

Urban Refugees in Bangkok Community Conversations with Somali and Pakistani Immigrants & the Agencies and Organizations That Work With Them

*Findings From A Joint Research Project of
Jesuit Refugee Service Thailand &
The University of Utah, College of Social Work
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“I’m asking you that my demands reach everywhere-my requests reach everywhere
and everyone. That you make sure that everyone has heard my requests because I am
someone who does not have safety and security to live...”

-Somali, female interviewee

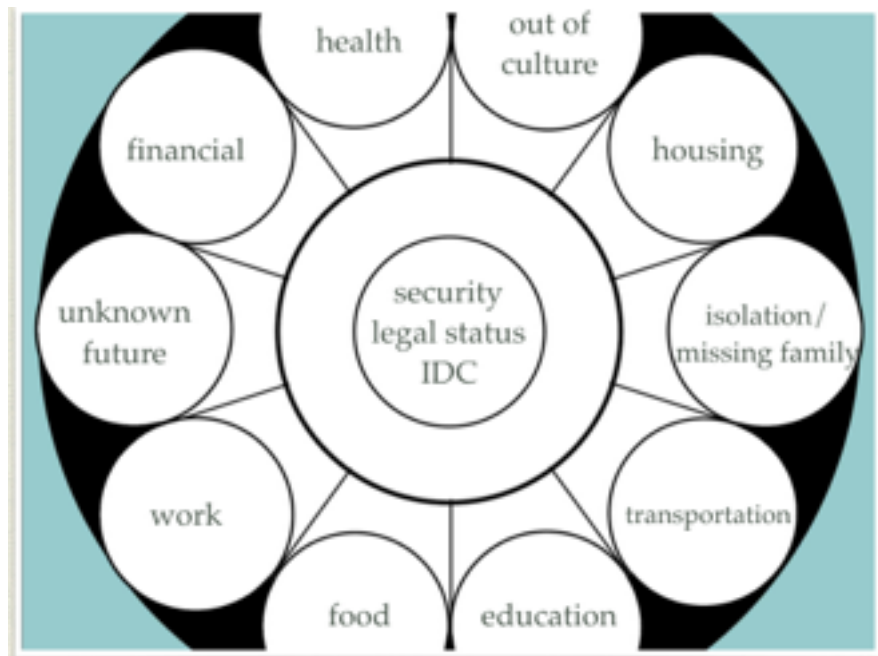
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past few years, Bangkok has experienced an increase in the migration of unaccompanied women and minors from Somalia and families from Pakistan. With over 9,000 new refugees and asylum seekers every year, current resources are strained and previous organizational processes are not meeting the long-term needs of asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2015). International non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs) and faith-based institutions agree; a paradigm shift is needed!

This report is presented by faculty, staff and community partners from the College of Social Work at the University of Utah (CSW), Salt Lake City, Utah USA, for Jesuit Refugee Service Thailand (JRS). It is one result of a multi-year partnership between JRS and the CSW that looks to utilize university resources to provide capacity building opportunities for JRS staff and its clients. Specifically, this paper is a summary of a one-year community-based research project that aims to understand the strengths and challenges of Somali and Pakistani individuals and communities that JRS works with in Bangkok, Thailand. The goal is to identify and bring together the talents, skills and networks of the Somali and Pakistani communities so that they these communities can survive and thrive while they are in Bangkok. JRS hopes to utilize this information to continue to build ownership,

agency, additional community networks and advocacy plans for these communities. The audience for this report is intended to be JRS staff, with knowledge and anticipation that it will be shared with involved agencies, the Somali and Pakistani communities, as well as local and international key NGOs, CBOs, and faith-based institutions, government agencies, universities and other immigrant communities.

It is important to note that the research team made an explicit decision to not ask Somali and Pakistani interviewees about their reasons for immigrating to Bangkok, nor about the details of their migration stories.



This was to avoid potentially re-traumatizing the individual, as well as to move away from the dominant, and often disempowering, refugee narrative that focus only on the trauma surrounding refugee's forced migration stories. However, each study participant offered his or her story without question. It can be discerned that this is because of the perceived power differentials and the possibility that comes with telling

one's story or simply the familiarity of telling one's story to people who conduct interviews. Regardless, these stories were offered by nearly all interviewees and importantly, were often coupled by intense emotion. The research team embraced this occurrence as not only critical to the goals of the research; but more so, as potentially therapeutic and a natural opportunity for listening to support healing

In December 2016, a team of researchers from the CSW undertook six days of research in Bangkok. The community conversations took place in the neighborhoods where the Somali and Pakistani interviewees were living, as well as in the agencies that work with them. There were a total of 42 unique interviews, with 63 unique individuals, inclusive of participants from the Somali and Pakistani community, as well as staff representing CBOs, NGO, and faith-based institutions serving these communities. The following report describes and discusses the findings of our research and recommendations for community partners. The research findings are structured in five main areas that were the focus of our project. They include: background information of the study participants; connections to resources; connecting to community; skills, strengths and successes; challenges; imagining a future; conclusion and recommendations.

CONTEXT

Currently, according to UNHCR, there are approximately 102,000 refugees living in Thailand. The vast majority of these individuals are from Myanmar and many have been experiencing protracted stays in temporary shelters along the Thailand-Myanmar border. However, included in this total number are also approximately 8,000 urban refugees who reside in Bangkok and its surrounding provinces (Thailand: implement commitments to protect refugee rights, 2017). These urban refugees come from a variety of countries including Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Congo, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Palestine, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia, China, Egypt, and Eritrea. Of specific interest to this paper is the experiences of individuals and communities from Pakistan (estimated population from JRS at time of research, 3,600) and from Somalia (270).

Given the fact that Thailand has no governing law protecting refugees and is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention, nor the 1967 Protocol, urban refugees are considered illegal migrants under Thai law and are not allowed to legally work once their initial visa expires. This is regardless of registration with UNHCR or recognition of refugee status by UNHCR. Therefore, they are subject to arrest, detention, deportation and exploitation at any time. In June 2017 the Thailand military government implemented a new decree aimed at cracking down on employers who hire unregistered foreign workers without work permits. Fines for employers can range up to 800,00 baht (\$23,557), resulting in many refugees losing their jobs (Lefevre, 2017).

In this context, local and international agencies and organizations, as well as communities themselves are left to try to meet the basic needs of urban refugee communities. And, even while the number of unprotected refugees has grown, scarce international resources and crucial attention have been diverted with the emergence of the Syrian refugee crisis (Potter, 2014). Consequently, existing service delivery models and organizational policies have been significantly challenged (UNHCR 2015). Specifically, the provision of services developed by agencies are often emergency services designed to meet the short-term needs of urban refugees from bordering countries. This is often ill-suited for supporting urban refugees who come from a variety of unfamiliar countries and cultures and who are experiencing protracted stays in Bangkok, waiting anywhere from 7-12 years and more for the resettlement process to be completed. Further, many of the current urban refugees are arriving as unaccompanied minors and single women who have experienced traumatic events prior to and during migration (Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015; Unterhitzberger et al., 2015). And, while studies have uncovered the trauma that women with refugee status have witnessed or experienced, additional research is needed to continually assess the unique needs of women in their community and develop culturally relevant treatment approaches (Holt, 2013; Robertson et al., 2006; Schmidt, Kravic, & Ehlert, 2008).

In December 2015, a team of partners from JRS and the CSW were invited to attend a grant-writing workshop for research planned in the Mekong Region. The series was held in Bangkok and hosted by Mahidol University and the University of Utah Asia Center. JRS and the CSW have been working together since 2010, both along the Thailand-Myanmar border and in capacity building

efforts in Bangkok. Building off of this strong partnership, as well as recent conversations regarding the opportunity for service delivery reform for urban refugees, the research team utilized the workshops to develop a grant that would begin to address this. The grant was submitted to the University of Utah Seed Grant program and was awarded to the team in July 2016.

RESEARCH OUTLINE

The goal of the research is to *identify and bring together the talents, skills, and networks of the Somali and Pakistani communities so that these communities can survive and thrive while they are in Bangkok*. JRS hopes to use the information that is collected to continue to build ownership, agency, additional community networks and advocacy plans for these communities. Both the research method used and the lessons learned are meant to be exemplary and adaptable to working with other refugee communities. Somali and Pakistani urban refugees were chosen because of the CSW's extensive work with people from these communities, the large number of Pakistani families immigrating to Bangkok, and the critical and often unique needs of unaccompanied minors and women from Somalia.

Working to change the pervasive narrative of *refugees as needy* and *refugees as consumers of services* to *refugees as strong and co-creators of services*, a community development and asset-based approach are utilized in the development, implementation, and analysis of the research. According to Community Development Exchange, "A community development approaches key purpose is to build communities based on justice, equality and mutual respect. Community

development involves changing the relationships between ordinary people and people in positions of power, so that everyone can take part in the issues that affect their lives. It starts from the principle that within any community there is a wealth of knowledge and experience which, if used in creative ways, can be channeled into collective action to achieve the communities' desired goals" (2008).

"Communities have never been built upon their deficiencies. Building community has always depended upon mobilizing the capacities and assets of a people and a place." (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993)

Utilizing these paradigms, the research team made up of lead individuals from JRS and the CSW co-developed the research topics and questions, research methods, and identified key community, agency, and community based organization stakeholders to be interviewed. This process occurred over a six month period.

The research topics include:

- ◆ Background information and experiences of the Somali and Pakistani communities and of those working with them
- ◆ Connecting to Resources - referral process - networking - partnership - perceptions of organizations working with communities
- ◆ Connecting to Communities - Somali and Pakistani relationships/ experiences with people from their own country - Somali and Pakistani relationships/ experiences with people beyond their country of origin - either from Thailand or from third countries

- ◆ Successes, challenges and skills of the Somali and Pakistani communities
- ◆ Next steps - Somali and Pakistani perceptions towards Thailand (i.e. just a transit country) and level of preparedness to be indefinitely in Thailand (if they are not recognized or not able to resettle) - future work ideas

In December 2016 a team of researchers from the CSW undertook six days of research in the Somali and Pakistani community in Bangkok holding community conversations with the identified stakeholders. There were a total of 42 unique interviews, with 63 unique individuals. Please see appendix (p. 28) for a detailed list of agencies and community based organizations that were involved.

PARTICIPANT	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS	TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED
Agencies	9	17
Community Based Organizations	4	6
Somali Community Members	21	23 (16 female, 7 male)
Pakistani Community Members	9	17 (13 female, 4 male)
TOTALS	42 unique interviews	63 unique individuals interviewed

JRS provided Somali or Pakistani translators for the relevant interviews. The translators received training with CSW researchers. All of the interviews happened in the interviewees apartment or a neighbors

apartment. A snowball method occurred, sometimes with interviewees mentioning another person to interview and sometimes the translator. Conversations with JRS, other agencies and community based organizations happened at their respective place of work. It is important to mention that the interviews were conducted the week following a raid in the communities where some of the interviews took place. It was reported by JRS and interviewees that between 40-65 people were arrested with 25 of these being children.

The CSW presented preliminary findings to JRS staff in May 2017. Two additional community discussions were held at that time between key JRS staff, CSW research team members and the participating immigrant communities. One with three people from Pakistan (two men and one woman) who took part in the original interview and the other with sixteen Somali women who were also a part of the original interviews. These additional conversations allowed for both the preliminary findings to be shared, but also for a conversation about development ideas to occur between JRS, the participants themselves and the CSW. During the subsequent months the research was analyzed by the team and this report was created.

The findings from this research are not meant to be conclusive of either all Somali and Pakistani urban refugees in Bangkok or the agencies and community based organizations working with them. More so, it is meant to provide a comprehensive snapshot, highlighting the voices of those interviewed. The research team is aware of the power differentials involved in outside researchers coming into communities for short periods of time and believe the role of the community translators was paramount in the success of the conversations. Our sincerest thanks is extended to them, both for the wisdom they

offered as well as the risks that they took in creating access to their communities.

In an effort at ease of usability, findings regarding the Somali community are provided first and the Pakistani second. Agency and CBO voices are dispersed throughout. A third section summarizes the community meetings in May 2017. The fourth details ideas for potential development, as is relative to the lessons learned.

RESEARCH FINDINGS - SOMALI

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The research team made an explicit decision to not ask Somali and Pakistani interviewees about their reasons for immigrating to Bangkok, nor about the details of their immigration story to Bangkok. This was to avoid potentially re-traumatizing the individual, as well as to move away from the dominant, and often disempowering, refugee narrative that focus only on the trauma surrounding refugee's immigration stories. However, each interviewee offered their story without question. It can be discerned that this is because of the perceived power differentials and the possibility that comes with telling one's story or simply the familiarity of telling one's story to people who conduct interviews. Regardless, these stories were offered by nearly all interviewees and importantly, were often coupled by intense emotion. The research team embraced this occurrence as not only critical to the goals of the research; but more so, as potentially therapeutic and a natural opportunity for listening to support healing. As one researcher, a PhD in Social Work, explained, "...I felt that the act of listening to each story was one way of healing – that is

when the pain starts to speak noticing that there is someone on the other side who is ready to listen."

Besides two interviewees who spent time in refugee camps prior to arriving in Bangkok, the stories offered by the Somali interviewees told of a common series of events. While the stories most often included experiences of intense trauma, they also revealed great strength and resiliency.

Somalia has been experiencing a civil war since 1991; the duration which has led to intense clan and familial breakdown for some. Interviewees, reported fleeing alone because they were being hunted by tribe and/or family members who killed their parents, siblings and/or loved ones. They didn't know what to expect, and often where they were going, as they were flown to Malaysia and then took buses to Thailand, crossing borders illegally. The route of migration was often planned by smugglers who receive cash while in Somalia through mediators. Bangkok was reported by some as the destination because of UNHCR's presence.

"I came here to get peace and education."

With the exception of one female, Somali interviewee, individuals reported leaving Somali when they were between the ages of 13 and 16, with age 15 as the most common. 68% interviewed had been in Bangkok since 2014 (2 years at the time of the research), 21% after 2014 (less than 2 years), and 11% before 2014 (more than 2 years).

CONNECTING TO RESOURCES

After the arduous process of navigating passage to Bangkok, Somali interviews revealed a sophisticated process of continual

resource navigation in order to survive in Bangkok. This began immediately upon arrival.

“We didn’t know about any organizations and we will try to search for these things. We are happy to work by our hands and to work and to survive.”

Having taken buses from Malaysia, interviewees reported riding around until they saw a Somali person or were taken to a Somali neighborhood. Once there they were brought in for the night, generally by a Somali woman and provided with some food. They were then advised to register at UNHCR. For many, the beginning of the registration process was the first time they learned that they are illegally in Thailand.

“When I came to Bangkok, I didn’t have any information about it. I didn’t know the name of the city. I didn’t even know there were Somalis in Bangkok.”

It was reported through an agency interview that during this first interaction with UNHCR, each person is provided with a book detailing the resources available to them in Bangkok. While a few individuals reported being told about some organizations, none talked about receiving a book. This was later confirmed in the subsequent follow-up meetings with interviewees. Rather, Somali interviewees had their initial introduction to service organizations and community-based organizations (CBOs), by way of other Somalis. They reported “registering” with every organization they could. They also found the mosques and other CBOs which provide them with a place to worship, food and sometimes additional resources.

When asked what were their current reasons for connecting with agencies, they responded that they were trying to find financial support, food and support for their health issues. They also talked about going to the mosques and other CBOs for food, worship and health issues.

Further conversation revealed that the Somali community is highly networked with the service sector. They provided detailed information about each of the places they access and reported being persistent in their follow-up. When asked what is working for them in terms of accessing resources, some said that the initial financial support was sufficient if they shared housing with a roommate, the counseling is helpful, and that they recognized the benefit of linking education to services. Individual service providers were also positively mentioned by name. Further, many interviewees talked about their appreciation of the services that were available and had a great deal of awareness of the context surrounding the limited resources available.

“We are very thankful for UNHCR, JRS and BRC who is helping us to give us the shelter here.”

When asked what is not working in terms of accessing resources, the following answers were given: there are not enough financial resources, especially after 3-6 months; age verification causes problems; the information provided is often unclear; distribution of resources is inequitable (people should be provided services by need); referrals for health are to inadequate or unattainable services; do not receive calls back from service providers; loss of services because of having to leave the education programs or jobs because of health reasons; and getting to organizations and CBOs requires taking

public transportation, which is unsafe, expensive and time consuming. There was also conflicting information across interviews about what agency provides what services to what population (i.e single people, minors without families, if you have refugee status, over 18, etc.) Further, a sort of ping pong experience appears pervasive in terms of accessing services. Many interviewees talked about going to one agency for a service and upon arrival being referred back to the original agency. This coupled with the transportation risks, and often little pay off in terms of services received seems to have created a general fatigue in the population. As a result, translators talked about individuals choosing not to attend all the recommended activities.

“I went Agency 1, but they send me back to Agency 2. When I go to Agency 2 then they send me back again to Agency 1.”

It is important to note that agencies discussed these same challenges and their continual efforts to create stronger service systems. It was also mentioned by all stakeholder groups that there are a lack of leaders in the Somali community, a potential consequence being that the community has no choice but to put their trust in agencies.

CONNECTING TO COMMUNITIES

The health of an individual and of communities is often dependent on the health of its relationships and community connections. With the Somali community a closer look at this helps to reveal a community that does have relationships with one another, but that these most often do not extend beyond need.

“I’m not connected to any community. What is the use? How can they support me when they themselves are in the same situation like me?”

Specifically, Somali interviewees reported seeing one another at the mosque, having Somali roommates, and helping each other when they can with food, shelter, childcare, IDC, etc. They see this as part of their faith and do their best in this realm. But, the dominant sentiment was that it was hard for people to support and connect with one another when they do not have the time and resources to even meet their own basic needs. Consequently, when asked about having Somali friends, the pervasive answer was that they did not have friends. Further conversation revealed that for some this was also because of trauma and fear related to past experiences in Somalia-it felt safer if no one knew their history. Again, the result of the lack of relationships has resulted in a level of isolation amongst many of the interviews that is alarming and of immediate concern. Only one interviewee talked about social connections that went beyond simple conversations and this was through utilizing social media (facebook) and playing soccer with others at a stadium.

Importantly, agency and CBOs responses to questions about Somali relationships revealed both an acknowledgement of how hard it is for Somalis to support one another and a general belief that they were more connected than was evident in the Somali responses. For example, more than one agency reported that Somalis have connections to support from Canada and Malaysia; which was not supported at all by the Somali interviews.

“I give the Somalis credit. They are trying to support one another. It is hard.”

Interviewees were also asked about their relationships with the Thai community and other ethnic communities. The majority of the responses cited not having relationships

with Thais, but also not having problems. One interviewee described Thais as, “silence people”. Another said their smiles were like “magic”. Interactions that did occur across ethnicities were generally with an individual at the mosque, a landlord (Thai), through work (i.e. Arabs), or at an agency; although one person talked about attending a Thai water festival and that this brought him great “happiness.” While language was identified as a barrier by almost all interviewees, many did talk about exchanging “hi” with the Thai community and that this was very meaningful.

A few interviews revealed a different perception and experiences with Thais. One interviewee said, *“We have neighbors and they will help you by smiling. That is the only thing. They don’t communicate. If you are facing a problem or dying near them, there is no one looking at you and taking care of you.”* Importantly, a few male interviewees also spoke of overt incidences of racial discrimination, a sentiment that was largely echoed by conversations with the translators.

Further discussion with agencies and CBOs echoed these statements and illuminated an often hostile climate for Somali communities. Specifically, agencies talked about a culture of fear within some Thai communities, as is exemplified by the following comments, *“Yes, I think the Thai people are afraid of the foreigners. We are still like, the black ones. Or, I think we have some generalization among Thai people.”* Another said that there is *“...a lot of racism...”* and went on to extrapolate on how this leads to low employability and exploitation. Yet another said, *“The government sends people to see what they are doing and asks if the people who are coming are terrorists and why there are so many black people coming, etc.”*

Some agency interviewees went on to discuss cultural differences that create barriers

between Thai and Somali communities. While the language barrier discussed with the Somali community was reflected in these conversations, a few agencies gave additional, specific examples. A couple of groups talked about how Somalis stay up late at night and make too much noise and that their foods are foreign. Others talked about how Somalis are late to appointments, “flighty” and that they can’t remember their own birthdays. The latter of which can be explained by understanding transportation barriers, the management of multiple, critical demands on an individual, and that that the construction of a birthday is a cultural norm, one that is not relevant in the Somali community.

Despite the described cultural misconceptions, interviews with all stakeholder groups illuminated examples of advocacy on behalf of the Somali community. One prominent agency detailed their efforts to educate the Thai police about the situation of the refugee communities in effort to minimize the amount of arrests. Other organizations talked about working with landlords to build allies in support of the Somali community. Further, a few Somali interviewees also talked about their own efforts to share their culture with the Thai community, as a way to eliminate racisms and the general sentiment was that people believed that they had respect for the Thai culture.

All in all, a tension was revealed between cultures. Relationships are being built on need and are not reciprocal in nature. The burden of adaptation is largely in the hands of the immigrant and the agencies. And, while immigrant communities are experts at navigating multiple cultures and becoming multicultural; the unfortunate consequence of this scenario could be the loss of Somali culture. This is viewed as a significant

finding, as it has been proven that immigrants adapt to new cultures most efficiently and sustainably when their own culture is seen as a resources in this process.

“For me I should respect the culture of this country in order to get the security and to be safe. Because if I practice my culture after that maybe my culture is against their culture. So this country and my country are different.”

SKILLS, STRENGTHS AND SUCCESSES

While the above findings began to unveil some of the skills, strengths, and successes of the Somali community (i.e. survival skills as evident in migrant, etc.), it is warranted to share a summary of the additional responses to this line of conversation.

When Somali interviewees were asked to identify their own, as well as the Somali communities’ skills, strengths, and success, the interviewees were largely unable to directly identify any. Rather, they immediately began to talk about their challenges and continually returned to them throughout the interview. While it could be argued that this was an act of agency and resourcefulness as the interviewer may have been perceived as having access to resources, it is also seen as critical information because of its potential to be speaking to the true, dire nature of the Somali communities’ situation in Bangkok.

Despite this trend, and keeping in line with the research paradigm that communities are best built by identifying and mobilizing their strengths, the research team was careful to utilize other topics of conversation which quickly revealed many critical skills and successes. Also, it is believed the morale of the Somali community could be positively

impacted if they are made aware of that these attributes are seen by others.

To begin, the Somali community holds substantial faith in Islam. 100% of the interviewees discussed this in depth and see their religion as the core of their strength. It sustains them; providing a consistent source of hope, emotional security and faith in the future. The mosques are spaces that are generally seen as safe, are places where they can access resources and is one opportunity to connect with others.

“We are people of faith. Besides everything that is happening, we believe in a better future. The community will share with each other. Part of our culture that we depend on one another. We try to interact with the community even with the language barrier. We try to find jobs, we want to work.”

Further, the Somali community has a strong interest in further education. And, while almost everyone talked about this for themselves, many discussed, more broadly, the importance of education for the women and children of the Somali community. Interviewees also mentioned that they attend agency trainings when they are able. One Somali man is pursuing an on-line computer science degree.

Despite the fact that it is illegal, everyone also wants to be employed and many attempt to be resourceful when it comes to finding work. Individual efforts include: clearing and cutting trees, working in restaurants, doing housework and cleaning for other families (i.e. Syrian), renting out part of one’s room, working as an interpreter, and going to the mosque to look for work.

Further, while though the majority of interviewees immigrated between the ages of

13 and 16, many talked about previous work experience in Somalia. Examples include: working as a tailor, barber, mechanic, farmer, business woman, and with cooking and cleaning. Many talked about wanting to be able to work in these fields.

“I want to work! I want to stand on my own! I would do anything for a job!”

And, as was discussed in the Community Connections section, most interviewees are trying to maintain pieces of their culture by wearing Somali clothing and the cooking of Somali food. Further, they support one another when they can by sharing food, providing some emotional support, caring for one another’s children and helping if someone is in IDC.

Agency and community based organizations interviewees were more easily able to identify strengths of the Somali community and expressed great admiration of their ability to survive in Bangkok. However, it is important to note that these were often stated as individual successes and rarely spoke to community success. Examples include: Somalis care for one another and have informal community response networks, they also have strong global survival skills and a fair amount of sophistication in terms of how UNHCR works, the most successful are motivated to learn English and become interpreters, others have gotten jobs doing hair at hospitals or working with NGOs, some are seeing that they may be staying in Thailand and are motivated to learn Thai and send their kids to Thai schools.

“They are surviving! I am not sure how they are doing it!”

CHALLENGES

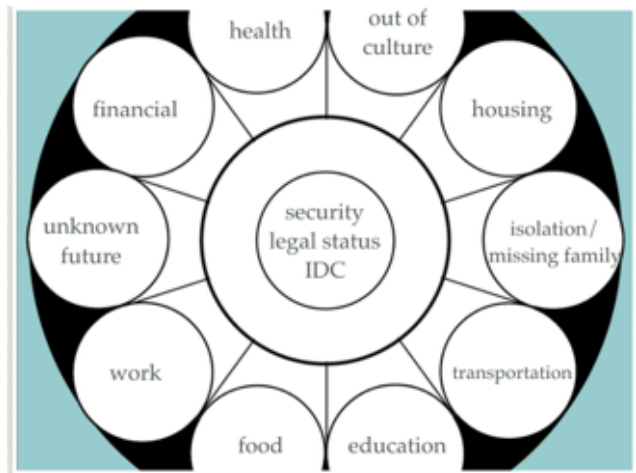
The research asked specifically about the challenges of the Somali community and the agencies working with them. These conversations revealed a very difficult situation for all involved. Overall, there is a permeating feel of hopelessness and it can be argued that no one is thriving. Past trauma, uncertainty about meeting day to day needs, and an unknown future have resulted in a community that is living in crisis.

“Here it is very difficult. If you know the situation we are into, you may cry.”

“We are just parents who are going through a lot in our life. I just really want you to know

“I just beg God for this to change”

Overall, the challenges appear as an interconnected web that encompasses all aspects of day-to-day life. At the center of this web emerges interviewees’ concern with their legal status, not having security and the potential threat of being arrested and going to IDC (100% reported as this as their number one concern). The related fear



permeates all aspects of their lives and for many results in serious health concerns and isolation.

“The first one is security. I’m afraid every day that I’m going to be arrested and be taken to the prison.”

Six of the Somali interviewees (three female and three male) had been in IDC themselves and 50% of those report having been beaten or tortured during their time there. The amount of time spent in IDC varied greatly - between 12 days and 2 years. Conditions were described as “*awful and difficult*”.

“IDC is hell on earth.”

Concerns within IDC include: cramped quarters (200 men in one room), the spread of disease (i.e. TB), lack of water, children being born inside and “being impossible to provide for”, corruption and discrimination amongst IDC staff, unpredictable and inequitable system for getting out and bailout being open, etc.

Agencies talked about how urban refugees’ illegal status leaves them vulnerable to the people they work for and also rent their apartments from. They also discussed how once someone is in IDC it is very hard to build their resources again.

“Usually when they are arrested, all the work that we have done build them up and helping them achieve goals, sustainable, and mental health, and well-being, all of that just falls apart, so it is a constant challenge for us to help people in this environment where they are so subject to these risks of arrest....everything falls apart.”

On their own, the remaining challenges are serious and warrant mention. But, given ban refugee illegal status, each challenge significantly compounded. This is especially true when transportation is involved. Often, in order to access a service, collect food, work or go to school an individual must take multiple buses in one day. While this puts them at risk of being arrested it also can take upwards of six hours/day in order to reach all of the places.

Related, the skills and strengths of the Somali community appear undermined again and again by the fact that they are illegally living in the country. This is most evident in the discussions around work. As noted, interviewees want to work and many have skills that would lend themselves towards employability. However, because they are not legally able to work they are either unemployed or scrambling for jobs that are inconsistent, extremely low paying, and leave them susceptible to exploitation and discrimination.

When asked about their top three challenges, beyond security issues, Somalis spoke of hunger, isolation, and health. It is important to note that each interviewee did talk about almost all aspects of daily life, as is represented in the diagram, and that each one is of serious concern. The top three are discussed here due to the intensity in which they were discussed.



“I have no shelter, no place to go, no place to sleep, no food and no help.”

In terms of hunger, the majority of the interviewees talked about not having food security. The food that they were able to buy or collect from, mostly churches, was not enough and many were unsure where their next meal would be coming from. Again and again, interviewees said they are worried about not having enough food for their children. One CBO also talked about how the hunger and lack of food security impacts the Somali community's ability to focus on education.

“For education, put behind because no need to study anything if you hungry.”

Regarding health, 100% of the interviewees talked about either a physical or a psychological health issue or both. The mental health issues were often related to trauma experienced pre-migration, possibly during migration and the multiple severe stressors that come with living in Bangkok. The resulting mental health issues appear to also be compounding other physical health issues.

“The second thing that falls after security is that I will not have anything to live for.”

Further discussions looking at the relationship between health needs and accessing health resources revealed a system that is lacking in places to provide good referrals to, few resources to pay for medicines, and often inadequate care. Therefore, what may have started as a minor health concern has grown into a reoccurring health problem. All in all, the need for more psychosocial support was also evident in all stakeholder conversations.

The third area, isolation, seems to stem from these health issues being compounded by

security threats. And as discussed earlier, has resulted in many of the Somali interviewees living in isolation from one another and other communities. In turn, this isolation exasperates the health issues, leaving a few interviewees in a place of extreme hopelessness.

“Because we are sitting in this room and didn't do anything the whole day, we just think about how you can get food and pay the room rent and our future and what is next to here and to know what will helping. When you ask yourself 24 hours then you are going to be crazy. The life has different situation and the situation now is very difficult. We are feeling it is oppression so we are waiting something. We don't get any entertainment. We don't meet someone who is interested in the situation who want to change something different in our situation. This is all about us, but not other people. We always worry about security situation if we go out we worry about getting arrested or come home safe. We are worrying like this.”

In an effort to understand a conclusive take on how the community felt about living in Bangkok relative to their past experience, researchers asked the following question: “*What would you tell a friend about coming to Thailand?*” The majority answers revolved around not advising their friends to come to Thailand. However, a few exemplified a measured response that balanced the benefits and challenges.

“...no longer fear for your life, but you have fear of being arrested, not working and not being able to find food.”

“It is good and bad. Have peace and can leave, but things are hard.”

IMAGINING A FUTURE

When asked to talk about where they saw themselves in the future, the interviewees' responses varied in detail, but tended to be framed by their faith and center-around being able to live somewhere legally where they are safe and have access to work and education for their kids. A few also mentioned wanting to be able to trace the whereabouts of their parents. A life in Bangkok appeared severely challenging unless something changed with their legal status.

"Everything is the decision of God and I believe that only God will decide, but for myself, I wish that someday I will be in a free country where I am not afraid of getting arrested. Where I can walk outside."

"God forbid - No, do not even say this...we cannot imagine staying here, only being resettled I have nowhere else to go, our only hope is the UN and resettlement."

"If I have safety and legal documentation and I am allowed to live here, I would live here. I would just work and live here."

Despite this a few did talk about wanting to learn Thai and study. Another talked about wanting to become a doctor and yet another, about wanting to support people with disabilities. These examples provide important examples of hopefulness and resiliency.

"I'm planning to be someone who has a good future and who is self-sufficient and I'm planning to work on being self-sufficient person who is independent."

Amongst the agencies, the general consensus was that Somalis are focused on their daily needs and have resettlement as their main goal. The agencies themselves would like to support Somalis in getting to a place where they are motivated in more hopeful about their future. They also talked about wanting to work together more - across agencies/CBOs - to support the Somali community.

CONCLUSION

While the challenges faced by the Somali community are overwhelming and the information gained in this study must ignite *a call to action* across those who work with them, the strengths and resiliency of this community cannot be stated enough. Imagine, these young people were forced to migrate from their homes between the ages of 13 – 16 years of age (with one exception), travelled alone with no understanding of where they were going, and arrived in Bangkok where food and safety are primary threats to their survival. With no language or status in this new country they are continuing to navigate a hostile environment and holding tight to their faith and their culture...their essence. All in all, they are exemplary in their survival against these many injustices and remarkable in their pursuit of refuge.

RESEARCH FINDINGS - PAKISTANI

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

As previously mentioned (p. 6), the research team made an explicit decision to not ask the interviewees about their migration stories. However, just as with the Somali participants, 100% of the Pakistani interviewees offered these stories on their own accord. Therefore, the research team decided to include them. These stories illustrate great strength and resourcefulness in the face of desperate circumstances.

Approximately 96.6% of the people who live in Pakistan are Muslim. Religious minorities in this context have been experiencing a long run of extreme violence and intense discrimination. Amongst the persecuted groups are Christians who make up 1.59% of the religious population and Ahmadi Muslims who represent an even smaller percentage. The situation has proven intolerable for these communities, forcing many to leave the country.

The Pakistani interviewees in this research study are amongst these groups. Through the telling of their immigration stories they self-identified as either being Christians (majority) or Ahmadi Muslim and fleeing Pakistan due to intolerable discrimination and life threatening violence. Examples included: one woman's husband was shot six times, another was burned, numerous people's family members were killed, churches were burned down, and some escaped communities where over a hundred people of their religious faith were murdered.

"Being Christian in Pakistan is a death sentence"

The vast majority of the interviewees shared immigrating as families (husband, wife, children) or as a single adult who came with their parents and/or siblings. In planning for their exodus, they had sold their homes and other possessions and made their way to Lahore (Pakistan) where they hired an agent and arranged for a VISA to enter Thailand. Bangkok was the chosen destination for some because they had a family member who had previously immigrated there. Twenty-two percent of the Pakistani interviewees reported arriving in Bangkok in 2012, 33% in 2013, 33% in 2014, and 11% in 2015.

CONNECTING TO RESOURCES

After the careful and dangerous work of negotiating migration for an entire family, interviews revealed the Pakistani community as highly resourceful and skilled in accessing and creating networks with others in the Pakistani community, churches and some agencies to survive and grow while in Thailand. Typically, this work began immediately upon arrival in Bangkok.

Having arrived by plane, interviewees differed in their initial means of connections, but were similar in their end goal of finding the Pakistani community. Some spent their first few days in a hotel, others went directly to family that already lived in Bangkok, another reported connecting with the Indian community who then put them in touch with other Pakistanis, and one reported going to a restaurant where they were told by a waiter where to find the Pakistani community. Most spoke of eventually renting a "condo" in a neighborhood with other Pakistanis.

Aware of the presence of UNHCR and its role in resettlement, the next step for most was to register with UNHCR. For some this proved

to be a harrowing experience as they learned that they did not have protection in Bangkok.

“When people first arrive in Thailand they have an interview with UNHCR. They will tell you I’m sorry this is the wrong country. You do not have protection here, so you can go back or try another country.”

From there, participants largely talked about finding local churches and beginning to connect with other Pakistani Christians. This opportunity to commune with other Pakistani Christians provided an initial source of spiritual strength, but has also proven to be a continual valuable resource in most areas of need. In fact, interviewees again and again returned to churches as the primary resource they utilize while navigating their needs in Bangkok. Many interviewees exhibited comprehensive knowledge of what services each church provided, to whom, and when. These services ranged from education, to food and health.

“The churches are why we are surviving.”

When asked what were the challenges with accessing resources at churches, study participants talked about the status of their case with UNHCR being opened or closed impacting their ability to receive support. Others talked about how some churches didn’t serve their religion or their status as single or part of a family.

The churches themselves cited challenges in providing support to the Pakistani communities. Specifics included, having large families and the challenge of providing all that is needed. Additionally, families are

fluid, which it make it difficult to keep track of what they need and where they went. One church had also reported that the Thai government had told them not to help.

The other primary sources of support cited were Pakistani, Christian neighbors and individuals outside of this community. Most often the support was for food, education and with health issues.

Examples of connecting to individuals include: a Thai man who helped pay for half the cost of surgery, the owner of one families building paying rent for the family one time, another landlord who brings food and water to people to help them survive, an Indian woman who hands out food, a Thai monk and Korean pastor who teach Thai to their children While it was not explicitly stated, it may be discerned that these connections with individuals were initially made through churches and are of the same faith.

All in all, the Pakistani participants did not talk about accessing agencies in any great length. When they did it generally focused on an individual need and most often for health related reasons. In these cases there was a general appreciation for what was provided. An International School was mentioned as being open for 3-5 year olds to attend two days a week.

Further discussion revealed that Pakistani interviewees had not had a lot of success with accessing services from other agencies and therefore stopped reaching out. Specifically, they talked about the fact that agencies do not have enough resources themselves, support for basic needs is largely unavailable, there is limited health resources (a primary challenge), and when there is an education program there is not enough wrap-around support to make attending possible. For example, one organization was reported as providing an education program as well as

bus passes and uniforms for attendees. But this was not sufficient, because no transportation support was provided for accompanying adults and the program was only for 7th and 8th graders.

CONNECTING TO COMMUNITIES

As was previously discussed, the research team believes that one indicator of individual well-being is how connected a person is to people within their own communities. For immigrant communities, it has also proven beneficial if they have relationships with those of the host community.

Interviews with Pakistanis revealed a community that is very connected to one another; particularly along religious lines. The Pakistani Christians see one another, as well as the churches they visit, as their primary source of sustainment. The same can be said for the few Ahmadi Muslims that were also interviewed. Their tendency to rely on one another and their faith is of the utmost importance. " When asked if they find camaraderie across religious lines, some answered yes and some answered no. This discrepancy was evident also in responses from community partners to the same question.

"We are like family."

One explanation to why these connections may not occur could be found through understanding the historical context regarding religious persecution in Pakistan. As explained earlier, both groups experienced multi-generational persecution due to their religious affiliations. Most likely the resulting trauma has left some with a tendency towards skepticism when it comes to connecting across religious lines.

While it appears that the Pakistanis are connecting initially for religious reasons and that the support they receive is emotional and spiritual, many additional notable outcomes seem to be resulting. For example, interviewees reported co-locating in the same building for housing and then convening on rooftops in the evening to discuss issues, share information, problem-solve, and "*have fellowship*". There were also instances of participants renting spare rooms in the building in order to hold religious services, for education programs, and to store supplies for those in IDC. These examples are prized both in their ingenuity for utilizing "safe" spaces and their focus on developing their own resources.

In terms of challenges with connecting to one another, interviewees shared that they could not support one another financially due to their own limited resources and that they worried and wondered about family members they had not heard from who had returned to Pakistan.

Study participants were also asked about their relationships with the Thai community and additional ethnic communities. All in all there appears to be minimal connections and when there is a connection it rarely extends beyond sharing faith or receiving a service from an individual. Additional examples include: interacting with landlords, seeing people at 7-11 when getting water, working for someone in the Indian community, and coming together on issues related to IDC. Overall, Pakistani interviewees largely reported that these interactions were good, especially when it involved their children.

"Thai people love children."

While these connections are of value they do generally put the Pakistani in the role of receiver, often leave them susceptible to exploitation and generally lack in their reciprocity. No examples of friendship were shared.

Further, a few participants, translators and representatives of CBOs also discussed the role of race in building relationships across cultures. A few discussions centered-around how the Pakistanis were employable (compared to Somalis) because they looked more Asian. In direct contrast, others talked about believing that Thais do not like them because of how they look, dress, and smell.

“They don’t like our faces here.”

“We take a bath and wear perfume, but they still don’t like us.”

As with the Somali interviews, these findings are of importance because they signal that the community is potentially carrying the psychological burden of covert and overt racial discrimination.

SKILLS, STRENGTHS AND SUCCESSES

The above findings clearly illuminate a number of strengths and skills of the Pakistani community. The most exemplary being their success at mitigating safe passages for their families to Thailand, the utilization of their faith as a spring board for accessing resources and building community. In addition, they demonstrated a keen ability to work together to procure space in their apartment buildings in order to have safe places to worship and receive education.

“Our strength is our faith and trust in God.”

When agencies and CBOs were asked about the strengths and skills of the Pakistani community they cited these same community-organizing successes. They also discussed the advantage that some urban refugees had when they arrived in Bangkok with a VISA. Further, many talked in great detail about the resiliency and strong coping mechanisms of the Pakistani community.

“She’s still surviving and doing the best she can do. If you are talking to her she’s still doing something while talking to the caseworker. Like canning tomatoes or preparing stuff. She doesn’t want to lose a single minute of her time. So she’s really so strong person.”

“Whenever you see their parents they are always smiling - always smiling. It’s really rare they are complaining to you. That is really amazing.”

In further exploration of the skills of the Pakistani community we see the role of work and education in their lives. One hundred percent of the interviewees directly talked about their desire to work and also to obtain more education for themselves and their children. Many report coming to Pakistan already having degrees and substantial professional work experience.

“I was a finance manager when I was in Pakistan in an international company. I have ten years experience in accounts.”

Past occupations included: businessman in transports, car salesman, finance manager, driver and seamstress. Agency staff also discussed the past education and work experience of the Pakistani community and saw it as an asset. Interestingly, they most

often cited lawyer, businessman and doctor as the jobs people had had in Pakistan and one agency reported that 30% of Pakistani urban refugees had a degree or were “very educated”. When asked what kind of jobs the community was finding the responses were in restaurants, as domestic workers with Indian families, as teachers, and through opening small businesses in markets.

While unable to work in their respective fields, Pakistani interviewees showed signs of ingenuity and tenacity in finding work in Bangkok. Examples of reported work include: stitching tracksuits for a Chinese company, painting, washing dishes, working as a security guard for an Indian man, sewing stuffed animal key chains for a Thai woman, making naan and selling it, buying potatoes/vegetables in bulk and selling it in smaller bundles at the market, cleaning for an Arab family, and working as the principal of the children’s ministry at the school and orphanage.

Pakistani interviewees also discussed trying to maintain their culture; specifically, teaching their children Urdu (their mother tongue), cooking Pakistani foods and dressing in Pakistani clothing. They also talked about feeling successful in that they can practice their faith more freely in Bangkok and it was mentioned by a few that they were willing to go to churches of a different faith in order to access services. And, despite the lack of social services generally rendered, individuals and agencies revealed that the Pakistani community knew about these resources. Many of the interviewees also talked about supporting one another with issues related to IDC.

As a last note, it is important to mention that across stakeholder groups the Ahmadi Muslims are perceived to be more successful

than the Pakistani Muslims. They are also believed to be receiving resettlement at a much faster rate. A claim that UNHCR discounts. Regardless, these notions are potentially creating fissures between the two communities.

CHALLENGES

The research also asked specifically about the challenges of the Pakistani community and the agencies working with them. And, while the previous section reveals a community that is indeed working to build itself with great tenacity and skill, what also became evident is that they are doing this work while they are also experiencing feelings of hopelessness, uncertainty, and indignation.

“Thailand is not better than hell.”

“We are not criminals!”

Just as with the Somali community, the challenges appear as an interconnected web that encompasses all aspects of day-to-day life (p. 12). At the center of this web emerges interviewees’ concern with their legal status, not having security and the potential threat of being arrested and going to IDC (100% reported as this as their number one concern).

“I don’t think there is any place we are safe.”

Sixty seven percent of the interviewees had been in IDC or currently had a family member inside. One family talked about a son who had spent time in prison, a few also discussed family members whom had been deported and had not been heard of since. Stories concerning IDC, included arrests of whole families (including children), single

females, fathers and sons, etc. The amount of time spent in IDC varied between 3 months and 29 months. And, again the conditions inside IDC were described as *“awful and difficult”*.

“They are treating people like animals in there.”

The Pakistani conversations illuminated the same issues inside IDC as described by the Somalis (p. 12). However, they also provided additional details. Specifically, the reported beatings and torture were the result of mothers advocating for their children to stay with them. Examples of corruption included women being asked to provide “pleasures” to male guards in order to have their husbands released.

Further, Pakistanis talked in great depth about the short and long term effects of the day-to-day threat of incarceration on youth in their communities. They shared that in fear of being arrested, children often stay in doors, they hide themselves, or are hidden by their parents, do not attend school regularly, and consequently experience mental and physical health issues.

“We are losing a generation basically.”

Further discussions with the Pakistani interviewees revealed a sophisticated knowledge of the paradox that the government has created regarding urban refugees’ lack of legal status. This understanding was shared across all stakeholder groups involved in the research and brought up again and again as the crux of successful integration in Thailand.

“They are not allowing us to get visas, but won't open cases of people in IDC and they don't want us to be illegal.”

All in all, the consequences of arrest, the threat of it and the lack of legal work status continually compounds the other challenges faced by the Pakistani community, as well as undermines the utilization of their individual skills and community organizing efforts. The effects of this are described in detail in the Somali Challenge section of this report (p.12) and pertain to Pakistani community as well.

One additional example of this phenomenon became clear when Pakistanis discussed their housing choices and the pros and cons that came with this. Specifically, many participants talked about their condos as a place that they felt “safe” and some said they had landlords that were considered “allies”. Additionally, because many people are choosing to live in the same buildings they are able to support one another emotionally and with day-to-day needs. A few cited doubling up in rooms as helping to make things more affordable. Further, this co-location has allowed them to work together to maintain their culture and create “safe” spaces for education and worship on-site (eliminating the need for transportation).

On the flip side, these successes are built upon the fact that many people are living in the same area, leaving them as vulnerable and highly susceptible to raids. Further, disturbances from non-Pakistani neighbors are higher in this context and the doubling up in apartments make the management of children more difficult. Therefore, what results is a situation that is possibly more tenuous, as a result of its thoughtfulness and success.

Beyond these described issues, Pakistani interviewees were also asked to talk specifically about their additional top three challenges.



Responses fell into these categories: health, education, and work.

In terms of health, 100% reported a mental and/or physical health issue. As with the Somali participants these issues seemed to have been exasperated by the psychological stressors of living in Bangkok under the described conditions. What often began as a minor physical health problem, has manifested itself into a more acute issue that is accompanied by psychological trauma. The specific health problems varied widely in nature, but not in the fact that they were almost all reported as reoccurring at the time of the interview. Also, across the board efforts to receive health care had been met with a broken system that left referrals inadequate, medications too expensive or ineffective and care limited.

Agency interviews talked about seeing a high rate of diabetes in the Pakistani community, as well as depression.

“Being worried all the time is hard on the mind.”

.Discussions around education again talked to the Pakistani’s desire for all members of their community to have the opportunity to pursue their education and especially children. They see this as vital to the successful development of their community. However, the challenges surrounding accessing these programs has resulted in most children not attending or at very least, attending irregularly. For example, transportation is an expensive security risk and school uniforms and fees are often prohibitive in cost. For parents, their time is spent trying to meet the day-to-day needs of their family and often attending an education program is not an option. In terms of the community-based schools, these are

vulnerable to security issues and are often inconsistent. Agency participants discussed how some of the schools that have been developed for urban refugees are prone to political and management issues.

Further, many Pakistani urban refugees came to Bangkok with professional backgrounds. However, in Bangkok they are not finding consistent work, are most often grossly underpaid, and by and large are not able to build off of the work skills that they possess. Ultimately, this means that they and their families are suffering and often unable to meet their day-to-day needs on their own. While thankful for the work they do find, most are aggrieved and amongst some there permeates an understandable, intense frustration with their situation.

Lastly, in an effort to understand how the Pakistani community felt about living in Bangkok relative to their past experience in Pakistan, the following question was asked: *“What would you tell a friend about coming to Thailand?”* The answers provided are exemplary of all responses and warrant reporting due to their extreme nature.

“Living in Thailand is like living in hell.”

“Thailand is worse than Pakistan.”

“It is better to die there in the hands of a Muslim.”

IMAGINING A FUTURE

When asked to talk about where they see themselves in the future, the Pakistani interviewees revealed a community that is feeling stuck. Most find Bangkok intolerable due to their legal status and see it only as a

transit country. Resettlement to a third country is cited as the ideal situation.

“Thailand is not our home.”

“There is no future in Thailand if there is no safety.”

“What is the meaning of life in here?”

One person said they were worried that they and their children would be spending their whole life in Bangkok and in IDC.

When asked what the need in order to make life in Bangkok tolerable, most said they need to be able to work legally and be paid good wages. Still others talked about needing to learn Thai. And others, discussed the desire to continue to focus on education for their youth.

In terms of going back to Pakistan, the general consensus was that this was not an option and would result in death. It is important to note this, as some agency providers believe that this is an option for the Pakistani community.

“We cannot go back.”

CONCLUSION

The importance of preparation for migration, maintaining the family unit and the support of community relationships are central to the finding of the interviews with the Pakistani community. While enduring religious discrimination, conflict, deaths in their families and threats to their own lives; the

Pakistani participants discussed their decision to migrate. At the same time, it was clear that there was no other options available. They did not leave their homeland willingly but at the realization that their very survival was at stake. This decision was part of a process that included rapid preparation and connecting with others in the Pakistani community who had also migrated to Bangkok. Upon arrival, they were unprepared for the intense challenges of their undocumented status in Bangkok. Still, their levels of education, professional work experience, networking skills and abilities to be flexible have afforded them potential for future integration with the Thai society. As with the Somali interviewees, the theme of faith and living life in a safe environment where they can practice their culture, care for their families and pursue more education continues to provide spaces of hope through the path of struggles.

COMMUNITY MEETING SUMMARY

In May 2017, members of the CSW research team presented preliminary findings of this research to JRS staff, as well as members of the Pakistani and Somali community. This was utilized as an opportunity to receive feedback regarding the work, as well as, to initiate discussions about next steps.

In these spaces it was largely discerned that the research was providing an adequate portrait of the situation in Bangkok for Pakistani and Somali urban refugees and the people that work with them.

The time with JRS resulted in a discussion regarding program development and next steps. Specifically, JRS showed an interest in thinking about how to build off of existing “safe” spaces (i.e. apartment/condo building), by co-locating services there. Leadership development was also discussed as an important next step, as well as building the capacity of communities to work together to develop their own goals. Consequently, CSW and JRS moved forward with aligning JRS translators and staff with CSW’s on-line Case Management Program and it was mentioned that JRS may talk further with Asylum Access about their community development programs. Further, there was a discussion about the need to reform the current health service networks, with JRS sharing how they were already beginning to do this. CSW also talked about using future time to support JRS in building relationships with local university resources in order to develop partnerships that support JRS in reaching its goals. Lastly, it was widely recognized that a focus of future partnership work might be thinking about how to support the attainment of work permits for urban refugees in Bangkok.

The conversation with the Pakistani community was attended by three Pakistani interviewees. Two, male Pakistani Christians and one, female Ahmadi Muslim interviewee. It is important to note that the female attendee had recently received refugee status and was waiting for relocation information. Also, one of the male participants shared that he had a meeting with UNHCR the following day where he would learn if he and his family would be eligible for resettlement or if their case would be closed. Two JRS staff were also present, along with two CSW researchers and a Pakistani translator.

The meeting began with the CSW sharing the preliminary findings of the research, specifically the background information that was shared concerning migration. The community members vocalized that this was accurate and moved the conversation into a discussion about what could be done about their situation in Bangkok. The conversation was intense, reflecting the extremely challenging situation for this community. Perceptions were shared regarding Ahmadi’s receiving preferential treatment for resettlement from UNHCR. There was also a discussion about how it might be useful for Pakistanis to support one another across religious lines. It was also shared that some Pakistanis were starting to go back to Pakistan and many had had their cases closed. JRS staff said that they were aware of this challenges and were doing their best to support the community. While there was an effort to talk about what JRS could do to support the Pakistani community while they are in Bangkok, the conversation continually returned to resettlement issues.

The discussion with the Somali community was attended by sixteen Somali female (interviewees), two JRS staff, two CSW researchers and a Somali translator. Again,

the meeting began with CSW showing the preliminary findings from the research. Immediately following the background section, Somali participants spoke up and said that the research was accurate and questioned the group regarding what would be the tangible results of these findings. As with the Pakistani conversation, the CSW shared that JRS would be using this information to support their development while they are in Bangkok. From here a discussion unfolded about ideas for program development. Most of the participants were engaged in the discussion, if only briefly. JRS led a discussion about bringing more services to where people live. Somali participants shared that they would attend programs at their apartment complexes and that yes, this would be helpful. From here there the group talked about what kind of services would be helpful. The majority response was that education based programming would be useful. JRS also shared a new effort at working with other agencies to begin to create more effective health referrals. The community thought this was a good idea, as well. JRS staff also went on to inquire why some individuals had not registered for the existing education programs. Participants mentioned that they did not know about it and one talked about how she was mistreated by the teacher. JRS staff acknowledged this and said that the teacher was no longer present. A few of the participants signed up for the program.

All in all the meeting had a positive feel, with many participants involved. Many participants seemed connected to one another and acted with agency when sharing their ideas about what would work or not work. However, once a participant mentioned that she had just found out that her UNHCR interview was scheduled for about 1.5 years away, many people became emotional, hiding their faces. Consequently

a conversation then occurred about how difficult it was for them in Bangkok and that they felt at the mercy of UNHCR. JRS again shared that they would take the information that was gathered to help build better programming for them, as well as, advocacy work.

Following the meeting, two of the Somali participants asked to meet with the CSW. During these one-on-one meetings, the women shared their struggles and feelings of hopelessness. The CSW responded by saying that they would do their best to support JRS in building their capacity to have their needs met. One of the researchers was also invited to the Somali community to eat and for further discussions. Overall, these discussions have led to ongoing relationships that could be supportive in further work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership Development:

*look for funding to provide stipends to urban refugees to attend trainings and for community seed projects

*work with AAT to build off of their existing programs

*involve translators and youth

*allocate a specific staff person and their time to work with community on their projects (i.e. Pakistani schools)

*involve community leaders in agency network meetings and JRS meetings

Co-Locate Services in Safe Spaces:

*discuss bringing existing services to “safe spaces” - apartment complexes and churches (eliminates transportation, etc)

*work with landlords and church leaders to build an alliance of support

Support Cultural Maintenance & Cross-Cultural Sharing:

*develop cultural programming that brings together different immigrant communities, with the Thai community

*provide stipends for Somali and Pakistani leaders to teach the basics of their language to JRS staff

Advocacy:

*support alliances that are advocating for work permits

*work with UNHCR to learn from about their one-one-one advocacy work

*research the potential for eliminating arrest and detainment of children in IDC

Partnership Development:

*continue to attend cross-agency network meetings; involve urban refugees in these meetings

*pursue a collective action process to create a shift from emergency service provision models to sustainable and long-term solutions

*meet with local universities (i.e. Mahidol University) to discuss mutual interests and reciprocal capacity building opportunities

*meet with identified ally groups (people supporting bailout in IDC, landlords, volunteers) to develop cross-sector, special interest partnerships

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If there are questions regarding the report please contact Rosemarie Hunter at r.hunter@socwk.utah.edu.

APPENDIX

Interview Participant Overview

PARTICIPANT	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS	TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED
AGENCIES		
JRS: URP supervisor, translators & caseworkers	3	10
AAT: legal services manager & community outreach team manager	2	2
BCP: director & caseworkers	2	3
UNHCR: legal director & outreach director	1	2
COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS		
Holy Redeemer Church: program supervisor	1	1
St. Michaels: priest	1	1
Yateem: director & 2 additional people	1	3
Pakistani Christian Church: Pakistani pastor	1	1
COMMUNITY MEMBERS		
Somali	21	23 (16 female/7 male)
Pakistani	9	17 (13 female/4 male)
TOTALS	42 unique interviews	63 individuals interviewed

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