

Q & A: Refugee Research Network, May 2014

Strategic mapping areas:

- Research
- Knowledge exchange and dissemination
- Civil society and policy advocacy

Research

1. How would you describe your institution's research agenda and collaborations? What kinds of factors drive your research and what kind outcomes have you seen as a result?

- Calcutta Research Group (CRG) is presently working on issues related to forced migration & law, statelessness, city and migration, labour and migration, methodology and forced migration and borderland in South Asia. For this purpose CRG is collaborating with UNHCR- New Delhi, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Indian Council of Social Science Research, British Deputy High Commission- Kolkata, Ford Foundation, International Organization of Migration- Nepal, and International Committee of the Red Cross. Among many other factors, violation of human rights of vulnerable groups of people, negligence of state machinery to protect the vulnerable and paucity of data based on good social science research to determine the present situation and the needs of the forced migrants drove CRG to undertake its research on forced migration. The outcomes of these research activities are many including courses on forced migration, workshops, conferences, public lectures, policy recommendations, media awareness programmes, publications, etc. One of CRG's main purpose is to increase the knowledge base of the forced migrant population in South Asia and sensitize thinkers and policy makers on humanitarian solutions to problems of forced migration.

2. In general, how would you describe the current direction of forced migration research? What are the factors shaping research agendas in the field? And what kind of research would you like to see more of, and why?

- For a long time the research agenda of forced migration was dominated by the scholars and thinkers from the global north. Researchers of the global South were expected to work on case studies that would support the meta-narratives produced in the north. However, with the influx of a new group of scholars from the global south in the last two decades that picture changed substantially. This was possible because they brought in issues that completely changed the agenda of research in forced migration. They pointed out that categorization of forced migrants into rigid groups of refugees, idps, forced migrants, economic migrants etc is unhelpful to say the least. They also pointed out that forced migrants were always vulnerable people whether that vulnerability came from poverty or political positioning within a society but it always resulted in severe persecution. Death caused by genocide or hunger was equally reprehensible and most conflicts at the end were conflicts over resources. As a result of research done by these new age scholars centers grew up in hitherto unknown quarters such as Kolkata, Kampala and Bogota. New issues such as mixed and massive flows, labour migration, statelessness etc. began to be debated. The Post- 1989 political situation also contributed to these developments. Focus on terrorism brought to the forefront the critic of the global north in producing forced migrants in the South in the name of anti-terror operations. More and

more research began to focus on vulnerable groups and their own narratives of living as forced migrants. This is a desirable shift from focus purely on laws of forced migration. We think such people centric research is the need of the hour. Juridical discourse is desirable only when it is creatively related to people-centric solutions. At the end it should be remembered that research on forced migration is research on human beings who are severely discriminated and disempowered.

3. What role could or should the RRN (or a similar network) play in establishing research agendas in the field?

- RRN should play the role of a bridge between research institutions of global north and global south to take up joint research and advocacy work. RRN should also put emphasis on qualitative research and joint leadership of research projects between the North and the South so that the southern agenda is not overlooked by the donor agencies of the North.

4. What lessons have you learned from past experience in collaborative research with institutions or networks in the South (or North)? What kind of North-South collaborations work and which ones don't, and why?

- We have learnt that North-South collaboration works only when work and funding is shared equally between the North and the South. North-South collaborations based on mutual respect and empathy is the only kind of inter-regional collaboration that will work.

Knowledge exchange and dissemination

5. How would you describe your main knowledge dissemination strategies/activities, and specifically, where have you seen the maximum results?

- CRG has open access policy. The library and digital archive of CRG is accessible by the researchers of the field. Apart from that the website of CRG has enormous material such as texts and photographs of programs, reports, papers, surveys and lectures etc. However, to expand the knowledge base of forced migration studies, CRG found the Annual Orientation Course most useful where participants came from diverse background to discuss their research and created a collective knowledge sharing platform. Apart from that public lectures, seminars, Friday lectures at CRG, Refugee Watch (Journal), Refugee Watch Online (blog) are the other strategies for knowledge dissemination that are extensively used.

6. In what ways do you rely on the RRN (and/or other networks) for knowledge dissemination and what kind of outcomes have you seen as a result?

- For a proper network of knowledge dissemination there is a need to recognize the strength and resources of the South with regard to collaboration. There should be joint research works which provide an opportunity to create linkages between Global North and Global South. In particular, framing such policy/ framework by which the assumption that those living in the South are in a position to only explain what is on the ground and therefore they cannot make theoretical contributions due lack of access to the

literature is an erroneous assumption. Researchers from the global south are making grounded theoretical assumptions today in spite of language barrier and lack of resources. RRN should popularize in the global north good research from the global south and collaborate with researchers of the South in developing research and capability increasing exercises for Southern researchers.

7. What concrete roles could the RRN play in assisting your institution with knowledge dissemination?

- RRN should identify the knowledge/ resource based institutions of the Global North and conveys the database to the institutions of Global South. So that, institutions from both these parts of the world can keep themselves informed of the activities/ research/ resources of other organization. This sort of initiative could bring the research organizations to the same platform where future agendas of research can be discussed, formulated and carried on.

Civil society and policy advocacy

8. How do you engage with civil society, and in what ways, if at all, do these engagements tie into your knowledge exchange strategies?

- CRG is an organization based on membership. The members of CRG come from various disciplines and arenas such as social sciences, law, journalism, human rights, trade unions, feminist journals, etc. Their association with CRG is *pro bono* which drives from a public service responsibility. Through the initiatives of its members, CRG associates with other civil society organizations and research organizations to find a way for knowledge sharing exercises by organizing various research programs and dialogues.

9. In what concrete ways—if at all—do you provide a platform for policy advocacy, and what kind of new platforms would like to see emerge in the future, and why?

- In the awake of globalization, CRG has been advocating the cause of forced migrants in international, national and local forums. CRG works extensively with UNHCR, IOM and INGOs in the international arena. In the national level it works with Human Rights Commissions and in the local level it works with local government and local institutions to support the cause of forced migrants.

10. Are there concrete ways in which the RRN could assist you in establishing, nurturing, and expanding these relationships with civil society and policy actors (local, national, global)?

- From the perspective of global South we need to think more carefully about what we can achieve and who to partner with. In order to get full commitment of northern partners it is necessary to find out what every partner is going to get out of the arrangement both in terms of work load and the funding attached. RRN can be an example setting initiative in this.