

Needs Assessment of Refugee Communities from Bhutan and Burma

**Conducted by
The Intergenerational Center
at Temple University**

for

**The Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
under a Cooperative Agreement with
The Office of Refugee Resettlement**

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**Needs Assessment of Refugee Communities
from Bhutan and Burma
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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the United States has experienced an influx of refugees from Bhutan and Burma.ⁱ Between 2007 and 2009, 18,772 refugees from Bhutan and 50,237 from Burma were resettled into approximately 40 different states (Martin, Daniel C. 2009). The challenges faced by these refugees are similar in many ways to the challenges faced by their predecessors from countries around the world: language and cultural dissonances create barriers to financial security, health, education, long-term integration, and cultural maintenance.

Recent changes in policies and the economy have created additional challenges. Resettlement agencies have long relied on extended families and/or ethnic community networks to support new arrivals, but a recent change in immigration policy has drastically limited the number of refugees who arrived through the family reunification program. As a result, resettlement agencies are assigned primarily “free cases.”ⁱⁱ With limited family and ethnic community networks that can help orient new arrivals, the burden to address challenges that arise in daily adjustments to a foreign environment has shifted to the resettlement agencies. One staff member highlights the refugees’ expectations and dependency this way: “They [refugees] see us as family and as the government at the same time.”

Compounding the refugees’ lack of means to provide financial security to their families and to gain self-sufficiency are the impacts of the current economic downturn that has shrunk funding levels to already cash-strapped resettlement agencies, community-based organizations serving immigrants and refugees, community clinics, public schools and other public service agencies, all of which are important partners in successful resettlement and integration of refugees. This lack of connection to other support mechanisms contributes to a widespread sense of abandonment.

This report summarizes the findings from a needs assessment of refugees from Burma and Bhutan facilitated by the Intergenerational Center at Temple University (IGC)ⁱⁱⁱ from February through August 2010. This qualitative assessment was conducted to inform the training and technical assistance effort being provided by the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) with support from the Office of Refugee Resettlement.^{iv}

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the capacity building needs of refugee communities from Bhutan and Burma within the United States, the IGC research team, in partnership with SEARAC and its other project associates, Mosaica: The Center for Nonprofit Development and Pluralism, and Karen American Community Foundation (KACF), focused its investigation on the following key areas:

- Initial resettlement experiences, including the support provided within ninety days of arrival by resettlement agencies^v and other organizations and individuals;
- Experiences in accessing mainstream services after ninety days of arrival; and
- Processes in community building and leadership development.

Methodology

The needs assessment primarily targeted three ethnic groups: Bhutanese and the two largest ethnic groups from Burma, the Karen and Chin (Bagnall 2010). After a document review and initial interviews with stakeholders and community leaders conducted nationally, fifteen focus groups with 177 refugees from Bhutan and Burma took place in Philadelphia, PA; Atlanta, GA; Chapel Hill, NC; and Indianapolis, IN. Comments and ideas shared at the community meetings conducted by SEARAC and Mosaica at some of the focus group sites were also documented. Basic service information from resettlement agencies in the focus group locations was also collected online to supplement the data from the refugees.

Initial Information Gathering

In order to design the needs assessment of refugee communities from Bhutan and Burma, the IGC team reviewed information on the historical and cultural background of these populations as well as demographic data. Also during this period, IGC conducted in-person and telephone interviews with a range of key informants. These informants included staff members from refugee-serving agencies, community leaders from Bhutan and Burma, and people who are well connected and knowledgeable in these communities.

Utilizing a method called snowball sampling (Patton 2002), IGC conducted a total of 47 initial interviews. IGC continued arranging key informational interviews throughout the summer to gain essential local and ethnic background information on the selected focus group locations. Overall, these initial interviews enabled the IGC researchers to gain useful insights on the structures and cultural norms of the targeted communities and helped cultivate relationships with emerging groups and organizations of refugees from Bhutan and Burma.

Focus Groups with Refugees

Fifteen focus group meetings with refugees from Bhutan and Burma took place during the summer in Philadelphia, PA; Atlanta, GA; Chapel Hill, NC; and Indianapolis, IN. A total of six focus groups with refugees from Bhutan were conducted in Philadelphia and Atlanta. The data collection involving refugees from Burma consisted of a total of eight focus groups: two focus groups of a mixed group of Karen and Burmese in Philadelphia, PA; three focus groups with Karen in Chapel Hill, NC; and three focus groups with Chin in Indianapolis, IN^{vi} (see Appendix A for more information about the focus group sites and participants).^{vii}

To supplement the data collected from refugees through focus groups, the IGC researchers also documented comments shared by community leaders and volunteers who participated in the community meetings conducted by SEARAC and Mosaica at some of the focus group sites. The basic data on service information from resettlement agencies serving refugees from Bhutan and Burma in the focus group locations were also collected to supplement the brief survey completed by the focus group participants.

Due to the shortness of the data collection period, the sample size is limited. Moreover, the findings from the needs assessment reflect emerging issues in the selected locations at a specific period. Therefore, they cannot be generalized for the overall experiences of refugees from Bhutan and Burma across the United States. Nevertheless, the assessment contributes to building our understanding of the nature of the challenges faced by refugees from Bhutan and Burma. The assessment also helps to identify some of the strengths they have brought from their home countries and refugee camps, illustrates the community-building potential they have in this country, and suggests further areas for capacity building.

II. KEY FINDINGS FROM REFUGEES FROM BHUTAN Philadelphia, PA and Atlanta, GA

Profile of Refugees from Bhutan

Bhutan is a self-proclaimed Buddhist nation, which emphasizes Buddhism in its government, culture, and daily life. Despite Bhutan's mountainous terrain, the migration rate from adjacent countries has increased since the 19th century. The Lhotshampa, ethnic Nepali peoples, began migrating from Nepal to the southern region of Bhutan to cultivate an agricultural settlement (Bhutanese Refugees: Story of a forgotten people n.d.). In 1958, the government of Bhutan granted citizenship to all Lhotshampas to ensure that the southern region would remain cultivated.

In the 1980s the Bhutanese government saw the Lhotshampas' practice of Hinduism as a threat to the Buddhist political order. Hundreds of thousands of Lhotshampas were declared non-nationals and forcibly removed from Bhutan. For more than 17 years, the Lhotshampas have been relocated to seven different refugee camps in Nepal (Bhutanese Refugees: Story of a forgotten people n.d.). The population of these camps has grown from 80,000 in 1992 to 105,000 in 2007 and continues to grow. In November 2007, the United Nations began to resettle Lhotshampas to refugee receiving nations from around the world. According to the United States Office of Immigration data, 18,772 Bhutanese refugees resettled in the U.S. in 2009 (Martin 2009). On the other hand, the U.S. Embassy in Nepal claims over 30,000 refugees have been resettled to the United States (United States Embassy: Kathmandu 2010).

The following section highlights the responses from refugees from Bhutan in Philadelphia, PA and Atlanta, GA. The main themes from the overall responses are presented in three key areas of focus group questions: 1) initial resettlement experiences; 2) access to mainstream services; and 3) community building and leadership development.

A. Initial Resettlement Experience

When the focus group and interview participants from Bhutan were asked to share their resettlement experience within 90 days of arrival, the following themes emerged from their discussions and reflections.

Unmet Expectations

Focus group participants from both Philadelphia and Atlanta acknowledged a range of support received from the resettlement agency, but many indicated that the hardships of resettlement were much more severe than they had expected. A sense of despair was evident from both non-English speaking and English speaking refugee participants. Through an interpreter, they commented: "Many sense that the life in the Nepal camp was easier. The border was open and they were able to work, go to school. Language and culture are similar..."

The sense of disappointment and confusion about their resettlement mainly comes from the discrepancy between information they received during the pre-departure stage and the realities of refugee services in the United States, as well as from their own interpretation of a highly complex resettlement service structure. Sources of pre-departure information included local newspapers as well as word of mouth from NGO staff and other refugees. Misinformation about the length of the resettlement agencies' services was most frequently reported among focus group participants. Both Philadelphia and Atlanta focus group participants also expected that adults 18 years and older would receive some type of skill training and ESL instruction to prepare for a job in the United States; as one man noted, "We were told in Nepal that we would get free education for five years for all."

Desire to Understand and Contribute to the Resettlement Services

Recognizing the enormous challenges of resettling newly arrived refugees, Bhutanese community members from both Atlanta and Philadelphia expressed their desire to be involved with the refugee resettlement process. Community leaders from Atlanta expressed their hope to establish a partnership with resettlement agencies. Given their own cultural and linguistic capacity and experiences as refugees, these leaders believe they can make contributions to the local refugee resettlement agencies.

B. Access to Mainstream Services

Based on the current resettlement system, the Reception and Placement (R&P) Service provided by resettlement agencies ends after ninety days of arrival (see endnote iv. for more information about the R&P Service). Although some resettlement agencies continue to assist their clients through different grant mechanisms, many refugees are on their own to access other government and local services. The following themes emerged when respondents were asked about their experiences in accessing available services beyond ninety days after arrival.

Access Challenges

Health care system: Many participants talked about the challenges of navigating the health care system in the United States. For example, some reported that they did not have the immunization records needed to apply for a green card. Once they were no longer eligible for resettlement services, it was extremely difficult for them to deal with the immunization process. Many participants expressed concern about keeping their Medicaid insurance as they believe it expires after eight months. Language access was also identified as a major problem associated with health care facilities. Atlanta focus groups indicated that most hospitals expect non-English speaking refugees to bring their own interpreters. When interpretation is provided, it is often through low-quality telephonic interpretation services.

Education: Parents indicated that understanding the American school system is particularly challenging. Although some parents or family members understand basic English and are able to read letters from school, this does not mean they can understand the implications of the letters or are able to follow through on requests or instructions.

Court system: The court system is another facility where refugee members feel they need more support, especially from professional interpreters. They discussed the serious consequences of using a bilingual friend or family member as a court interpreter.

Community Support for Service Access

Although Bhutanese refugees face many challenges of accessing mainstream services, some focus group participants indicated that they are able to rely on the “bridge builders” that help them connect to and navigate the mainstream services. The bridge builders include both mainstream organizations and Bhutanese organizations, as well as both American-born and Bhutanese individuals.

Overall, lack of knowledge and connection to organizations other than refugee resettlement agencies makes it difficult to access mainstream services. Although community volunteers are committed and resourceful, it is extremely challenging for them to obtain appropriate contacts and the latest information on a range of services. As one leader commented, “We don’t have proper info right away because we have no proper person to reach out [to for updated info].”

During the focus group discussions, no other organizations such as ethnic community-based organizations were identified as promising bridge builders.

Distinctive Challenges for Refugees from Bhutan: Concerns for Older Generations

Bhutanese focus group participants highlighted their concerns for community members over 40 years of age. The Atlanta community particularly noted that people between 45 and 64 are most vulnerable.^{viii} This generation did not have a chance to attend school and primarily worked as farmers or construction workers in Bhutan and the Nepal refugee camps. They are non-literate in both Nepali and English. According to the focus group participants, due to the poor living conditions in the camp, “they aged much earlier,” leading to health issues that prevented them from performing manual jobs. As younger generations enter the broader community for school and work, older adults suffer severe social isolation. One focus group’s participants articulated the struggle of the older population: “Most older Bhutanese refugees are totally illiterate and they don’t know where to go or what to do. So they have become hopeless...they struggle for existence.”

This negative impact extends to the rest of the family. Because the majority of refugees from Bhutan arrive with large families, unemployed middle-aged and older family members strain the whole family unit, putting enormous pressure on the young generations who must quickly find jobs and work long hours. The younger generation expressed their sense of guilt for not caring for elders left at home. The older generation, in turn, expressed their sense of guilt for depending on young family members and thus depriving them of educational opportunities.

C. Community Building and Leadership Development

Community Building Structures: Two Locations, Two Different Stages

The two Bhutanese communities IGC visited are very different in nature and at very different stages in their community building. The community building capacity of each depends on the size of the refugee population, the scope of its network, and its community organizing experience.

For example, Atlanta has a core group of active community members. Three formal community groups are already established in the area and are active in coordinating community support, meetings, and events. Overall, the Atlanta community leaders have a certain degree of organizing capacity, although they do not refer to themselves as leaders. Many of them know each other from working together in community activities in the refugee camp. Many were educated in the camp, although some went to college in Nepal; several taught at schools and a few taught at a university.

In contrast, refugees in Philadelphia have just begun to organize themselves. They have met with other refugees from Bhutan through personal introductions and social services or educational programs available upon their arrival. There has not yet been a formal meeting or an event to gather community members. One of the resettlement agencies has established a women's group and started to facilitate community engagement efforts among women who are available during weekdays.

Goals for Community Building

The Bhutanese refugees who participated in the focus groups and the community workshop identified their long-term goals as follows:

- Establishing a community center or an association to support people facing obstacles and to preserve culture and religion;
- Developing partnerships with both Bhutanese and non-Bhutanese organizations in the U.S.;
- Fostering active community participation, engaging in advocacy, and facilitating political empowerment; and
- Achieving self-sufficiency.

Challenges for Leadership Development and Community Building

The following themes surfaced as challenging aspects of leadership development and community building within the refugee communities from Bhutan:

Negative connotations of leadership: the term “leader” has a negative connotation for some Bhutanese who associate it with political activities. In the Atlanta focus groups, for example, a focus group question about leaders and their roles confused some of the participants. A few bilingual members explained that the word “leaders” referred to political leaders from the refugee camp who forced the refugees to remain in the camp to continue fighting against the Bhutanese government, while they wanted to consider other options for a better life such as resettlement.

Active community members who are involved with community building consider themselves volunteers, navigators, or informal social workers. According a community member, these roles are expressed in the Nepali language, as “swyem sevak.” Its literal translation, according to a bilingual focus group participant, is “stepping forward to serve for the community, i.e., volunteers.” The overall approach that active members said they are taking is a social-work approach rather than a political activist approach.

However, during the discussion at the community meeting, the need for leadership development was raised. Participants felt that more unified efforts to solve community problems are necessary. As one member commented, “we [have] realized that we need leaders, we need to organize and solve our own problem[s]. We have to be the solution.”

Lack of resources, coordination, and trust: Atlanta leaders reported that the lack of resources and a lack of networking and relationships with outside/mainstream agencies are the major obstacles to their

community work. Focus group participants further explained that because of the lack of resources, they are not able to rent a professional space and so they must meet at members' homes. They believe that not having a public/professional space affects the perceptions of their legitimacy and transparency about their work. These perceptions also create trust issues between different Bhutanese organizations and with resettlement agencies.

Participants agreed that there was a need for better coordination across groups. Philadelphia leaders identified the geographic distance among community leaders as a challenge.

III. KEY FINDINGS FROM REFUGEES FROM BURMA

Profile of Refugees from Burma

Burma is a small country south of the Himalayan Mountains, which has received a great deal of international attention within the last several decades. Also known as the Union of Myanmar, Burma is comprised of several different ethnic groups, many of which are being persecuted under the current military regime (CIA World Fact Book: Burma 2010).

Burma regained independence from post-World War II Great Britain in 1948. During this time, several ethnic minority groups organized demonstrations seeking independence from Burma but these attempts failed.

In the 1960s, Burma's dictator launched a counter-insurgency strategy called Four Cuts, designed to cut the four main links (food, funds, intelligence, and recruits) between insurgents, their families, and local villagers. Eventually, the state began seizing lands from ethnic minorities and forced them to relocation sites. The human rights abuses that occurred throughout the relocation process are the main reasons for refugee flight (BBC World News: Burma Profile 2010). International resettlement of refugees from Burma began in 2004. The United States Office of Immigration Statistics indicates that at the end of 2009, a total of 50,237 refugees from Burma have been resettled within the U.S. The two largest ethnic minority groups to resettle in the U.S are the Karen and the Chin.

Profile of Karen Refugees

The Karen peoples are one of the largest ethnic groups in opposition to the Myanmar government. The Karen state established the Karen National Union (KNU) in order to be independent from the government. After the British Government granted independence to Burma in 1948, the Burmese government declined the Karen and other ethnic groups' requests for autonomy. During the mid-1970s the KNU created an armed faction called the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) which was established in order to fight the Four Cuts (Burma Issues: Karen 2010). The Karen state is located along the Thai border; in 2008, UNHCR estimated that there were 140,000 Burmese refugees living in nine Thai refugee camps (Pichai 2010).

Profile of Chin Refugees

The Chin people are another oppressed ethnic group in the western part of Burma. The Chin refugees are primarily Christians who converted to the practice during British rule over Burma after the Second World War (Bagnall 2010). Once the military took charge in the 1960s, many Chin people were persecuted for their Christian beliefs and forced to convert to Buddhism (Bagnall 2010). In addition to religious persecution, there were many accounts of human rights violations including, “forced labor, arbitrary arrests, detention, and torture” towards the Chin population (Human Rights Watch 2009).

In 2010, an estimated 38,700 Chin refugees were registered with UNHCR in Malaysia (Pichai 2010). According to refugee community estimates, unregistered refugees could number around 10,000 (Burma Issues: Chin 2010).

The following sections look at the responses from refugees from Burma, primarily Karen refugees in focus groups conducted in Philadelphia, PA and Chapel Hill, NC, and from Chin refugees in Indianapolis, IN.

Key Findings from Karen and Burmese^{ix} Refugees Philadelphia, PA and Chapel Hill area, NC

A. Initial Resettlement Experience

Basic Support Needed

In general, the Karen and Burmese participants in the Philadelphia focus groups indicated that they received consistent support from their resettlement agencies. As one participant reported, “I was picked up by a caseworker, given housing, which [omitted] agency paid for. They also helped my children find jobs.” On the other hand, participants in North Carolina expressed distress and concern for inconsistent and inadequate support for their resettlement.

Karen refugees reported that they need support in the basic details of everyday life in the United States because they are not used to the modern conveniences that did not exist during their long periods of internal displacement or at the refugee camps. For example, focus group participants talked about not knowing how to use the stove when they first arrived or where to buy food.

Ambivalent feelings about bilingual Karen refugees serving as volunteer interpreters

The focus group participants reported that some bilingual Karen refugees serve as volunteer interpreters and translators for resettlement agencies. Although their contribution makes resettlement services more accessible for Karen refugees, key informants expressed ambivalent feelings about this working relationship with agencies. Using volunteers sometimes meant tapping into young populations who do not have sufficient proficiency to interpret, leading to miscommunications that have caused problems for other Karen families. Also, the use of young volunteers sometimes interfered with their schooling.

B. Access to Mainstream Services

When focus group participants were asked about their experiences in accessing services ninety days after arrival, the following issues were highlighted.

Access Challenges

Language barriers: Refugees from Burma experience challenges concerning language issues similar to those of Bhutanese refugees. However, linguistic diversity creates additional problems. For example, some resettlement agencies employed staff members who speak one of the languages spoken in Burma, such as Burmese. Unfortunately, this language is not spoken by all Karen refugees. Additionally, for many Karen, Burmese is considered the language of an oppressive government, adding psychological stress to an already stressful resettlement experience.

Education: Female focus group participants who often stay home and take care of young children say that they are unable to communicate with their children’s teachers and that their children require tutoring and homework support. Some also indicate issues of social adjustment of children to their school environment.

Both men and women lament that older children who just missed the age cut-off for school are put to work right away with no opportunity to continue their education and improve their chances for future advancement. For example, one focus group participant commented, “My grandson, who is over 18, is just working and has no education.” Men from both locations say that they want education in order to find

better jobs and to better advocate for themselves at their current jobs, such as demanding legally guaranteed breaks during the workday. However, no options have been presented to them. As one participant put it, “I want to study, but cannot enroll in high school because I am too old, but I want to attend ESL classes. What can I do?”

Housing: The Philadelphia women’s focus group raised many issues around housing. None of them know how to connect to their landlords. As one participant commented, “It is confusing. We have no way to get in touch with the landlord because of our language barrier.” Those in North Carolina also have issues with unresponsive landlords: although they reported a wide range of concerns including structural problems, noisy neighbors, and evictions, they have had little or no response from their landlords.

Police /Law enforcement: Karen refugees’ negative experience with authority places them at another disadvantage. The following comment was shared at one of the women’s focus groups: “We are scared of the police - when we see the police. We have fear instead of feeling safe. In our country, the police are violent and they instill fear in individuals, so we have that same feeling here.”

Community Support for Service Access

Refugee leaders, churches and informal family and social networks serve as “bridge-builders” that connect newly arrived refugees and mainstream services. Moreover, support efforts are sometimes organized by individuals. For example, one refugee from Burma has organized a group of volunteers to provide homework support to young children while another American volunteer has organized annual gatherings to promote cross ethnic interactions of all refugees from Burma.

Karen refugees often rely on extended families and neighbors to help navigate challenges. They may also be personally connected to other Karen people in other states who sometimes offer help. In North Carolina, for example, some of the focus group participants are connected to a leader who lives in Seattle, WA. A woman talked about the help she received through this distant relationship: “The first refugees arrived in New Burn...Within one month, [we had] no food stamps, no money to buy food. Kids got fishing lines to fish. [There was a] problem with [the] food stamp card but [I] didn’t want to push [the] caseworker to help right away. [I] called [name of the leader] and he sent cash.”

In Philadelphia, one resettlement agency has partnered with a local ethnic community-based organization to provide on-going support to Karen refugees beyond the initial resettlement services. This project supports two monthly community meetings for Karen refugees. Information such as how to apply for legal permanent residence is shared. Additionally, multilingual staff members help refugees navigate the health and school systems.

Karen’s Distinctive Challenges

Cultural traits: More than other groups, Karen culture’s high regard for harmony over self-advocacy may put them at a disadvantage in terms of access to mainstream services. For example, a woman in Philadelphia said, “Some families go out and ask for help, but some don’t feel comfortable doing so.” One key informant pointed out, “Compared to [a] group like Somali Bantu, who tend to have no hesitation to speak up their issues, refugee[s] from Burma, they try not to stand out and keep quiet. That does not serve [them] well.”

Unfamiliarity with modern life: Many Karen refugees are not familiar with much of the modern infrastructure in the U.S. One community volunteer accompanied a Karen young woman from her home to the doctor's office several times, each time allowing the young woman to take on more responsibility, such as identifying the bus station, purchasing tokens, and signing in at the doctor's office. When the volunteer asked the young woman to meet her at the doctor's office for the following visit, the young woman refused. Upon investigation, the young woman revealed that she did not know how to use the elevator.

C. Community Building and Leadership Development

Community Building Structures: Informal Volunteer Networks

There are nascent efforts in North Carolina to form an official organization to serve the community. An informal network of volunteers already exists, composed of members who are bilingual with a range of professional experience in the home country. Many of these members are fairly well-educated with several years of formal education back in Burma, and many had occupations such as teachers, office workers, electricians, farmers, and seamstresses before arriving in the U.S.

In Philadelphia, refugees from Burma do not have an identified group of leaders. Though focus group participants would like to nominate certain individuals, they do not have a process or a structure to appoint individuals for certain leadership roles. One man said, "I know someone who I want to be the leader. But what if they don't want to be the leader?"

Goals for Community Building

The Karen refugees who participated in the focus groups and the community meeting identified their long-term goals as follows:

- Obtaining better education both for working-age adults and children in school;
- Establishing stability in employment and access to health care;
- Increasing visibility and integration of the Karen in the United States; and
- Developing greater "unity" and mutual support among Karen refugees.

Many also expressed their hopes for those who remain in Burma. One woman indicated, "I hope that Karen will have their own state someday."

Challenges for Leadership Development and Community Building

Language diversity and internal conflicts: Across all Karen focus groups, participants identify language as the foremost challenge to community organizing. Service agency staff and community key informants agree that refugees from Burma face unique challenges. Complex linguistic differences, religious traditions, and violent inter-ethnic conflicts challenge community cohesion here in the United States. Both of the communities in North Carolina and Philadelphia face internal conflicts. One of the project partners, KACF, highlighted the fact that different religious beliefs within the Karen community are often

connected to historical conflict in Burma. In Philadelphia, a key informant noted that there are no leaders in the community because it is too fractured.

Lack of previous community building experiences: Decades of internal displacement and poor conditions in refugee camps prevented refugees from having shared community building experiences like some of the Bhutanese refugees did. There is a lack of collective leadership to leverage resources to help those struggling with basic needs.

Cultural traits: The egalitarian and reserved culture of Karen people could influence their ability to self-advocate. Comparatively, the refugees from Burma on the whole are perceived to be more “shy” and less likely to self-advocate than those from Bhutan. Key informants attribute this to the culture’s value on harmony over advocacy as well as their negative experience with hierarchical power in their home country. They are perceived to prefer informal and nonhierarchical structures, identifying with the idea of “helping” rather than “leading.”

A. Initial Resettlement Experience

Closing the service gap with support from churches and community leaders

Confusion about resettlement services was not as prevalent for Chin refugees in Indianapolis as it was for other refugee groups. The majority of participants stated that, based on the information they heard at pre-departure orientation in Malaysia, they expected to get only three months of resettlement agency services.

The focus group participants indicated that the most challenging aspect of resettlement was finding employment. Resettlement agencies would help connect them to an employment agency, but once they were introduced to an employment agency, they faced considerable obstacles. As one man stated, “Staffing agencies don’t want us if we have to rely on others for language.”

Many focus group participants reported slow assistance from resettlement agencies such as delays in making appointments with health facilities or in enrolling children at school. They often rely on Chin leaders to resolve their problems. A female participant commented, “ICBC [Indiana Chin Baptist Church] gave us housing. My caseworker helped for two months; after that I depended on the church. The church was the only resource.”

Desire for Understanding and Contributing to the Resettlement Services

Chin community leaders expressed their desire to better understand the resettlement policy and system. For example, the implication of the recent increase in funding for the R&P Service was discussed. One leader heard from the community members that they see neither any difference in the amount of monetary support nor the length of services based on this increase. The lack of clarity on how this increase has changed the resettlement service is creating a sense of skepticism within the community.

Issues Regarding Secondary Migrants

Some of the focus group participants were secondary migrants.^x Many said they did not receive support from local resettlement agencies when they relocated to Indianapolis. These participants relied on their relatives and Chin churches to start a new life in Indianapolis. Those who left their first resettlement location within ninety days of U.S. arrival said they negotiated the transfer of their R&P funding to Indiana, but discovered that their original resettlement agency did not send funding to the new local agency. Because so many Chin refugees have moved to Indianapolis, Chin leaders are trying to understand how R&P funding can be transferred to the secondary migrants from their original grant. The leaders are also trying to explain to community members about the complexity of funds and service transfer for secondary migrants.

B. Access to Mainstream Services

Adequate Support in Indianapolis

Health care system: Indianapolis has a large number of Chin refugees and has Chin churches which provide much needed social services for refugees beyond 90 days after their arrival. Basic language

access and relevant navigation support appear to be adequate. One participant said, “Interpreters are available almost all the time.”

This language support seems to result in improved health care access. As a key informant asserted, such services depend on the sheer number of Chin people living in this community: “This [availability of language support] is because it is Indiana. Six thousand Chins are here and every agency knows Chins.” According to this key informant, area hospitals and health agencies are aware of the increasing needs of Chin refugees and coordinate with three interpretation agencies in the area. Once an appointment is arranged with a limited English-speaking Chin patient, the hospital sets up an appropriate language interpreter for that appointment. Many of the interpreters sent from the agency are Chin refugees themselves, so they would provide additional help such as giving the patient a ride back home. The key informant said, “It’s part of Chin culture.”

While basic language services are offered to the majority of Chin refugees at health facilities, the challenge lies in the language diversity of the community. A Tedim speaking^{xi} focus group participant wished for a Tedim speaking interpreter, rather than a Burmese speaking one, because Burmese is the language of the oppressive government.

Education: Focus group participants indicated some degree of support at their school district, such as the presence of bilingual staff and tutors. One local district has hired eight Chin staff and eleven paid tutors to support approximately 800 Chin students enrolled in this district. The Parent Liaison position at this district was first established in 2004, a few years prior to a large wave of Chin students who arrived in response to the Chin leaders’ advocacy efforts. As more Chin refugees arrived and the heterogeneity within the community grew, the district has hired additional Chin language speakers. In addition to language support, Chin school staff assist with system navigation such as guiding parents to apply for a free meal program and securing funds for children’s textbooks.

Access Challenges

Employment and welfare: Both focus group participants and key informants showed serious concerns about the lack of coordination and communication between their employers and the welfare agency. Misinformation about their employment records affects their eligibility for welfare benefits. Many Chin people are only able to find temporary or part-time work. However, once they are employed, even if the job is temporary, the employer or an employment agency reports to the welfare agency as if they have secured a full-time, permanent job – resulting in the termination of public benefits. One man commented, “Once food stamp is cut off, it is very hard to reapply. I only work 20 hours a week.” A community leader explained that it is extremely difficult for a refugee to reapply for benefits due to the lack of transportation, language, and navigation skills. Community leaders are aware of this problem, but currently there is no mechanism to resolve this issue.

Law enforcement: According to the key informant interviews, many Chin refugees are wary about being perceived as “illegal,” and this may influence their interaction with the local law enforcement. Their anxiety stems from their experience of being searched as illegal residents by the Malaysian police.

C. Community and Leadership Development

The Indianapolis Chin community built its leadership foundation long before the large influx of new refugees arrived. A group of educated and acculturated refugees and established Chin churches are the basis of their community development and leadership.

Community Building Structures: Early Arrivals, Chin Churches and Chin Community Groups

According to a key informant, a small number of refugees from the Chin state started to arrive in the U.S. 10 years ago. They are part of the elite and educated class who came over to the United States after their stay in Guam or India. These refugees “created a village of Chins” based on Baptist churches in concentrated locations such as Indianapolis, IN and Dallas, TX. Currently, there are 12 Chin churches in the Indianapolis area. These churches function as a place for worship and socialization and also serve as a basis for their community building and leadership structure. Church members are mobilized in various ways through different branches and groups. Bilingual members serve as translators, the youth group coordinates donation pick up, and the women’s branch organizes a welcome visit for new refugee families. Overall, social service functions of these churches are most frequently mentioned in the focus groups.

Besides churches, the Chin Community of Indianapolis was established by refugee leaders in 2001 and has a resource/community space where community activities and meetings are held. The group is under the umbrella of the Chin Community of Indiana, a loose network of leaders across Indiana who possess sophisticated knowledge and skills in navigating the U.S. political system and have made impactful change for their community through advocacy work.

Leadership Development

All the data collected on the Indianapolis Chin community reveal a range of attributes of their community leaders. In addition to their commitment and English skills, these leaders seem to possess some degree of advocacy and networking skills to form alliances with key mainstream leaders, agencies, and religious institutions. They are effective in making a compelling case to garner more support. Some leaders are equipped with political advocacy skills that were acquired while in India and English fluency gained while attending an American university. This combination of skills allows them to successfully engage in advocacy work in the U.S. These community leaders function not only as problem solvers but also as cultural brokers, negotiators, and advocates who interact with mainstream entities. These skills have enabled them to be more proactive in addressing the needs of their community.

Challenges for Community Building

Overworked leaders: The existing community structure in Indianapolis appears to be highly functional. However, a challenge lies in the over-reliance of community members on the community leaders. One community leader expressed his concerns about the overload of community work, emphasizing that many of the leaders and volunteers offer their service on top of their full-time jobs.

Relationships with other refugees from Burma: While Chin refugees represent the majority of refugees from Burma in Indianapolis; there are also other refugees such as the Karen, Karenni, and Burmese living in the city. While the Karen and the Karenni are said to be more akin in language and culture, the Chin share neither language nor culture with other groups in addition to having challenges communicating with other Chin sub-ethnic groups that have different dialects. Because of the disparate language and cultural characteristics between the Chin and other refugees from Burma, there is no cross ethnic support or organizing efforts, at least during this early stage of resettlement.

In an interview^{xii} with a small group of Karen, Karenni, and Burmese community leaders, in Indianapolis, they expressed that their community needs and challenges are often overlooked because they lack the structural support and capacity in their community to mobilize in the same way that the Chin community could. They feel marginalized not only by the mainstream community but also refugee servicing community and institutions that overlook their needs.

Void of leadership in other cities: Resources and power of Chin refugees in the U.S. are concentrated in a few cities. Indianapolis has a well-founded Chin community with Chin churches and relatively high-capacity leaders. Their sheer numbers enable them to be an influential voice when they demand services and support from local mainstream institutions, such as hospitals, schools, and social services agencies. However, key informant interviews indicate severe lack of resources and leadership among Chin communities in other cities in the United States. A key informant pointed out, “[Educated Chin] leaders seem to concentrate in certain cities and other cities do not have people who speak English at all. Even if there were 100-200 Chins, no one speak[s] English and they are struggling.” This informant also spoke about the need to develop more leadership in these cities and suggested the possibility of establishing leadership group(s) or organization(s) to facilitate information and resource provision to Chin communities in other parts of the U.S.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. Initial Resettlement Experience

Unmet Expectations

An overall needs assessment suggests that expectations of the newly arrived refugees are often not matched by reality. One Bhutanese community leader said, “People had a hope for life in America, but when they get here, condition is harder than their life in the camp.” Feelings of confusion and disappointment about their resettlement experience were evident in all focus groups due to: 1) misinformation and misinterpretation in the pre-departure stage; 2) the observation of differential treatment from resettlement agencies upon arrival; and 3) the economic reality of life in the United States during an economic recession. Different ethnic groups highlighted various levels of frustration for a range of factors. For example, the sense of misinformation in the pre-departure stage was expressed more strongly among refugees from Bhutan than among Karen and Chin focus group participants.

Resettlement Services

Focus group discussions highlighted a range of issues around the resettlement agencies’ services. Overall, community members expressed disappointment about the length and the type of services provided within ninety days of arrival. Many, especially the refugees from Bhutan, expected that they would receive eight months of service and job-skills training. Emerging community leaders who wish to collaborate with resettlement agencies expressed disappointment that their voices have not been heard in shaping the resettlement service process. Many also expressed concerns about how government funding is allocated and how such funds are being managed and spent. These questions and concerns may be attributed to many refugee leaders’ lack of understanding of the role of resettlement agencies, and the complexities of federal government policies and guidelines for resettlement service delivery.

Existing Community Support

The assessment illuminates three types of community efforts in place to meet resettlement challenges of newly-arrived refugees: 1) personal help to provide informal support; 2) volunteers (neighbors, churches, and family members) to supplement or fill in the gaps of resettlement services; and 3) community organizing to advocate for systemic change.

For example, in Philadelphia, individual community members support other refugees by showing newcomers where to buy food, whom to turn to for help, and where to find information and transportation. In Indianapolis, Chin churches have become the basis for providing volunteer service to newly resettled refugees. Community leaders from Bhutan noted, “The spirit of volunteerism is multiplying.”

Refugee community leaders expressed hope that in the future, there would be more collaboration with resettlement agencies and policy makers. One such example was shared in Atlanta where leaders from Bhutan and Burma had joined organized efforts to gather a group of multi-ethnic refugee leaders to assess the resettlement services. These efforts, facilitated by a non-profit organization, resulted in recommendations for improvement to a group of local resettlement agency leaders and to the state refugee coordinator.

B. Access to Mainstream Services

Beyond Ninety Days After Arrival

As described in the previous sections, focus group participants expressed a strong sense of anxiety and confusion regarding experiences with organizations and institutions beyond resettlement agencies, such as health care agencies, employment services, public schools, and the police. The level of mainstream services which refugees are able to access is influenced by three factors: 1) the capacity of the receiving community and service agencies; 2) the language and navigation skills of individual refugees; and 3) the capacity of the refugee community to support newly arrived refugees.

For example, in cities where mainstream agencies are proactive in preparing for the influx of refugees, it is easier to access services. Key informants in St. Paul, MN reported that mainstream agencies, such as the health department and school districts, are relatively well informed about Karen refugees' history, culture, and languages. In other cities, however, the mainstream agencies often have no knowledge about the Karen. A key informant in New Jersey said that at local health facilities, Karen people are often mistaken for Korean immigrants.

For the refugees, the skills of the individual, such as his or her English proficiency level, familiarity with modern life, and the knowledge of the mainstream service structure make a difference in their access to services. Nevertheless, even if individuals lack these skills, newly resettled refugees' access to services seems less challenging in communities in which a formal or informal mutual support network among refugees exists. For example, Chin refugees in Indianapolis could rely on their church to identify a volunteer translator who could accompany them to a social service agency or a doctor's office.

The assessment, especially pertaining to refugees from Burma, suggests that fear and distrust of the government and/or public officials is still evident among the refugees, due to their past experiences as IDPs (internally displaced persons) and abuse in refugee camps. Karen and Chin refugees mainly rely on individuals or organizations they trust to negotiate with public officials.

Role of "Bridge Builders"

Some focus group participants indicated that they are able to rely on "bridge builders" who help them connect and navigate mainstream services. Bridge builders include both mainstream organizations and those led by refugees from Bhutan or Burma, as well as individuals from both refugee and mainstream communities. For example, Karen and Chin churches often serve as bridge builders by mobilizing bilingual volunteers. Fellow refugees who arrived several years earlier were often cited as helpers and translators.

Ethnic community-based organizations were not identified as prominent bridge builders, except for a few examples, including a collaborative project between a local resettlement agency and an ethnic community-based organization that serves Karen refugees who are no longer eligible for the R&P Service.

C. Community Building and Leadership

Community Building Structure

Three types of community building structures were visible in these refugee communities: 1) ethnic churches; 2) professional networks; and 3) community support groups formed and carried over from the refugee camps.

For example, the Chin community built the foundation for its leadership based on Baptist churches long before the large influx of new refugees arrived in cities such as Indianapolis, IN and Dallas, TX. A group of educated and acculturated refugees “created a village of Chins.”

Refugee leaders from Bhutan are highly connected through their community network, which was developed in the refugee camps and maintained in the United States. While the network is spread out in several cities, these leaders communicate through internet and conference calls and have begun to develop local community organizations and groups.

By building on these familiar structures, these communities are able to initiate organizing efforts. At the same time, some of the functions in these structures may not transfer effectively into the U.S. context. The lack of resources and internal divisions were identified as key challenges for organizing their community. In addition, traditional structures such as hierarchy among different clans, religions, genders, and ethnicities brought from past history often exacerbate internal divisions and hamper the development of the community in the U.S.

Community Leadership

The overall assessment illuminates the challenge of translating the words “leaders” and “leadership” for the participants. Both refugees from Bhutan and Burma associate the word leader with political leaders of their native country who embody very negative images and experiences. Nevertheless, refugee members were able to identify a group of influential people who help and represent their community in the United States. Descriptions of these people included “committed and care about the community,” “educated” and “speak English.” These “community leaders” function as sources of information, problem solvers, and advocates for the community.

A range of skills among these community leaders was observed and described during the focus groups and the site visits. These skills include both English and native language abilities, negotiation skills, knowledge of the local social and public services, analytical perspectives on the community’s struggles, and skills to make a compelling case of community needs.

Challenges of Community Building and Leadership Development

As demonstrated in the previous sections, various levels of challenges emerged from the needs assessment. Regarding community building, the major issue is the lack of resources. Many leaders of new organizations and community groups discussed the lack of a designated space or a center for their community activities and some believed that this contributed to their lack of legitimacy. The other challenges stem from the structural and cultural transition from refugees’ native countries and refugee camps to the United States. The lack of connections outside of their ethnic community was identified as a key challenge, especially by the leaders from Bhutan. Other challenges to rebuilding a community include internal conflicts and divisions which prevent these groups from developing a unified voice.

The challenges regarding leadership development often centered on the lack of time and the wide geographic distances among current community leaders and the imbalance of leadership capacity across different cities. All three refugee groups focused on the lack of educational and skill development opportunities. Many of the focus group participants reported that they had expected opportunities to develop their skills upon arrival and had believed that these opportunities would equip them to become contributing members of the American society. Different types of opportunities need to be developed to respond to the range of existing skills of different cohorts within the community. For example, two distinct cohorts exist within the refugee community from Bhutan – the educated young generation who

would like an employment opportunity to build upon their English skills, and the older non-literate refugees who would benefit from an opportunity to use their farming and craft skills.

Goals for Community Building

Through focus groups and discussions at community meetings, community members and leaders expressed a range of goals for organizing. Overall, individual and community self-sufficiency were most frequently expressed by community leaders as the ultimate goal of their organizing efforts. Many discussed their strong desire to be contributing members of American society rather than remaining dependent on public benefits. Leaders from Bhutan articulated their concept of self-sufficiency as follows: “Community members as contributing assets, not just liabilities,” and “Being able to contribute to community welfare...we want to contribute not only to our community but the wider American community.”

In addition to responding to existing challenges and solving problems, leaders hope to attain self-sufficiency through increased resources for education, job skills and leadership development. Many leaders seem to believe that establishing their own organization or community center would lead them to increase their legitimacy and the resources to offer such opportunities.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Improving Initial Resettlement Experiences

1. Increase opportunities for information exchange between refugees and resettlement agencies in order to provide both with a better understanding of the roles and capacity of resettlement agencies.
2. Foster trusting and productive collaboration between resettlement agencies and refugee communities by acknowledging and valuing the perspectives and expertise that refugee leaders and members bring to improve resettlement services.

Improving Access to Mainstream Services

1. Build the capacity of the receiving community to provide more accessible services for newly arrived refugees, including: 1) fostering collaboration across service providers, local faith-based institutions, and established and emerging ethnic-based organizations; and 2) leveraging volunteer resources through non-profit organizations, religious institutions, and civic associations.
2. Provide opportunities for “bridge builders” to increase their knowledge and skills related to language, accessing information, navigating mainstream services, resettlement policies/systems, and refugees’ legal rights in the United States.

Supporting Community Building and Leadership Development

1. Provide opportunities for refugee members and leaders to reflect on and strengthen their current community organizing structures in order to more effectively address their communities’ needs in the United States.
2. Build leadership and advocacy skills of refugees so they can frame their own community needs and assets and connect with their local and state government representatives.
3. Facilitate internal community building. Internal community tensions could be a stumbling block to effective community organizing. Because current divisions and tensions are deeply rooted in the history, relationships, and religious/cultural differences among various refugee organizations and groups, intra-community communication opportunities are needed to establish a shared vision and shared goals. It is also important to clarify the functions of each organization in order to avoid duplicated efforts.
4. Develop a network of resources and mechanisms to distribute information, knowledge, and resources to cities that lack strong community representation. Information distribution to cities without English-speaking community leaders is particularly important because the struggles faced by these refugee groups often remain unnoticed due to of language barriers.
5. Support connections between refugees, ethnic community-based organizations, resettlement agencies and other social services to develop collaborative funding opportunities.

Endnotes

ⁱ We learned from Karen and Chin representatives that ethnic minorities from Burma prefer to be referred to by their individual ethnicity. While some community members may not have a preference for being identified as Burmese, community leaders and political activists are intentional about not using the term Burmese and not using the Burmese language to communicate with each other unless necessary. Because many refugees suffered under the regime of Burma as ethnic minorities, they feel strongly that their identity should not be assumed under the identity of their oppressor.

We learned from community leaders from Bhutan that while refugees from Bhutan are historically ethnic minorities from Nepal who migrated and settled in Bhutan, and their refugee status speak to their persecutions by the Bhutanese government, they identify themselves as Bhutanese. Some Bhutanese refer to themselves as Nepali speaking Bhutanese, but generally the Bhutanese affiliation to Bhutan is very different from the Karen, Chin, and other ethnic groups in Burma.

Therefore, when we speak about refugees from Burma, we refer to the individual ethnicity such as Karen, Chin, Karenni, or Burmese (sometimes also called Burman, the largest ethnic group in Burma), or use “refugees from Burma” if we refer to the refugees as a collective.

ⁱⁱ “Voluntary agencies often work with relatives or others who have filed sponsorship papers (normally affidavits of relationship and other supporting documents). Such sponsors will be responsible for assisting the agency with a refugee's resettlement. Sponsors may be relatives or friends of the refugee. In some instances voluntary agencies will accept refugees who do not have a sponsoring relative or friend. These are usually referred to as “free cases.” For free cases an agency often locates an individual, a church, or other group willing to undertake sponsorship of the refugee. In some cases, the agency itself will act as the refugee sponsor.” (UNHCR, 1998)

ⁱⁱⁱ For more information about Temple University's Intergenerational Center, go to <http://templeigc.org/fostering-immigrant-integration>

^{iv} For more information about SEARAC's T&TA project, go to <http://www.searac.org/content/training-and-technical-assistance-refugee-communities-bhutan-and-burma>

^v Resettlement agencies offer Reception and Placement (or R&P) Services to refugees during the first 30-90 days of arrival in the United States. Some of the services include picking them up at the airport, housing, food, and household items such as furniture. R&P also offers case management and transportation assistance.

^{vi} The site selection for the focus groups was made based on a combination of the following criteria: inclusion of at least two major ethnic groups from Burma (Karen and Chin), locations with large concentrations of targeted refugee groups (Bhutanese in Atlanta and Chin people in Indianapolis), locations in which our project partners have already established relationships (Karen in North Carolina), and a pilot site where the research team has relatively easy access to the community geographically to test out the data collection instruments (Karen people and Bhutanese in Philadelphia). A limited timeline and travel budget also influenced our decision making in sampling strategies.

^{vii} Based on the cultural tips regarding group dynamics within the ethnic group provided by key informants, focus groups were divided by different subgroups. For example, participants from Bhutan were separated based on their generation and gender, while participants from Burma were separated by ethnicity (Karen and Chin), generation and gender. Chin participants were separated further into two ethnic languages and gender. These focus groups were approximately one and a half hours long and were conducted in English with the aid of an interpreter. At the end of each focus group, participants were asked to complete a very brief survey in their native language that requested basic demographic information and types of services they received from the resettlement agency. (See Appendix B for the focus group guidelines and the brief survey questions.)

^{viii} Refugees who are 65+ years old are eligible for the SSI (Supplemental Security Income) benefit which supplements their lack of income.

^{ix} The majority of Philadelphia focus group participants were Karen but a few Burmese refugees joined in the discussion.

^x Secondary Migrants are refugees that are initially settled in a United States city to receive R&P services, but left the assigned location to live elsewhere. Reasons for relocation could be based on desire to reunite with family members or wanting to join a similar ethnic community living in another city.

^{xi} Tedim is the name of a city and a dialect in the Chin state of Burma.

^{xii} An informal interview was held with a small group of Karen, Karenni, and Burmese in Indianapolis to learn about the needs of other refugees from Burma living in the city. Their input was included under the Chin refugee findings to provide context for distinctions between the disparate language and cultural characteristics between the different ethnic groups from Burma and the challenges for these groups to advocate for language and culturally appropriate services.

APPENDIX A

Total Number of Focus Groups: 15 Focus Groups

Total Number of Participants: 177

Native Country		Focus Group Location	Gender		Age	US residence	English Fluency	Language - spoken	Language - Read/Written		
			F	M							
BHUTAN		Philadelphia, PA (3 Focus groups)	13		24-63	5 months-1 years	little-some	Nepali	Nepali-English		
				26	24-59	1 month-2 years	little-some	Nepali	Nepali-English-Hindi		
		Atlanta, GA (3 Focus groups)	12		32-61	9 months-5 years	little-fluent	Nepali	Nepali-English-Hindi		
				22	25-75	2 months-11 years	little-fluent	Nepali	Nepali-English-Hindi		
BURMA		Philadelphia, PA (3 focus groups)		18	17-76	7 months-3years	little-fluent	Karen, Burmese	Karen-Burmese-English		
			25		22-65	1 month-12 years	little-some	Karen, Burmese	Karen-Burmese-English		
			Chapel Hill, NC (3 focus groups)			28	15-55	15 month-6 years	little-some	Karen, Burmese	Karen-Burmese-English
					11		16-40	2 years- 5 years	little-some	Karen, Burmese	Karen-Burmese-English
		Chin		Indianapolis, IN (3 Focus groups)		7	19-53	1 month-2 years	little-some	Lai, TeDim, Chin	Tedim, Zomi, Lai, English, Burmese, Chin, Tedrin
					14		16-75	0-3 years	little-some	Hakha, Chin, Lai Holh, Mara, Tedim	Lai, Hakha, Burmese, English, Mara
		Total	76	101							

**Needs Assessment for Refugees from Bhutan and Burma: Focus Group Questions
GUIDELINES**

Introduction (15 minutes): (Ground rules and purpose of the focus group interview, Oral Consent)

Hello and thank you for coming. My name is _____. I am from Temple University in Philadelphia and we would like to learn about your experiences in the United States and the (name of ethnic group) in the (name of location).

Today, I (we) would like to ask you some questions about your experience in the (name of location) area and how some agencies and people are helping your life here.

(Optional) We also want to know how you are learning about different places and services in (name of location), like school system, health services, etc. Most importantly, we would like to talk about how the (name of ethnic group) people here are coming together, to help one another and thinking about the (name of ethnic group) community together.

The reason for asking these questions is because we have a project to learn about the (name of ethnic group) refugees' experiences in America and develop a community training program.

This is a discussion group. This is not a test or a request for you to participate in a program. We are not interested in immigration status and I will not ask any questions about this topic. This is not a place for you to ask for specific service request and information, either. This is an opportunity for you to share your ideas, opinions and experiences with us and with other community members.

You do not need to answer any question that you don't want to. Every opinion is valued and no one will be criticized for expressing an opinion that is different from other people. I want to listen to each one of you. If one person speaks too long, however, I might stop that person and ask other people to speak.

We are conducting a discussion like this at three other locations in the United States.

(Time and Confidentiality) We will be talking for about 1.5 hours. What you tell us here is confidential. We will not use anyone's name in our project.

I also want to ask you not to tell others about what you hear from other people today, so we can talk honestly.

(Taping and typing) I want to focus on listening to your opinions. So, we have X (name of the note taker and introduce him/her) here to help me take notes. We will also tape record this session to help us record what you say accurately. We would be the only person who listens to the recording. Is this all right with everyone?

I thank you all for participating. Do you have any questions about this group discussion?

Focus Group Questions (1.5 hrs)

1. Brief Introductions: (5 minutes)

Please introduce yourselves. What is your name? When did you arrive in (name of the city)?

2. Initial Resettlement (20 minutes)

I'd like to know about the first 3 months when you arrived to the U.S. Who helped you in what ways?

(Ask about resettlement agency)

What was helpful about these services? Why?

What did you think that you (and your family) would get when you arrived here but in fact, you did not get from the agency?

(If this does not make sense, ask about information they've gotten pre-departure and how what you heard was correct or incorrect about resettlement services.)

Was there any confusion about the agency's services? If so what kinds of things were confusing?

If you had any confusion, did you resolve it? If so, how?

(Probe about the things/services they did not get from the agency.)

(List what they said previously) Did other agencies or people provide help/service to you? What organization? Who? (Probe ECBOs---Somali, Vietnamese organizations, EFBO such as Hindu temples)

3. Access to mainstream services (20 minutes)

Besides, X (name of the resettlement agencies they identified), what other places have you gone for information, services and programs for your life in America? (Probe for schools, housing and employment services and training, ESL programs.)

What are some of the difficulties in going to these places and getting the services and information? (Probe trust/comfort issues in addition to physical obstacles such as transportation/language)

Did anyone or any organization help you? (Probe who are their 'bridge builders' and what they do for them.)

Does anyone here help new (name of ethnic group) refugees to get to these services? In what way do you (or this person) help the new refugees?

(Probe about community leaders/bridge builders/helpers that exist in the community.)

(To internal leaders/bridge builders)

(Note: This may be asked at a follow up interview with 'bridge builders' not in the focus group)

What else do you hope to do to help newly arrived refugees?

What are some of the difficulties helping the newly arrived refugees?

What kind of resources do you feel you need to help the community more?

4. Community and Leadership Development (30 minutes)

Back in (name of home country and camp location), who led or represented your community?

Here in (name of location), do these leaders (from home country or camp) continue to lead and represent the community? Or do you see new leaders? What are their roles? How did they become leaders? Were they selected by the community members?

How are they different from leaders in (name of home country and camp location)? Why are they considered as your leaders in the (name of ethnic group) community? (probe qualification of community leaders)

What do you expect from the leaders? / What do you want the leaders to do for the community? / What are their roles?

I'd like to learn about the (name of ethnic group) community groups and organizations in (name of location). What issues are they working on?

Did any outside agency/people help this group? If so who? How?
(Probe for ECBOs)

What do you hope to see in the (name of ethnic group) community in the next 3-5 years?

What challenges are you facing in organizing the community?

What support does the community need? (In addition to support such as funding, spaces, and transportation, probe about needs for individual and organizational capacity building).

Questions and additional comments

Is there anything you'd like to add?

Thank the participants and ask them to fill out the demographic info.

**COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS
DEMOGRAPHIC AND CHECK LIST**

Please tell us about you.

1. Gender: male _____ female _____
2. How old are you? _____
3. Where were you born (country)? _____
4. How long have you lived in the United States? _____
5. Where do you live? (City) _____
6. How long have you lived in this city? _____
7. What is your native language? _____
If you speak English, how much English do you speak? (circle a, b or c)
a. little b. some c. fluent
8. What language(s) do you read and write? _____
9. How many months or years did you attend school?
In your native country _____
In the refugee camp _____
In the United States _____
10. Before you came to the United States, did you work in Burma/Bhutan or in another country?
a. Yes b. No

If yes, what was your job? _____

11. Do you work now?

- a. Yes b. No

If yes, what is your job? _____

12. Please check all the services you and your family received in the first three months in the United States. If you checked, please write who provided this service.

-
- Airport pick up (Provided by _____)
 - Cultural orientation (Provided by _____)
 - Finding housing (Provided by _____)
 - Arranging medical check up and immunization (Provided by _____)
 - Applying benefit such as cash assistance (Provided by _____)
 - Helping children's school registration (Provided by _____)
 - Finding a job (Provided by _____)
 - English class (Provided by _____)
 - Leadership training (Provided by _____)
 - Others

13. What are your hopes for the (name of ethnic group) community?

14. What are the challenges of the (name of ethnic group) community?

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