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# MINORITY BIHARIS, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN BANGLADESH

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## Introduction

Human development means a positive change in social, economic, and political structure which in turn eases the level of poverty and improves the living standard of a group of people. It is somewhat easier to say which countries are richer and which are poorer; but defining ‘*human development*’ is absolutely a daunting task. In a broader sense, it is the end product of economic growth<sup>1</sup> and the notion of human development incorporates all aspects of individual’s well-being, from their health status to economic and political freedom. Center for Development Studies, Flinders University defined human development as *those processes of social, economic, and political change involved in the alleviation of poverty and the improvement of the living standards of the population of the third world*’<sup>2</sup>. However, human development must be conceived as a multi-dimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of absolute poverty<sup>3</sup>.

The status of human development in third world countries like Bangladesh is very low. An ample variation in the status of human development among different communities has been found in urban and rural context. The urban communities are more developed compared to their rural counterpart. Again, there are different ethnic and linguistic communities living in Bangladesh who are also suffering a lot in terms of their human development. These communities are often classified as a minority. Biharis (also called stranded Pakistanis), a minority refugee community in Bangladesh are also among the unfortunate forgotten people, who have been languishing in sub-human living conditions for the last 35 years in Bangladesh<sup>4</sup>.

According to a rough estimate by the Refugee and Migratory Movement and Research Unit (RMMRU), there are about four or five lakh Biharis living in the country<sup>5</sup>. The Biharis, many of whom consider themselves Pakistanis, sided with West Pakistan when war broke out between East and West Pakistan. In 1971, when East Pakistan became the independent Bangladesh, the Biharis found themselves unwelcome in both countries: Pakistan feared that a mass influx of Biharis could destabilize a fragile and culturally mixed population, and Bangladesh scorned the Biharis for having supported the enemy. With such refusal of offering citizenship, the Biharis have remained stateless for over three decades and lived in congested camp settlements. In addition to denial of their fundamental rights to a nationality and related civil and political rights, families face humanitarian hardship as well<sup>6</sup>. For humanity, the local community allows them to live in the open space by making slums and still they help them with association of the local administration (usually with collaboration to the local ward commissioner). Moreover, camp residents lack sources of clean water, suffer health effects from poor drainage and sanitation systems, and have poor access to education and medical facilities.

While Bangladesh permitted Biharis to stay, and they received some assistance from international organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross in the early days, they have now lived in refugee-like camps in Bangladesh with little attention from the global community. Their lack of political voice further prevents any movement toward improvement in the situation. Indeed, Biharis exist at the fringes of society, with their most fundamental human rights denied.

## **Objectives**

This paper attempts to find the human development status of the minority Biharis live in Capital City Dhaka. There are many indicators of measuring human development i.e., World Bank Development indicators, United Nation (UN) Development Indices, Economic Indicators etc. However, in this study, UN indices of human development that are Human Development Index (HDI), Human Poverty Index (HPI) and Gender-related Development Index (GDI) have been taken into consideration for measuring the human development status of the Bihari community. The study also briefly describes the causes of their existing human development status. Another objective of this paper is to focus on the services and facilities that the community gets from local governance.

## Minority Biharis in Bangladesh: A Brief History

The history of the Biharis in Bangladesh goes back to the partition of India in 1947. Their displacement occurred in the wake of communal violence during and in the aftermath of the partition. About a million of them migrated to East Pakistan, mostly from the eastern Indian states of Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Orissa, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim <sup>7</sup>. These people were then labeled as ‘*Muhajir*’ by the Pakistani government and defined as, “A *Muhajir* is a person who had entered Pakistan as a result of partition or for fear of disturbances connected therewith” <sup>8</sup>.

**Table 1: *Muhajirs* in East Pakistan (Present Bangladesh), 1951.**

Place of Enumeration	Total	North India	East India	South India	West India	Central India	North-West India	Other Places
East Pakistan	699079	20773	670735	982	1855	2697	2009	28
Chittagong Division	41935	3398	36361	337	803	414	595	27
Dhaka Division	162855	7958	150877	409	993	1377	1240	1
Rajshahi Division	494289	9417	483497	236	59	906	174	-

**Source:** Census of Pakistan, 1951.

During the period of united Pakistan (1947-1971), the Urdu-speaking Biharis were not assimilated within the society of East Pakistan and remained as a distinct cultural-linguistic group. They generally associated and identified themselves with the West Pakistani society primarily based on a shared linguistic heritage and supported the West Pakistani governing elite in the process of capturing the economic and political power in East Pakistan. The Biharis, consequently, enjoyed government patronage and preferential treatment in various sectors of the East Pakistan economy <sup>9</sup>.

In December 1971, however, when East Pakistan became the independent state of Bangladesh, their preference for Pakistan seemed natural, and in those early days, many Biharis were left behind to their ‘own’ country. But then the flow suddenly stopped, with each nation blaming the other for the halt and unfortunately, not all of the Biharis could afford to move, and were left behind in Bangladesh. Between 1974 and 1992 some 175,000 Biharis were relocated to Pakistan. Nevertheless, some Biharis have organized associations such as the Stranded Pakistani General Repatriation Committee, and began lobbying

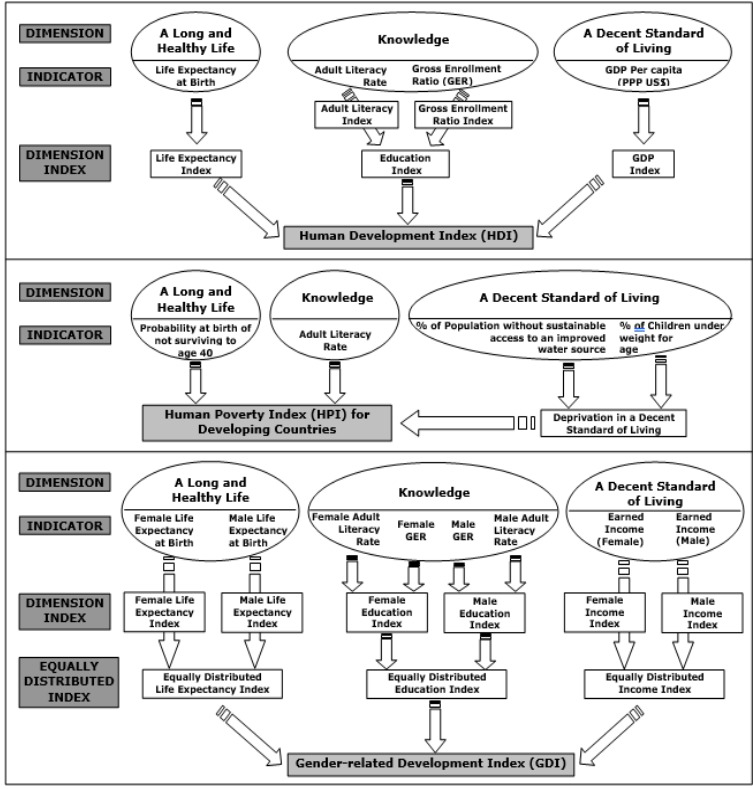
for relocation to Pakistan. The Bihari leaders still maintain that they would still like to be relocated back to their homeland of Pakistan. But two generations of Biharis now live in about seventy camps around the city. For some members of the younger generation, Bangladesh is the only home they have ever known, and Bengali is the language they have learned. New generation seems to disagree to resettle in Pakistan because most of the younger folk have never even set foot on Pakistan soil, so to them, Bangladesh is their home<sup>10</sup>.

### **Human Development Status of the Biharis**

In this paper human development status of the Biharis were measured by using the UN indices of human development. Recently, UN has prescribed three development indexes which are important to measure the status of human development of a community or country. These are Human Development Index (HDI), Human Poverty Index (HPI) and Gender related Development Index (GDI)<sup>11</sup>. All of these indexes have been developed based on many sub indexes which required a set of social data. Figure 1 summarizes how the three human development indices used in the *Human Development*, highlighting both their similarities and differences.

In Bangladesh, Biharis live in 66 camps in 13 regions across the country. And there are 3 large Bihari camps in Dhaka city. These are named by Mohammadpur Geneva Camp, Mirpur Non local Stranded Pakistanis camp and Islampur Bihari camp. This study has taken the Biharis of Mirpur Non local Stranded Pakistanis Camp as case population (Figure2). The total number of Bihari population in this camp is approximately 12,000. The average percentage of male and Females are about 60 percent and 40 percent respectively. About 1000 Bihari households are living in the study area in which 70 percent and 30 percent are living in the slump and in the buildings respectively. A maximum of 53 families have the family members above 10. Only 5 percent have some light of education. Most of the people of this community (almost 99%) are engaged as workers in the industries of *Benarashi Shari*. Nearly all of the peoples of the community have almost same socio-economic condition. Their average monthly income is about 3000 Taka per person. All have latrine facility, albeit, not properly used and maintained. The community under study has access to 40 combined latrines for about 1000 families. However, in recent years, a significant number of families have constructed some form of their own

latrines though the hygiene condition is very poor. This community has no permanent source of water. They have to collect water from neighboring houses or in some cases; they cut down the waterline illegally and collect water temporarily from there.



**Figure 1:** Summary of Human Development Indices by the UN. Source: Human Development Report, 2005

In this research 100 households (10%) were selected randomly from the study area in consideration of convenience to represent their real characteristics. A set of questionnaire survey was conducted among the selected households for collecting the socio-economic data. Data were then used as input in mathematical analysis to find the values of different indicators of human development as adopted in this study. Most of these household heads are male (93 out of 100), aged 45 to 60 years. Data from secondary sources were also used for the calculation of the different indices. Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with the community leaders was made to know which services and facilities they get from the local governance and also to know

their problems for a full appraisal of the real status of Human Development.

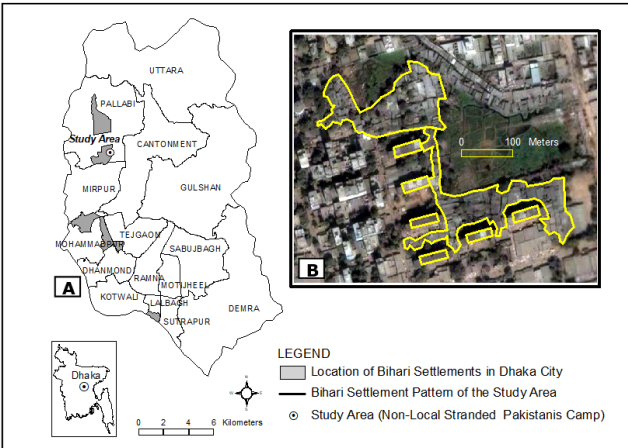


Figure 2: The map (A) shows the approximate location of the Bihari settlement in Dhaka City. Location of the study area has also presented in this map. The irregular shaped polygon (B) represents the slump area while rectangular polygons are four storied buildings in Mirpur Millat Bihari Camp. These buildings were constructed for the staff of Water Development Board but these buildings were occupied by the Minority Bihari group since independence.

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**Human Development Index (HDI)**

The UN Human Development Index (HDI) is a comparative measure of poverty, literacy, education, life expectancy, childbirth, and other factors for countries worldwide<sup>11</sup>. It is a standard means of measuring well-being, especially child welfare. This index has been used by many researchers to identify whether the country is a first, second, or third world country. This composite index is a simple average of three indexes reflecting a country’s achievements in:

- **Life expectancy at birth:** High levels of longevity are critical for a country's economic and social well being; Minimum limit of life expectancy is 85 years.
- **Levels of educational attainment:** The HDI measures adult literacy and the ratio of people in primary, secondary and tertiary education; Minimum goals is 100%.
- **Gross Domestic Product per capita:** seen as being a measurement of the ability of people to access goods and services; Minimum per capita achievement limit is \$40000.

Although highly desirable, these goals have not yet been fully attained by any country. The advantage of the human development index relative to the development diamond method is that it allows countries to be ranked in order of their achievements in human development. The disadvantage of the human development index is that, as an aggregate index, it does not allow us to see the relative importance of its different components or to understand why a country's index changes over time whether, for example, it happens because of a change in GNP per capita or because of a change in adult literacy.

The HDI is essentially a score between 0 and 1. A score of 0 would mean no human development has taken place and a score of 1 is the maximum amount of human development <sup>11</sup>. In 2006, the Human Development Report places Norway as the top ranked nation with a HDI of 0.965. Box 2 represents the calculation of HDI of the Bihari community of the study area.

### **Box 1: Calculation Methods of HDI**

The formula of calculating HDI is:

$$\text{HDI} = \frac{1}{3}(\text{Life Expectancy Index}) + \frac{1}{3}(\text{Education Index}) + \frac{1}{3}(\text{GDP Index})$$

$$\text{x-index} = \frac{\text{x-min(x)}}{\text{max(x)-min(x)}}$$

where,

max(x) = Highest value that the variable 'x' can attain

min(x) = Lowest value that the variable 'x' can attain

$$\text{Life Expectancy Index} = \frac{\text{LE}-25}{85-25}$$

$$\text{Education Index} = \frac{2}{3}\text{ADI} + \frac{1}{3}\text{GEI}$$

Where,

$$\text{Adult Literacy Index (ADI)} = \frac{\text{Adult Literacy Rate}-0}{100-0}$$

$$\text{Gross Enrollment Index (GEI)} = \frac{\text{Combined Gross Enrollment}-0}{100-0}$$

$$\text{GDP Index} = \frac{\text{Log(GDP per capita)}-\text{Log}(100)}{\text{Log}(4000)-\text{Log}(100)}$$



## **Box 2: Calculation of HDI of the Bihari community**

### **Required Parameters and their values from field survey:**

Life Expectancy at Birth – 50 years

Adult Literacy Rate – 5% (ability to read Bangla or English)

Combined Gross Enrollment – 20% (number of children attaining in school)

GDP per capita – 50 USD

### **Calculated Value of sub indexes**

Life Expectancy Index = 0.454

Education Index = 0.099

GDP index = -0.188

### **Calculation of HDI**

$$\begin{aligned}\therefore HDI &= \frac{1}{3} \times 0.454 + \frac{1}{3} \times 0.099 + \frac{1}{3} \times (-0.188) \\ &= 0.151 + 0.033 - 0.062 \\ &= 0.122\end{aligned}$$

By the HDI, human development status of the Bihari Community was found very poor (0.122) in contrast to the nation (0.520) as a whole. Apart from the life expectancy index of the Biharis (0.454), which is close to the national value (0.63), the Education index (0.099) and the GDP index (-0.188) are far away from the national values (0.45 and 0.48 respectively). The so called religious taboos don't let them to learn modern education system. These people feel that they don't need to learn Bengali or English. Almost all of them can read the Holy Quran but not accurately. For Bihari children, the right to a basic education has become a luxury. There is no time to get wiser as most of the children may have to work in factories in order to help support their families. However, in recent years, the community feels the importance of proper education for a sustainable life. That is why their enrollment in schools is increasing nowadays.

### **Human Poverty Index (HPI)**

HPI measures *scarcity* as one of three basic dimensions of human development captured in the above calculated HDI. The three dimensions of HPI are <sup>11</sup>:

- ***A long and Healthy Life*** – vulnerable to death at a relatively early age i.e., probability at birth of not surviving to age more than 40 years.
- ***Knowledge*** – exclusion from the world of reading and communications, as measured by the adult literacy rate.
- ***A decent standard of living*** – lack of access to overall economic provisioning, as measured by the unweighted average of two indicators – (a) the percentage of the population without access to safe water and (b) the percentage of children under weight for their respective age.

The result from HPI indicates that almost half of the people of the studied community (50.196) have little sign of human development. This community people are the main labor force of ‘Benarashi Sharee’. They worked hard for whole day for a small reward; sometimes they were cheated by their employers. They are really not only poor but also are living in a sub-human condition, in an adverse living environment. At home they live like animals. Their families cook, eat, work, and sleep in the same room. This index also indicates that the remaining 50% of the population are also poor but they have some sign of Human development either in education, income, or health status. The comparatively richer Bihari families are now able to live in their own single bedroom houses, and are able to send their children to schools.

### ***Box 3: Calculation Methods of HPI***

The formula of calculating HPI is:

$$HPI = \sqrt[\alpha]{\left[\frac{1}{3}(P_1^\alpha + P_2^\alpha + P_3^\alpha)\right]}$$

Where,

$P_1$  = Probability at birth of not surviving to age 40 (100 times)

$P_2$  = Adult Literacy Rate

$P_3$  = Unweighted Population

$\alpha = 3$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Unweighted Population} = & \frac{1}{2}(\text{population without access to safe water}) \\ & + \frac{1}{2}(\text{Child under weight for age}) \end{aligned}$$

**Table 2: Required parameters and their values for HPI calculation.**

Parameters	Minority Bihari
Probability at birth of not surviving to age more than 40 years	35.2 %
Adult Literacy Rate	5%
Population without access to safe water	99%
Child under weight for age	40%

**Source:** Field Survey, 2006.

HPI value for the Bihari Community in below:

$$\therefore \text{Unweighted Population} = \left(\frac{1}{2} \times 99\right) + \left(\frac{1}{2} \times 40\right) = 69.5$$

$$\begin{aligned} \therefore HPI &= \sqrt[3]{\frac{1}{3} \{(35.2)^3 + 5^3 + (69.5^3)\}} \\ &= \sqrt[3]{\frac{1}{3} (379441.583)} \\ &= 50.196 \end{aligned}$$

### ***The Gender related Development Index (GDI)***

The GDI adjusts the average achievements to reflect the inequalities between men and women in the three areas: (a) A long and healthy life, as measured by life expectancy at birth, (b) Knowledge, as measured by the adult literacy rate and the combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrollment ratio and (c) A decent standard of living as measured by estimated earned income. It is important to mention here that to achieve human development, empowerment of both male and female are required. Backwardness of any one sex can hamper the level of development for the community. A ratio between the living standards of male and female can give a true picture of human development.

**Table 3: Achievement Values of different goals in Human Development GDI.**

Goals	Maximum Value	Minimum Value	Studied Values	
Female Life Expectancy at Birth	87.5	27.5	48.6	
Male Life Expectancy at Birth	82.5	22.5	56.4	
Adult Literacy Rate	100%	0%	Female	1%
			Male	7%
Combined Gross Enrollment Ratio	100	0	Female	10%
			Male	40%
Estimated Earned Income (PPP US\$)	40000	100	Female	5
			Male	45

**Source:** UNDP, 2005 and Field Survey, 2006

The calculation of the GDI involves three steps. First, female and male indices in each dimension are calculated according to this general formula:

$$\text{Dimension Index} = \frac{\text{Actual Value} - \text{Minimum Value}}{\text{Maximum Value} - \text{Minimum Value}}$$

Second, the female and male indices in each dimension are combined in a way that penalizes differences in achievement between men and women. The resulting index, referred to as the equally distributed index, is calculated according to this general formula:

$$\text{Equal Distributed Index} = \left\{ \left[ \text{Female Population Share (Female Index)}^{1-e} \right] + \left[ \text{Male Population Share (Male Index)}^{1-e} \right] \right\}^{\frac{1}{1}}$$

Here, 'e' measures the aversion to inequality. In GDI 'e' = 2; which gives the harmonic mean of the female and male indices.

Third, the GDI is calculated by combining the three equally distributed indices in an un-weighted average.

**Box 4: Calculation of GDI of the Bihari community**

Female Life Expectancy = $\frac{48.6-27.5}{87.5-27.5}=0.351=$	Male Life Expectancy = $\frac{56.4-22.5}{82.5-22.5}=0.565$
∴ Equally distributed LE Index = $\{[0.391 (0.351^{-1})]+[0.601 (0.565^{-1})]\}^{-1}=0.459$	
Female Adult Literacy Index = $\frac{1-0}{100-0}=0.01$	Male Adult Literacy Index = $\frac{7-0}{100-0}=0.07$
Female Education Index = $\frac{2}{3}(0.01)+\frac{1}{3}(0.1)=0.0396$	Male Education Index = $\frac{2}{3}(0.07)+\frac{1}{3}(0.4)=0.1799$
∴ Equally distributed Education Index = $\{[0.391 (0.0396^{-1})]+[0.601 (0.1799^{-1})]\}^{-1}=0.075$	
Female Income Index = $\frac{\log(5)-\log(100)}{\log(4000)-\log(100)}=-0.812$	Male Income Index = $\frac{\log(45)-\log(100)}{\log(4000)-\log(100)}=-0.216$
∴ Equally distributed Income Index = $\{[0.391 (-0.812)^{-1}]+[0.601 (-0.216)^{-1}]\}^{-1}=-0.306$	
∴ GDI = $\frac{1}{3}(\text{Equally Distributed LE Index})+\frac{1}{3}(\text{Equally Distributed Education Index})$ $+\frac{1}{3}(\text{Equally Distributed Income Index}) = \frac{1}{3}(0.459)+\frac{1}{3}(0.075)+\frac{1}{3}(-0.306)=0.076$	

From the above discussions and measurements of Human Development, we can see that the HDI value for the Bihari community is 0.122. In 2006, Bangladesh has been placed 139th position in terms of Human Development with the HDI value 4 of 0.520 which means that the notion of Human Development is very poor. This minority Bihari community living in an adverse environment within a country; which itself is one of the poorest countries in the world. The calculated value of HPI is 50.196 which mean that almost half of the community has no sign of any sort of human development (i.e., education, life expectancy, income etc.). The GDI value of the community is 0.076 which represents a great inequality among the male and female.

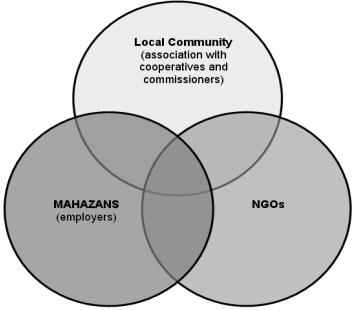
So, from the above discussions, it is clearly visible that the level of Human Development in this community is very poor. The reasons may be as follows:

- So called Religious taboos restrict them to acquire modern education which doesn't led them to improve their status;
- MAHAZANS dictate the life style of the community. They pay small amount of money against their firm effort;
- They are deprived from governmental benefits as they are not the citizen of Bangladesh hence they have to struggle hard;
- Females are restricted to learn education or work rather to manage the household activities only.

Ultimately, absence of citizenship restricts the Biharis' chances to develop their own economic opportunities and prohibits access to processes that would enable them to safeguard their rights.

## Role of Local Governance

Local Governance is the process of area-based decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented) for a specific area <sup>12</sup>(ESCAP, 2001). Generally government is the main actor in governance. The bottom most administrative body in the administrative hierarchy of a government is responsible for managing local governance with association of local people. However, different private organizations, NGOs, research institutes, religious leaders, financial institutions, political parties and cooperatives are also major part of local governance. In the study area, the major actors of local governance are MAHAZANS (employer of the Biharis), NGOs and Local community with association of cooperatives and local ward commissioner.



**Figure 3: Actors of Local Governance in the Studied Community**

Although the Mahazans are too rude to these peoples but they are the only source of the income for the Bihari community. Most of the peoples of the study community are directly dependent on their employers to manage their house hold expenditure. The International Red Cross supplied few food grains to the Biharis. But this little contribution also stopped for unknown reason for about a decade. Several NGOs are now working for them; but they mainly focus on health services. The main governance comes from the local community. With collaboration to the local ward commissioner and local cooperatives, they provide water to the community people. Field observation in the study area finds that three water lines have been provided by the local community at different points to collect water free of costs. Several shops and homes of the study community are brought under electrification in recent years with the aid of the local ward commissioner.

## Conclusion

In Bangladesh, the Bihari issue is considered by many as the by-product of the communal hostility in the sub-continent. Several researches have been done on various issues on the Bihari community by different national and international agencies and researchers but, unfortunately, their lifestyle remain unchanged and till now they have a very poor level of human development

status. The same status exists among most of the Bihari camps all over Bangladesh. They are economically, socially and politically ignored both by the Bangladeshi and Pakistani governments. Furthermore, low-income level, lack of basic utility services, minimum living and social environment pushes them more vulnerable position. It is the time for the governments of Bangladesh and Pakistan, the UN, regional and donor governments, non-governmental agencies, and concerned individuals to identify and implement permanent solutions for this protracted problem that has prevented hundreds of thousands of individuals from improving their lives. The following recommendations are placed here to improve the status of human development for the Bihari community:

1. Immediate rehabilitation is necessary for Biharis community. From that point of view, both the Bangladeshi and Pakistani government will have to take decision through a discourse about these stranded community as to their nationality: whether they are Pakistani or Bangladeshi from an internationally, and are to be taken care of accordingly;
2. If they are treated as Pakistani then the Pakistani Government, Bangladeshi Government and International organizations like UN have to take necessary steps to move them into Pakistan. If they are deemed to be Bangladeshi, then the government should accord citizenship and try to mainstream them;
3. Government and NGO should take up to ameliorate their education, health, water and sanitation problems at the earliest to avert large-scale catastrophe.
4. Develop and implement programs to provide relief and temporary humanitarian assistance for Biharis until a sustainable solution is found for every stateless individual.
5. Donor governments can provide additional funding as necessary to support viable programmes to prevent loss of nationality, provide assistance, and resolve statelessness. They can also help to prevent the development of and reduce to statelessness.

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