

IASFM20 Podcast Series Full Transcript Episode 9. Voice of Participants Part 2

Opening credit

Forced migration due to war, conflicts, disaster, climate change and urban development impacts is a critical issue requiring attention from multiple stakeholders. The International Association for the Study of Forced Migration, or IASFM, is a global interdisciplinary association committed to advancing research, policy analysis and understanding of forced migration and displacement. The 20th Conference of IASFM was held on the 21-23 January 2025 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, with a topic of “Forced Displacement in an Urbanizing World”. This audio series, supported by the Washington University in St Louis, presents various reports from this conference.

The views, opinions, and contents expressed in this podcast are solely of those of the creators and do not necessarily reflect the views or possessions of Washington University in St Louis.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

Hello everyone, welcome back to IASFM20 Podcast Series. I am Akino, your host for today. Today, we are back with voices of participants, where we hear presenters giving a glimpse of their research that they presented in the conference, as well as attendees sharing their impression of the panel they attended or the conference as a whole. This time, we have Marofa Sharifi and Banafsha Mudaber from Emplace Youth Initiative, a youth refugee-led organization based in Indonesia who was the conference’s social media partner. Both Marofa and Banafsha are reporting from the conference site.

First up, let’s listen to Marofa in conversation with Dr. Shahida Aman from University of Peshawar, who was part of the panel “Access to social protection for displaced people in urban areas” from the second day of the conference.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

Thank you for being on our podcast. I would like to ask about your research. Your research paper, also the theme that you had your panel. Tell us why this theme, and how did you come to the realization to do research regarding this topic.

Guest: Prof. Shahida Aman

Thank you very much for inviting me to your podcast. I'm Professor Dr. Shahida Aman and I'm teaching in the Department of Political Science University of Peshawar. I'm also heading the department nowadays. Myself and Dr. Ayub Jan, who is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science, we are working together on a project of protected displacement economies. That project is a collaborative one between University of Sussex and University of Peshawar, but there are other countries involved too.

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So in the context of that research, we collected a lot of data from the field. Pakistan is one of those countries where a large number of Afghan refugees have come and they are residing since 1979. As far as our research is concerned, our research primarily focused on protected displacement economies, which means how people who have been displaced for a longer period of time, they conduct their economies. So in the context of their research, we collected thousands of surveys. We did hundreds of interviews, key informant interviews, as well as oral history interviews. We also made documentaries, so it was quite a huge work, and that was carried out in the context of refugees in Pakistan.

Now, as far as this particular paper was concerned, which is a paper by myself and Dr. Ayub Jan, this particular paper focuses on the role of intermediaries in displacement settings. Now, if we look at the literature in displacement settings, most of the time the literature talks about only organizations in the context of how they are channeling aid to displacement affected communities, and we, on the other hand, are trying to emphasize that it's not just the organizations, but there are some very important culturally and historically-rooted institutions, like the institution of Maliks and Masharan who play a very important role in providing social protection to the displaced people. When we talk about displaced people in the context of Pakistan refugees, we are talking about the Afghan refugees, I mentioned in the panel also that around 80% of the Pashtuns living in Afghanistan had become displaced. Most of them, almost a greater majority of them, ended up in Pakistan. Not only Pashtuns, but we also got significant numbers from different other tribal groups in Afghans, for example the Hazaras, the Tajiks, etc.

Now, what my research was trying to emphasize was that these Maliks and Masharan, which are historically-rooted institution in the context of these Pashtun tribes, and also non-Pashtun tribes, they play a very important role in organizing the social, political lives of the displaced people in Pakistan. I gave the example of the Haripur rural village, which is a very, very large camp. It has got 100,000 refugees residing there and most of the social life, the political life of these refugees, is organized by Maliks and Masharan. Maliks are village headman, translated as such, and Masharan is translated as elders. So these Maliks and Masharan, they are historically-rooted institutions. These Maliks and Masharan were present there when the displacement had not taken place more than 40 years ago. And when displacement took place, these institutions came with these refugees to these camps and then they are still regulating the lives of these refugees. And this is a very important aspect because where state institutions are weakened, or where refugees are not recognized as refugees under the UN conventions, then these informal and partially formal cultural institutions, they play a very important role for the regulation of refugee lives. So this was primarily about, our research was primarily about.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

What did you find out studying this matter?

Guest: Prof. Shahida Aman

There were a number of findings and very interesting findings. The first and the foremost finding was that these Maliks and Masharan, they come from a cultural perspective, they are culturally-rooted institutions. There are certain traits of Pashtun's social order that make their position very volatile.

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The first I discussed there also in the panel was that this Pashtun tribes are segmentary. They are patrimonial. They are kinship based. They all have a common ancestorship, because of which, leaders position is always changing. It's a, foremost, it's not fixed. It's not hereditary. So a leader has to do a lot more in order to be recognized as a leader by the... It has to display a number of qualities. And it becomes very difficult for the Maliks and Masharan to display those qualities in displacement setting. In non displacement settings, when they were there in their hometowns, they had lands from which they were deriving rent, they were... within their tribal groups, they had connections with their state authorities, etc, but all of them got uprooted when they were displaced and they came to Pakistan. So in the face of those, and the fact that they don't have land rent with them, and in the face of the fact they had to renegotiate their relationship with the state authorities, this particular aspect of how Maliks performed their leadership roles becomes very important in displacement studies.

As I earlier pointed out, they are performing a number of important responsibilities, including a dispute resolution. They are providing for the settlement of petty disputes in these. They act as mediators. They try to reach a decision through consensus. And consensus-based decision also helps them strengthen their position. It raises their stature. They deal with criminal cases among the refugees. They try to bring them and to bring it to a settlement. They deal with financial issues, financial disputes among the refugees. And there are a number of other functions they are performing, including connecting the refugees to the state authorities. All of this reflected that in the face of waning aid from the international NGOs or NGOs or the state authorities, these Maliks are still struggling, you know. Their power base is limited, but they are struggling to, you know, provide services in such informal settings in displaced cities.

Actually, the thing is, any institution that has come from your own social and cultural roots is important. It's very important. They're playing a role. But the aspect of this institution having to go through certain dilemmas is very important. There's a lot of criticism on their role by the refugees inside but no one wants to become a leader. Everyone wants to criticize a leader, the Malik, but no one wants to become the Malik because Malik has to do a lot more and he has to spend the fortune of his house on relieving the issues of the people.

So we found that there was a lot of criticism also on their own. People criticize them for not distributing aid. Whatever limited aid is coming to them properly among the refugees. Sometimes the female accused them of favoring the females of their own family for trainings imparted by the NGOs. Some of them even accused him of misappropriating funds, the corona-related funds, and also the funds that were coming for treatment of emergencies. So, there's a lot of criticism, but amidst although those criticism, this particular institution has survived. And it's still performing a very important role in the displacement affected communities.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

So what is the impact? Or what do you like to see for them?

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Guest: Prof. Shahida Aman

In my opinion, and as far as our research is concerned, one of the recommendations here could be that the formal institutions, INGOs and NGOs need to recognize the important role play by these informal institutions. It's also important to understand that these institutions need to be strengthened, but at the same time, there should be an oversight on the fair distribution of resources through them.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

Next, Marofa talked to Hafsar Tameesuddin, a prominent name in this region as an advocate for refugee rights. Hafsar organized and presented in the “Mobility of Rohingya in Southeast Asia” panel on the third day of the conference.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

I'm having Hafsar, the co-secretary general of APRRN all the way from New Zealand. So I have some questions regarding the panel that you're going to moderate, as well as that you are a speaker in there. The panel is about Mobility of Rohingya in Southeast Asia. So my first question to you is that why this topic and how and why did you came to have this topic to talk about and also to moderate about?

Guest: Hafsar Tameesuddin

Because the issues of Rohingya, it's a protracted issue. It has been a long and ongoing displacement issue in our region because the root cause inside the country itself is not addressed. Rohingyas continue to suffer inside the country and they continue to feel compelled to leave the country and seek protection in the neighboring countries. Now we have 1 million plus in Bangladesh refugees camp, nearly 100,000 plus in Malaysia, a few thousand in Indonesia, and some few thousand in Thailand and India, in many different parts of Southeast Asia, including Southeast Asia.

Particularly for Indonesia, there was a... has been boat movement, as they call it, from the refugee camp and also from inside our country because the situation inside the country and in the refugee camp is so deteriorating. There are a lot of ongoing human rights violations against Rohingya. And the responses to the boat arrival of Rohingyas to Indonesia has been amazing in the past because the Asians were very kind and supportive and showing humanity.

But then, unfortunately, along the way now the dynamic is changing. There were some resentment. Countries like Malaysia and Thailand and India will not even allow Rohingyas to disembark if they made it alive, because the sea journey that they take is really risky. The boat they take on is not strong enough. There were sometimes smugglers involved. A lot of assault and human rights violations happen along the journey. If they make it alive, the countries will not allow them to disembark. So this is ongoing issue.

So with this panel, we are hoping to raise awareness about the ongoing human rights violations of these Rohingya refugees inside the countries, in the host communities in Southeast Asia, to remind the participant of this conference that, look, this issues should not be forgotten. We should all come together to respond to this collectively as a whole of society approach.

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Host: Marofa Sharifi

So I get from your speech that you focus on the root of this problem and how these people are suffering inside the country, as well as the outside of the country. So what do you what impact would you like to see after having this panel?

Guest: Hafsar Tameesuddin

So we are hoping to encourage people to think beyond repatriation. Because when we talk about the issues of refugees as a broader general term, not just only for Rohingyas, everybody think about it's a hot potato. Nobody want to hold it in their hand. They just want to send them back home. But the reality is, whether it's for Afghan or Rohingya or in other refugee crisis, repatriation is not going to happen immediately. It is politically very sensitive and complicated. Refugees will remain, unfortunately, in this host country, not because they choose to be, because they don't have any choice. So what we are hoping from this panel is that to think beyond repatriation and resettlement.

Because if refugees are remaining in countries like Indonesia, India, Thailand and Malaysia, we need to look at the durable solution, livelihood, so refugees and Rohingyas have a dignified human life when they are waiting for this long term solution. For now, the way how they are living in the refugee camp in Cox Bazar, Bangladesh, is like an animal. They can't... It's like the prison. And there is landslide, there is kidnapping, and selling young girls and women for persecution, armed group. There's nothing like as a human dignity. And then, as I mentioned earlier, if they finally cannot take it anymore, if they try to escape and try to come to other countries, nobody will accept them.

So what we are trying to encourage is that, yes, we understand, nobody want refugees and Rohingyas, but then it is our obligation as a member of ASEAN from Southeast Asian country, and Myanmar, the issue of Myanmar and the issue of Rohingya is the responsibility of ASEAN. So we are hoping from this panel looking at how to respond this Rohingya issues, the boat movement, how do we respond it in a way that is respectful of human rights of Rohingyas. Also encouraging the academia to do more in depth research on the root cause and the ongoing crisis. It has not stopped. It has started 90s, since 1960 somewhere, and it has been massive exodus Rohingyas in 1978. It has happened again in 2012 and then there was genocide in 2017 and 2021 is the coup, and then now still inside the country, there is a big number of killing and people being homeless, all of it.

So we are hoping to call on all actors in this space that includes civil society, NGOs, refugee-led organization, refugee leaders, and then ASEAN members and people who work with the ASEAN Secretariat and APHR, AICHR, all of them, to call them, look, when it comes to the issues of refugees and Rohingyas, we cannot act it alone. But collectively, if we all do our part, there could be something. As I said, repatriation or settlement is not going to solve the problem. We also need to look beyond repatriating and resettlement. So there's a hope to wake up the people. The issues has not ended. It's still ongoing. And what do we do now? And think of innovative way of responding to the issues of Rohingyas.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

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I have nothing to say but to deeply, and from the bottom of my heart, to thank you for doing what you're doing. And let's hope that the impact that you're looking forward is going to be applicable and we're going to see it as soon as possible. Thank you again for being here with us.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

Yes, thank you Hafsar for being in the podcast with us. What you are doing is beyond words. I'm sending you big hugs from here. Next one, Marofa spoke to Reqqa Salem about her presentation on Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

We have Reqqa with us here as a speaker of "75 years of Unrecognized Urban: the Case of Al Mahatta Camp in Jordan. Thank you for being here. So I have question about your paper first. First of all, tell us about it.

Guest: Reqqa Salem

This paper has personal significance for me because when I was doing my Bachelor, there was the opportunity to volunteer as an interpreter in unrecognized refugee camps that were very new at that time in Jordan. And when I came back to Amman, my home city, after a long day, I passed by something that we called Al Mahatta camp, but it did not look like a camp at all. And it occurred to me for the first time, that this part of my city that I grew up seeing used to be a camp one day, like these camps where I'm volunteering, but it became a part of the city, and we still call it a camp. And ever since, I really wanted to visit this topic and engage with it and now I have the privilege to present it and share it with amazing scholars and attendees here.

Of course I think this has relevance to a lot of people around the world. This is not only the case in Jordan. It's also the case in Indonesia and in other countries that there are people who live in unrecognized parts of the town, and this puts them in very peculiar positions and precarious status. And that does not stop them from sharing their experience and finding creative solutions and trying to integrate with the city and build it and form it. I think it has global significance, not only personal.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

You did your study and you have the result of it and presenting. What would you like to see through... that's done through your work, the impact of your work, or the takeaway from your work, and also what should be done?

Guest: Reqqa Salem

What I would like to happen for this paper to be able to contribute to is what is important for the participants in this research. They have shared with me from the initial stage that that the most important thing for them is to have their experience and resistance and resilience documented in the hope that they are not forgotten. Because the world tends to forget about Palestinian refugees, but they don't forget about the rest of the world. They also hope that by documenting their experience, people who are undergoing the same circumstances somewhere else in the world can also benefit and learn from them,

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and then they can all be in camaraderie and siblinghood to achieve their independence, to achieve their access to their humanitarian right.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

From Marofa, we move to Banafsha. First, Banafsha talked to Hala Ahmed from the Sisterhood. Sisterhood is a prominent refugee-led organisation in Indonesia that focuses on women. They run a community center in Jakarta, with their areas of work span in literacy and skills, health and wellbeing, advocacy and legal empowerment, and solidarity and community. Hala spoke in a panel on “Sexual and Gender-based Violence from Displacement to Refuge: conceptualising violence, harm and recovery” from the second day of the conference.

Host: Banafsha Mudaber

Hello, Mrs. Hala. As far as I know today, you had a panel. May I know about your panel, and what was about it?

Guest: Hala Ahmed

Yeah, today we are (doing) presentation for the Sisterhood organization. Also we are talking about the sexual, gender, and gender-based violence, and sexual and reproductive-based violence.

Host: Banafsha Mudaber

May I know a little bit about Sisterhood?

Guest: Hala Ahmed

The Sisterhood is the first and only safe space for women refugees in Indonesia. Because it's led by women refugees for women refugees. And it's not just an organization. It's also our second home, really. Actually, we are trying to help women that get (impacted by) violence. We are, like, awareness, we created guides of women's rights and health so they can ask for help. Because some women, they didn't, they just get violence and just sit and they think that they don't have any rights. But at this time, after they learn and they have a knowledge about their rights, their health, and they can ask. They didn't stop, and they know that they are not alone. They can ask for help.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

Last one, we have Professor Jaya Dantas from Australia, talking to Banafsha about her creative submission titled “Fleeing the War across Oceans: Using Photovoice with Ukrainian Displaced People in Western Australia”.

Host: Banafsha Mudaber

Hello, Miss Jaya. How are you doing for today?

Guest: Prof. Jaya Dantas

I'm doing very well. Thank you for inviting me to share in this podcast and my thoughts.

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Host: Banafsha Mudaber

It's my pleasure. Can you please share a little bit about your background and experiences? And from which country did you join IASFM conference this year?

Guest: Prof. Jaya Dantas

My name is Professor Jaya Dantas. I'm a professor of population health at Curtin University in Western Australia. I'm originally from India, from Mumbai, India, but I have lived in five countries in the last 35 years. India, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Australia. I am now a university academic and a dean international, and I do a lot of research on refugees and migrants in many countries, especially Africa, Asia and Australia.

Host: Banafsha Mudaber

May I know about what impression do you have about this IASFM conference and which panels did you join? And what is your takeaway from this conference?

Guest: Prof. Jaya Dantas

The conference, I have attended from Australia. So I attended the conference in 2018 in Greece and now I'm attending the conference here in Yogyakarta. I like to attend the conference because of my own interest in refugees and migrants. And basically, here I have brought an exhibition on the Ukrainian displaced people in Western Australia, and the exhibition is displayed on the seventh floor. Yesterday, I did a creative pitch for three or four minutes during the session in the morning. And then I also shared my thoughts in the afternoon, in a panel on our project. It was the Photovoice Project. I have attended the plenary and the keynote, and I attended the session on gender based violence.

Because of my interest in forced displacement, I'm really interested in the various aspects of advocacy, activism, research, and what policy and solutions can be found to support populations at risk in different parts of the world. That's why I like to come and I meet new people, both academics and wonderful people like you, who are doing challenging things but wonderful things in difficult circumstances.

The main takeaway is that we still have a lot to do as a global community. We have populations at risk in many parts of the world. There are ongoing conflicts in South America, in Africa, in the Middle East, in South Asia and Southeast Asia. And there are displaced populations in high numbers, both internally and across borders, and they need to be supported. Finding solutions that are consultative and take into consideration the people's lived experiences and voices is important. But the most important takeaway is that we need funding and we need government support, and this is often the most challenging part.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

That was our episode for today. Thank you Marofa and Banafsha, our field hosts hard at work so we can capture these conversations and share it with you, especially you who couldn't come to the conference. On behalf of the podcast team, I would also like to thank our guests today: Prof. Shahida Aman, Hafsar Tameesuddin, Reqqa Salem, Hala Ahmed, and Prof. Jaya Dantas.

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In the next episode, we will talk with a panel within the IASFM20 conference's special focus on Asia Pacific. Thank you for listening to this episode. I'm Akino as your host today will stop here. Stay tuned and wishing you a lovely day ahead.

Closing credit

The 20th International Association for the Study of Forced Migration Conference is organized by the Resilience Development Initiative in collaboration with the Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada.

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