

**CAPACITATING REFUGEES IN NORTHEAST INDIA: A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
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Email: sam.chawngthu@gmail.com)***Keywords:** Young Mizo Association (YMA), refugees, economy, internally displaced people**INTRODUCTION**

The conflict following the Military coup in Feb 2021, has plummeted Myanmar into a severe humanitarian crisis including the state of Chin on the western border of Myanmar, bordering Mizoram, India and have led to civilian being injured in bombings, due to landmines, caught in shootings and their villages being burnt in retaliation by the Myanmar military. The humanitarian crisis has forced tens of thousands of people to flee from their homes. Many are internally displaced, and many have sought refuge in Champhai district in Mizoram State in India and this number has been steadily increasing over the past. Both the YMA and the state government have been working to provide humanitarian aid since 2021. More recently

The military junta continues to intensify aerial bombardments in Chin State. The Diplomat reports that the population of Chin State has endured 47 airstrikes in the month of April 2023.

The UN and other international aid agencies still haven't been able to provide humanitarian aid in Chin state from within Myanmar due to communication breakdowns and difficulty accessing the affected areas, mainly because the military has cut off all aid especially humanitarian medical aid (The MY Military's Four Cuts Strategy).

UNHCR Myanmar Emergency Overview Map on 17 October 2022 reported 48600 as displaced from Chin into neighboring countries and this number increased to 53,500 in the updated overview published on 01 May 2023. Over 20,000 of these are in Champhai alone.

Literature review

Current studies in this field can be broadly classified into two categories: qualitative studies supported by sociology and anthropology, and quantitative studies supported by economics. Karen Jacobsen's

groundbreaking research (Jacobsen, 2002, 2005, 2006) provides an in-depth analysis of the economic life of refugees through the use of diverse and comparative qualitative data, primarily derived from her own fieldwork. Her research sheds light on the methods and obstacles that refugees in wealthy and developing nations encounter in securing a living during their extended periods of banishment. Subsequent qualitative research has critically engaged with refugee policies related to livelihoods, self-reliance, and socio-economic integration (Easton-Calabria and Omata, 2017) and described themes like refugee livelihoods across a range of historical and contemporary contexts (Campbell, 2006, Carrier, 2017, Hammar, 2014, Horst, 2008, Lindley, 2009, Oka, 2014, Werker, 2007).

According to McKenzie (2018), causal studies are typically preferred by economists over descriptive and comparative studies. Additionally, a large portion of the quantitative research that is currently available ignores variations, exceptions, and non-linearities because it concentrates on means and aggregate effects, frequently in single-country contexts. Seldom have the advantages of quantitative and qualitative approaches been integrated to accurately and methodically depict the range of refugee economic experiences.

According to K Cortes Et al, 2004 The popular perception might be that camps house people who are helpless and dependent on food aid, but some recent studies reveal that refugee populations are actively engaged with host-country economies in an effort to improve their circumstances (8). There is little reliable empirical evidence of how refugees affect the economies of host countries. Some studies suggest that refugees have no significant impact.

INDIA'S REFUGEE POLICY

India lacks specific legislation to address the problem of refugees, in spite of their increasing inflow. India is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the key legal documents pertaining to refugee protection.

- However, India has had a stellar record on the issue of refugee protection. India has a moral tradition for assimilating foreign people and culture. Moreover, the Foreigners Act, 1946, fails to address the peculiar problems faced by refugees as a class.
- It also gives unbridled power to the Central government to deport any foreign citizen.

Further, the constitution of India also respects the life, liberty, and dignity of human beings.

- The Supreme Court in the National Human Rights Commission vs. State of Arunachal Pradesh (1996) held that “while all rights are available to citizens, persons including foreign citizens are entitled to the right to equality and the right to life, among others.”

Further, Article 21 of the Constitution encompasses the right of non-refoulement.

- Non-refoulement is the principle under international law which states that a person fleeing persecution from his own country should not be forced to return to his own country.

Due to the policies the Government of India has on the refugees, the Government of Mizoram was

also advised to refrain from welcoming and sheltering any refugees from Myanmar.

Beyond the policies that India upholds on refugees, it has a strong bond with Myanmar with the bilateral ties and the Treaty of Friendship in 1951 with the Government of Myanmar. The Union of India by no means is willing the risk the relation it has with Myanmar, as it also requested not to shelter refugees that fled Myanmar.

REFUGEES IN MIZORAM

Mizoram have an international border length of 510 and 318 kilometers with Myanmar and Bangladesh respectively, and an existence of strong ethnic ties with the Chin-Kuki-Zo community for ages (or since time immemorial) in which many civilians live in the many towns and villages along the border in Myanmar.

Myanmar Refugees

Ever since there was a military coup in Myanmar from February 2021, there are rounds of strikes in all the towns/villages of Myanmar that closely shares border with some villages of Champhai District, Mizoram, India. Thus, hundreds and thousands of civilian fled their town and villages for safety, of which many have entered Mizoram.

Mizoram have hosted more than 40000 (Forty thousand) refugees till date, and are widely spread across the length and breadth of Mizoram. Of the total refugees in Mizoram, Champhai District alone hosted more than 50 per cent of the total refugees. The demographic of the refugees in Champhai are composed of infants to an old age people, which also results into the necessitation of basic needs of all age group.

Bangladesh Refugees

Mizoram is also currently hosting hundreds of Kuki-Chin refugees displaced due to counter-terror operations carried out by Bangladeshi security forces in the country's Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region. CHT is home to some ethnic minority groups – mostly Buddhists and Christians.

Due to such operation in the region, many civilians also fled towns/villages in the region seeking safety and refuge in the nearby neighboring border villages. Since there are also close ethnic ties with the Kuki-Chin community of Bangladesh too, hundreds and thousands of displaced people again entered Mizoram towards the end of the year 2022 for which the Mizo's cannot turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to their cries.

Certain kind of help in all possible ways are voluntarily given out again for them, donations are collected in every nook and corner of Mizoram as well to shoulder the basic necessities for survival, and the number of refugees enter are still on the rise.

Internally Displaced People from Manipur

On 3 May 2023, ethnic violence erupted in India's north-eastern state of Manipur between the Meitei people, a majority that lives in the Imphal Valley, and the Kuki tribal community from the surrounding hills. As of 29 July, 181 people have been killed in the violence. More than 300 wounded, and approximately 54,488 displaced.

According to several organizations, there have been accounts of partisan killings by security forces, as well as allegations of the police siding with the Meitei community. As such is the prevailing situation in the neighboring state of Manipur, there seems to be no solution to this conflict in the near future. Therefore, Internally Displaced People (IDP) are still seeking refuge in the state of Mizoram to this day, and their number are increasing every day. However, the IDP from Manipur unlike the Myanmar refugees are the citizen of India, and the Government of India certainly is obligated for the welfare of their own people and the Government of Mizoram is not crippled by any policies of India towards their welfare in initiating any kind of action to meet their basic needs for survival.

Thus, the State (Mizoram) finance department has already sanctioned Rs. 5 crores for the IDP. The administrative approval and expenditure sanction have already been obtained from the government. "The funds would be distributed as per the number of IDPs sheltered in the district as well as the expenses already incurred by the district administration," Lalengmawia said.

Altogether 12880 Internally Displaced People of Manipur are spread out in all the 11 districts of Mizoram, of them, about 9899 people are staying with their relatives and friends or in rented houses while 2981 people are lodged in relief camps.

Aizawl district is hosting the most number of displaced people at 4818 followed by Assam border district of Kolasib and Manipur border district of Saitual at 4443 and 2951 people, respectively, while south Mizoram's Hnahthial district is giving shelter to eight such persons

Myanmar Refugees in Champhai District

Champhai the fourth district and one of the eleven districts of Mizoram state in India. The district is bounded on the north by Churachandpur district of Manipur state, on the west by Saitual and Serchhip districts, and on the south and east by Myanmar.

The economy of Champhai is mainly agriculture and border trade. Champhai is also the main trading center of Mizoram with goods like clothes, silverware and electronics imported from Myanmar through the trading post in Zokhawthar. As Champhai is bordered by Myanmar on the east, there are many villages bordering Myanmar that resulted to a high influx of refugees through this unmanned border.

Zokhawthar is an official border trade point and a small village. Since it is the main point of entry for goods and people that cross the boundary, there are many refugees in Zokhawthar. The refugees in Zokhawthar area have already outnumbered the normal inhabitant of this village. Thus, the refugees have exhausted almost all of the possible aids from these villagers and need to begin and soon start their live on their own.

Melbuk is an unofficial or informal border trade point and a small village. This point of entry also witnessed a large number of goods and people crossing the boundary, there are also many refugees in Melbuk. The refugees in Melbuk area have settled by the bank of river Tiau with minimal amenities and are prone to some of the water borne diseases. The village of Melbuk is far from their settlement, which resulted into many difficulties in all kinds of emergencies with no proper means of transport and road. Thus, the refugees in this area need all kind of empowerment more than any other refugees in the other camps.

Table 1: REFUGEES IN CHAMPHAI DISTRICT

1	Male	7,226
2	Female	7,852
3	Children	5,242
Total		20,320

Source: Sub Headquarter Young Mizo Association (SYMA), Champhai

Table II Camp / Settlement in Champhai District

1	Zote ITI
2	Zote hostel
3	Melbuk 1 Upper
4	Melbuk 2 Lower
5	Mualkawi (closed)
6	Tleii Camp
7	Seni Camp
8	Lipui Camp
9	Bethel Camp 1
10	Bethel Camp 2
11	Tattoo 1
12	Tattoo 2
13	Bukfelzawl field Camp
14	Bulfekzawl camp
15	Farkawn 1
16	Farkawn 2
17	Farkawn - with host community
18	Khuangthing 1
19	Khuangthing 2
20	Zawlsei 1
21	Khankawn
22	Thekte
23	Dilkawn - host community fire
24	Zems Camp
25	Khawbung 1
26	Khawbung 2
27	Buang Camp
28	Khuangleng Camp
29	Vety Camp

Source: Sub Headquarter Young Mizo Association (SYMA), Champhai

NEED FOR ECONOMIC CAPACITATING OF REFUGEES

With the present situation of refugees prevailing in Mizoram, it has reached a point where extension of help have become economic burden for the cash strapped government and the people of Mizoram where the masses depends on the government for all kinds of financial outlays.

There have been all kinds of donation from the people of Mizoram in the past and even till today. However, the donations have eventually declined remarkably in spite of the empathy they have on the refugees. This clearly reflects the economic adversity that is being faced by both the refugees and the people of Mizoram.

The State Governments Fiscal deficit for 2023-24 is estimated at 3.5% of GSDP (Rs 1,247 crore). In 2022-23, as per the revised estimates, fiscal deficit is expected to be 7% of GSDP, almost twice the budget estimate of 3.1%. The state government debt have rose to Rs.12,553 (Twelve thousand five hundred and fifty three) crore (As asserted by Dr. Lallianchhunga, Congress spokesperson). As such is the financial condition of the government, expecting assistance in any form from the government is not possible.

Economic adversity of Myanmar refugees

Unlike the IDP from Manipur and refugees from Bangladesh, refugees from Myanmar have been hosted for much longer period (more than two and a half years) and have almost exhausted of all possible aids.

Economic issues of the Refugees:

1. There is an acute scarcity of job all over the state, so employment opportunities for foreigner (refugees) are legally forbidden, and the society might not accept.
2. There are few or no job opportunities for the refugees and most of them totally rely on aids given to them.
3. Even for those who fortunately get the opportunity to work, are purely temporary or daily laborers on which they cannot rely.
4. They are underemployed as they are not entitled for the current prevailing fair and minimum wages of the government.
5. Most of them does not have the skills, knowledge and tools to work in the current environment without any kind of education and training for a particular job.

Other issues:

1. They don't have any basic live saving medical facilities at their disposal.
2. There are no proper educational and training facilities for all working age group in the camps.
3. There are no or proper place for worship irrespective of faith that are being practiced.
4. They are not given any legal status in the society. Perhaps the Government of India has insisted on obtaining biometric data of refugees from Myanmar.
5. They don't have basic civic amenities.
6. They lack or do not have a hygienic living condition and are overcrowded in all of their camps.
7. There are certain discriminations

Trade Identified for Sustainable Economic Capacitating

After due deliberation with the refugees at various camps in Melbuk, Zokhawthar and Champhai, there are nine (9) trades that are identified for their (refugees) sustainable economic capacitating. The trades that are identified are those trades which are likely to be easily traded off in the existing market in and around the towns and villages where camps are situated. These trades beyond its socio-economic benefits and sustainability, they are likely to cause no business harm for the existing traders (local traders/business men) within which they operate.

Through this economic capacitating activity, we are of the expectation that, the households in the camps will be able to run their family in a more meaningful way, meet day to day expenses and survive with minimal aids from the people of Mizoram, provided that they continue to sustain their trade with increased income in a matter of six (6) months or a little more.

Some of the trades are as follows:

1. Poultry

Chicken is one of the most consumed non-vegetarian food item all over the state. The required quantity of chicken is not produced within the state of Mizoram, therefore a huge quantity of it are being supplied from the neighboring state and supplied to every corner of the state and Champhai district is no exception. Thus, the keeping a small poultry farm would be the means for economic welfare and suffice many needs of the family.

Poultry farming is an economically viable activity that can be taken up by many household in the camps, and the time taken for the chicks to be consumable is hardly a month or two. The product life cycle is short and could be repeated three to four time a year provided the situation remains normal.

2. Petty trade

Small trade or stall that can be operated from the comfort of their own home nearby the camp area (As refugees are not officially permitted to run business or have formal employment). This does not require a high amount of capital investment, with high turnover rate. The targeted market for this trade is not the people in the camp area only, but also those towns and villages nearby the camp.

This business/trade can be taken up with small advice or instruction, which could be suitable for some young and adult individual irrespective of their level of education.

3. Mechanic (Automobile)

An automobile repairing (for two wheelers & four wheelers) is a sector, where the demand for trained personnel is limited and high in demand. Trained technicians/mechanics are usually don't experience much job scarcity in this particular sector as long as they are mobile with essential knowledge tools. There is also a high possibility of being employed in private garages and workshop that are dispersed around the town and villages.

4. Phone repairing

Phone repairing is a trade with good potential; in today's world almost every one of us possesses cellular phone which does not come cheap. Acquisition of one could cost us a remarkable amount of

money, a slightest defect of which can make it unworthy. So training personnel and setting up of tools could be economically viable and render a sustainable financial for a house hold.

5. Manual Weaving

As the people of Mizo use puan (mekhela) as a formal dress for women and for many other cultural costumes, it have a huge market potential and can cater to the market without causing any economical detrimental for the weaver in Mizoram. Manual (hand woven) are coveted more than themechanized ones, therefore training some women for this trade could make their family economically sustainable once they learned weaving, they can work from home and deliver to the dealer and agents in the market without physically going and selling the finished product in the market by themselves.

6. Tailoring

Tailoring is also a trade in which dresses are being made, tailored making of dresses is very common for and practiced all over the state. Training individual in this trade could also help them (household/family) in achieving economic sustainability with the trade having a potential for various contract tailoring for schools, colleges, institution etc. through brokers and agent. Thereby, generating income from their labor which will be justifiable in accordance to the skills they developed.

7. Furniture works

The process of manufacturing wooden furniture, it also has good market potential. Each and every house hold has more or less wooden furniture; they are also use for interior decoration of building for shops, restaurants, cupboards, chairs and many more. Trained individual for this trade with tools could be economically worthy for their household, as the existing trained and skilled individuals are not adequate to meet the current market demands which result to charging of high rates for their service. It is also unlikely that, the current market will experience discord in the carpenters market of Champhai district.

8. Pig farming

Pork is also one of the highly consumed meats in the state of Mizoram, whose domestic production hardly meets half of the market demand. Pigs are imported from Myanmar, Manipur and Assam in the past. However, the imports of pigs from Myanmar and Manipur are totally stopped due to the prevailing situation in the state of Manipur and Myanmar.

A piglet if fed the right feeds is consumable within 6-8 months, pork has a ready market and especially during the festive season their demands are very high, with two of the three main sources being blocked at the moment the demand might never be met by the supply available. A mature/consumable depending on their size/weight could fetch around Rs.30,000-50,000 (Rupees thirty to fifty thousand) in the local market.

9. Mushroom

Mushrooms are also one of the favorite foods of Mizo and are consumed very often. There are wild and seasonal mushroom are available for a very limited period of time only. Mushroom cultivation

is also a good trade with good market potential. The cultivation period of mushrooms is approximately for sixty (60) days mostly. Therefore, training individuals for mushroom cultivation could bear good returns for the respective household, enhancing their economic sustainability within a short period of time.

Table III Camp/Settlement wise trade

Sl. No.	Trade	Bethel Camp	Hostel Camp	Lipui Camp	Theiba Camp	Uilui Camp	Vawkte Kai Camp	Total Household
1	Poultry	29	7	17	30	15	6	104
2	Petty Trade	2	7	4	11	1	3	28
3	Mechanic (Automobile)	4	6	1	2	1	1	15
4	Phone Repairing	2	4	1	2	1	1	11
5	Manual Weaving	1		3	5			9
6	Tailoring	3	5	5	6	7		26
7	Furniture works	6	5	9	7		1	28
8	Pig rearing	50	12	41	13	81	2	199
9	Mushroom		3	3	2			8
	Total	97	49	84	78	106	14	428

Source: Sub Headquarter Young Mizo Association (SYMA), Champhai

The number of House Hold (families) in Bethel Camp is ninety seven (97). As shown in Figure 1, the percentile distribution of the selected trade by various house hold (families) for their sustainable economic capacitating (empowerment). Thirty percent (30%) of the total household chose poultry, petty trade is chose by two percent (2%), mechanic (automobile) is chose by four percent (4%), phone repairing is chose by two percent (2%), manual weaving is chose by one percent (1%), tailoring is chose by three percent (3%), furniture works is chose by six percent (6%) and piggery is chose by fifty two percent (52%). The number of House Hold (families) in Hostel Camp is forty nine (49). As shown in Figure 2, the percentile distribution of the selected trade by various house hold (families) for their sustainable economic capacitating (empowerment). Fifteen percent (15%) of the total household chose poultry, petty trade is chose by fourteen percent (14%), mechanic (automobile) is chose by twelve percent (12%), phone repairing is chose by eight percent (8%), tailoring is chose by ten percent (10%), furniture works is chose by ten percent (10%), piggery is chose by twenty five percent (25%) and mushroom cultivation by six percent (6%).

The number of House Hold (families) in Lipui Camp is eighty four (84). As shown in Figure 3, the percentile distribution of the selected trade by various house hold (families) for their sustainable economic capacitating (empowerment). Twenty percent (20%) of the total household chose poultry, while petty trade is chose by five percent (5%), mechanic (automobile) is chose by one percent (1%), phone repairing is chose by one percent (1%), manual weaving is chose by three percent (3%), tailoring is chose by six percent (6%), furniture works is chose by eleven percent (11%) piggery is

chose by forty nine percent (49%) and mushroom cultivation by four percent (4%).

The number of House Hold (families) in Theiba Camp is seventy eight (78). As shown in Figure 4, the percentile distribution of the selected trade by various house hold (families) for their sustainable economic capacitating (empowerment). Thirty eight (38%) of the total household chose poultry, while petty trade is chosen by fourteen percent (14%), mechanic (automobile) is chosen by two percent (2%), phone repairing is chosen by two percent (2%), manual weaving is chosen by six percent (6%), tailoring is chosen by eight percent (8%), furniture works is chose by nine percent (9%), piggery is chosen by seventeen percent (17%) and mushroom cultivation by three percent (3%).

he number of House Hold (families) in Uilui Camp is one hundred and six (106). As shown in Figure 5, the percentile distribution of the selected trade by various house hold (families) for their sustainable economic capacitating (empowerment). Fourteen percent (14%) of the total household chose poultry, petty trade is chosen by one percent (1%), mechanic (automobile) is chosen by one percent (1%), phone repairing is chosen by one percent (1%), tailoring is chose by seven percent (7%) and piggery is chose by seventy six percent (76%).

The number of House Hold (families) in Vawkte Kai Camp is ninety seven (14). As shown in Figure 6, the percentile distribution of the selected trade by various house hold (families) for their sustainable economic capacitating (empowerment). Forty three percent (43%) of the total household chose poultry, while petty trade has been chosen by twenty two percent (22%), mechanic (automobile) is chosen by seven percent (7%), phone repairing is chosen by seven percent (7%), furniture works is chosen by seven percent (7%) and piggery is chose by fourteen percent (14%).

Conclusion

Sustenance of the economic livelihood Capacitating of Myanmar Refugees is meant for an economic upliftment of refugees in particular to those who have sought refuge in the town/villages of Zokhawthar, Melbuk, and Champhai town. There are various assistances given to these refugees by the State Government, Churches, Young Mizo Association (YMA) and many other NGO's. Since the situation in Myanmar shows higher intensity of conflict. There possibly is no sign of improvement for the situation to calm and improve in the near future, thus the number of refugees keeps increasing with the gravity of social and economic need cannot be over emphasized than ever before.

Presently, the power supply that various camps enjoyed at the moment is a temporary connection with fixed charges of approximately Rs.20,000/- (Rupees twenty thousand only) which is being borne by the Sub Headquarter YMA (SYMA), Champhai. It may also kindly be noted that, temporary electric connection are usually allowed for upto six months (6) only, however, due to the dire situation of the refugees through mutual trust and understanding they are still enjoying till date. Perhaps, their temporary connection could go off (cut off) at any moment. It may also be pointed out that, Electric Connections are meant only for those who possess a Land Settlement Certificate (LSC) which is issued by the Land and Revenue Settlement Department, Government of Mizoram. Moreover, there has been revision and increasing of electric consumption rates per unit. This is an evidence of the state governments financial crisis at hand, the rates of electric consumption per unit has been revised twice in 2022 and 2023.

With the increased in the rate of consumption unit, while not being legally entitled to permanent or

temporary connection across the camps. It could be economically feasible for camps if owning of a Solar Powered Inverter/Generator is scalable and within sight. The need for uninterrupted lighting system are coinciding with some of the trade like poultry, phone repairing, weaving, tailoring etc. as they will have more time to labor post dusk making more income for their worthy labor to attain sustainable economic empowerment, which we all want them to attain as well. It's very clear that, the nearest health care services available for the refugees are at Champhai only. Most of the camps are around 40 kilometers more/less away from the nearest hospital, and with the condition of the road and availability of transportation system, availing of basic health care services in emergencies is difficult for all of them especially during night.

Therefore, selecting two-three (2-3) ladies at their prime and those who are willing to and considering as service to humanity from each camp to undergo basic lifesaving medical services such as checking blood pressure, sugar level, temperature, running of IV's etc. is highly recommended. Such basic course could be taught by Med Aim Hospital, New Champhai.

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