it was not easy to come back as Pakistan had a systematic method. For example, the refugees were asked some questions, took their pictures and scanned their eyes then they were paid off to leave. If any refugee wanted to come back in the future, then he/she will not be registered. The role of government was appreciable for UNHCR keeping refugees for the longest period of time on the humanitarian basis.

Conclusion

To sum up it was found that Afghan Refugees are burden for the society. Because refugees owned the business of the area which is not acceptable for the local people and also had severe effect on the daily wages of their local labour class. Afghan refugees' arrival had increased the unemployment rate in Baluchistan as well as the existence of the Afghan refugees had increased the price of food products in Baluchistan. Beside this, the Afghan refugees are also burden on the existing infrastructure including education, health and water resources and are involved in various social evils like homosexuality, drugs smuggling, conflicts with local people, snatching, robbery, sense of nostalgia and homesickness. They also militarized the society by being involved in the banned organization like TTP etc. The societal disadvantage of the refugees is; the crime rate multiplied, loss of respect and identification, loss of tolerance in society, lands & personal properties were occupied, illegal occupation of resources of the local people. Afghan refugees are involved in estate marketing in order to launder money. Afghan refugees had generated a high level of social alienation among the locals Afghan refugees, on the whole, had created social strains and security issues for the local people. Marginalized the local culture. Positive impacts of the refugees are learning of labour and marketing skills, business skills,

boosted up the agricultural production, boosted the local markets with export materials, cheap export materials' availability in markets and food products availability within a reasonable price range as they were imported from Afghanistan.

Recommendations of the Study

All the variable selected for the research work were significant to prove the socioeconomic impacts of the refugees on the local population of the selected districts of Balochistan. From the study, the researcher had drawn some of the recommendations which are:

- In order to address the issue of refugees, policies of the national government and international organizations must be inclusive to take the potential impacts of the refugees on the local community and their population must be taken seriously.
- The international organizations and national government should initiate the policy of burden sharing. The burden sharing policy should be for the local and refugees both.
- The state should clarify the laws regarding the status of the refugees and those laws should be implemented properly throughout the country.
- The refugees need to be kept in the premises of the refugee camps only, where all the facilities should be available within the vicinity of the camps.
- The protracted refugees should be provided with the same standard of education as in other parts of the country.
- Separate facilities like health, education, water, and infrastructure should be provided to the refugees within their camps.
- The skills of the labour force of the refugees should be used privately by the government only for the purpose of boosting the local economy of the areas.
- The vocational training of the refugees should be arranged in order to make them independent from the state.
- They should be repatriated according to the international laws of the refugee.

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