

**FROM NEEDS TO RIGHTS: THE TRANSITION TOWARDS RIGHTS BASED HUMANITARIANISM AND EMPOWERMENT IN THE BURMESE REFUGEE CAMPS IN THAILAND**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research explores proposals that livelihood programs, using rights based principles, can function to improve the social and economic situation of Burmese refugees residing along the Thai-Burma border. The paper analyzes how the programs operate in the limited refugee camp context to mitigate limited economic freedoms. Strategies to improve gender equality, preserve the environment, and sustain and maintain peoples' skills while economically empowering them, are all evaluated in this study.

The research explores proposals that the rights based approach (RBA), more specifically the principles of participation and empowerment, are effective in fostering greater food security in a protracted refugee situation. Programs falling under the categories of income generation, agriculture, and vocational trainings are all analyzed. The capacity of the rights based approach to aid the sustainability of livelihood programs, and contribute to the long- term goals of self-reliance for the Burmese refugees in Thailand is assessed.

The research explores proposals that the livelihoods programs provide social benefits that currently overshadow concrete economic improvements. The research first provides a historical context of the Burmese refugee situation in Thailand and the rights based approach. The research then moves on to evaluating the vulnerability context of the camps, compiling the policies and overview of each project, and analyzing projects according to principles from the rights based approach to development.

**KEY WORDS: HUMAN RIGHTS/ REFUGEES/LIVELIHOODS/RIGHTS BASED APPROACH/PARTICIPATION/EMPOWERMENT**

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