



Rohingya community's perception of local people

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WHAT MATTERS?

Humanitarian Feedback Bulletin

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BBC Media Action, Internews, and Translators without Borders are working together to collect and collate feedback from communities affected by the Rohingya crisis. This summary aims to provide a snapshot of feedback received from Rohingya and host communities, to assist sectors to better plan and implement relief activities with communities' needs and preferences in mind.

The information in this edition includes insights from local Cox's Bazar newspapers; as well as information collected through conversations with affected individuals, community focus group discussions and live radio phone-in programmes on Bangladesh Betar and Radio Naf, which are supported by UNICEF.

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It's Not as Easy as 1, 2, 3...

Rohingya and other regional numeral systems

Numbers can be a source of misunderstanding when communicating with the Rohingya community. Though the names of numbers in the Rohingya language may sound similar to Chittagonian and Bangla, their system of counting is quite different. Whereas most languages use a numeral system based on the number 10 (decimal system), they instead use a complex system combining both base 10 (decimal) and base 20 (vigesimal) numeral systems.

Lost? Let me explain.

In English, the word for 'six tens' is sixty. To indicate the numbers 61 to 69, you add single digit numbers to sixty. When you come to sixty plus ten, you switch to seventy (that is 'seven tens'). The pattern then repeats.

This is the same in most Indic languages, including Bangla and Chittagonian. Though each number from 0 to 100 may sound like arbitrary and unique words in these languages,

they do in fact follow a system of prefixes and suffixes based on the number 10. The word for 68 in Bangla is *aatshotti* and the word for 78 is *aataththor*. The *aat-* prefix denotes the number eight, and the suffixes *-shotti* and *-aththor* are for sixty and seventy, respectively.

However, in Rohingya, the base 20 numeral system makes counting more complicated. Up to the number 19, Rohingya communities count their numbers similarly to Bangla or Chittagonian speakers as you will see in the table on the right hand side. However, from 20 onwards, they use a base 20 counting system. For example, the number 25 is *ek-kuri-faas*, or in English, ‘one times twenty plus five’. The number 68 is *thin-kuri-aashto*, or ‘three-twenties (plus) eight’. Number 80 is *sair-kuri*, or ‘four twenties’.

Though this may seem unusual, Rohingya is not unique in using a mixed decimal-vigesimal system. Throughout history, different populations have used numbering systems based on different numbers. Anyone that sat through a French class knows the pain of saying the number 99 (*quatre-vingt-dix-neuf*), which when translated to English is ‘four-twenty-ten-nine’. The decimal system is not (and has never been) the only way of counting.

However, the Rohingya community is increasingly adopting a Bangla-influenced decimal numeral system, both amongst the registered refugees and the new arrivals. Education level, which is largely influenced by gender and age in the Rohingya community, determines which numbering system is used. Men, particularly those with access to

formal education or any form of trade, will more likely use the decimal system. The above-mentioned mixed numeral system is still used by the less-educated groups within the Rohingya community, often older people, women, and those from rural areas.

But wait, it gets more complicated...

Though Rohingya people may be adapting to the Bangla numeral system, there are certain differences in the names of the numerals between Bangla, Chittagonian, and Rohingya. For example, standard Bangla generally uses *bish* for the number twenty, whereas it’s *kuri* in Rohingya.

If this is not complicated enough, there are also variations in the symbols for the numbers themselves. Bangla has different symbols for numbers compared with those used in English. The newly arrived Rohingya community, particularly those with very little education or from secluded villages, are not familiar with the Bangla symbols. This may lead to confusion, as some number symbols may look similar to the western number symbols but are in fact a totally different number (highlighted in the chart below). Add into this mix the Burmese numbers, which also have a different set of number symbols (and number names). Those that were educated in state schools in Myanmar are familiar with Burmese numbers, especially as the numbers are often used in official documents and for trade.

By and large however, most Rohingya speakers are familiar with Western *number symbols* and prefer to use a mixed decimal-vigesimal numeral system.

Numbers in English, Bangla, Chittagonian, Rohingya, and Burmese

English		Bangla		Chittagonian*		Rohingya**	Burmese	
0	Zero	০	Shun-No	০	Shun-No	Sifir	၀	Thunya
1	One	১	Ek	১	Ek	Ek	၁	Tit
2	Two	২	Dui	২	Dui	Dui	၂	Ni
3	Three	৩	Theen	৩	Theen	Theen	၃	Thone
4	Four	৪	Char	৪	Sair	Sair	၄	Lay
5	Five	৫	Panch	৫	Fans	Fans	၅	Ngaa
6	Six	৬	Choy	৬	So	So	၆	Hout
7	Seven	৭	Shaath	৭	Shaath	Hant	၇	Khun-Ni
8	Eight	৮	Aath	৮	Aashto	Ãashto	၈	Shi
9	Nine	৯	Noy	৯	No	No	၉	Ko
10	Ten	১০	Dosh	১০	Dosh	Dosh	၁၀	Ts-Say

* Chittagonian uses Bangla numerals

** Rohingya has no written numerals



The Rohingya community have concerns of their own; but limited knowledge about how they can express them

Many reports have depicted the host community's perception of the Rohingya people. However, it's also worth exploring the Rohingya community's perception of local people to get an idea of both sides of the story.

A qualitative study was conducted with Rohingya people who have arrived in Bangladesh since August 2017, and also those who came before this influx. It was observed that people who arrived more recently are skeptical to share their concerns with any outsiders, while those who have been living in Bangladesh for more than a decade are more willing to share some of their worries, but not all. Participants from both groups noted that they do not have a trusted platform to share their worries and feelings.

Rohingya participants in the study acknowledged the support provided by the host community in terms of food and shelter, but they also raised a number of issues. Some complained that local people take money from them as rent for giving shelter.

Some of the Rohingya community in Leda camp – particularly those who arrived between 1994 and 2004 – claim that robbery is increasing within their community. They believe they know which members of the host community are behind the robberies, but do not feel they can make any formal complaints as they are not aware of their legal rights. They also mentioned their belief that some local community members have kidnapped people from more affluent Rohingya families in order to demand

a high amount of money. Hence the Rohingya men and elders guard the camp overnight.

“About a month ago a child has been kidnaped by a local person and the kidnapper demanded a certain amount of money to his parents through a phone call.”

– Rohingya woman, 50, Leda camp

Study participants also described their belief that some people from the host community have changed their identity, covered themselves in a niqab (veil), and queued with Rohingya people to collect relief goods. While this may be explained by the host community's economic difficulties (local people have previously talked about the financial problems associated with losing property or land), study participants said that host community members' attempts to take relief items has caused numerous unpleasant incidents.

“We all, old and new Rohingya people, used to collect our relief from the same queue. 2-3 days ago, a girl from the host community came for relief and stood behind a Rohingya girl. And it is natural to shove in the relief line. But, the family members of that Bengali girl started to beat the Rohingya girl badly when she was pushed by a Rohingya girl.”

– Rohingya woman, 45, Leda old camp

Some community members appreciated the support from the military in providing security in the camps:

“If the military (Army) were not in the camp then we couldn't stay in the camp”

– Rohingya man, 24, Shamlapur

In Uchiprang camp, Rohingya people live side by side with the host community. Study participants described how, when NGO people come to construct latrines in the camp, some members of the host community prohibited them from doing so as they did not want latrines built next to their homes because of the smell. Members of the Rohingya community also mentioned that the host community had issues with sharing the water point with the Rohingya people.

Other concerns described in the study by people from the Rohingya community include:

- Lack of specific income sources
- Limited education for their children
- Movement restriction (unable to move outside of the camps)
- Population is increasing within the camp boundary, reducing people's living space
- Lack of law enforcement to prevent men marrying multiple wives

Data was collected using qualitative methods in Kutupalong, Uchiprang, Shamlapur and Leda camps between 8 and 15 May 2018. A total of 16 focus group discussions were conducted, involving 80 individuals. Study participants were 50% female and were drawn from a range of age groups between 18 and 40+ years. Approx 25% of the study participants had arrived in Bangladesh before August 2017; with the remaining 75% having arrived as part of the current influx.



Rohingya community feedback – Repatriation, Ramadan, extreme weather, mahjis and health

This analysis is based on feedback that has been collected on a daily basis between March 27th to April 24th, 2018 by 800 volunteers of BRAC and between March 27th to May 20th 2018 by 13 Internews community correspondents and one feedback manager. In total, 1792 interactions have been analysed to present the concerns and questions of the Rohingya community. The feedback by Internews is collected in Rohingya, Burmese and Chatgaya. The BRAC data is mainly documented in Bangla with a few entries in English.

Internews

Total Feedback	Men	Women
446	225	221

BRAC

Total Feedback	Men	Women
1346	309	1037

Repatriation

“When will we go to our own country and regain our legal rights?”

– Man, 31, Kutupalong Extension

“I have been living in Bangladesh for 35 years. I have a Bangladeshi NID card. What shall I do if I am being sent to Myanmar?”

– Woman, 80, Kutupalong MS

“Many Rohingyas were killed in Myanmar, but why is it not solved? If this problem is solved quickly and they can re-settle us back in our original place, it would be good. Just giving food rations will not improve our situation.”

– Man, 21, Kutupalong MS

“When they will take us back to Burma, what will we do to survive there?”

– Woman, 19, Nayapara RC

Feedback on repatriation falls under three key themes: people who are keen to return to Myanmar, people who do not state a preference but have questions about the status of repatriation, and individuals who are fearful of being sent back. Within these three key groups there are varied questions and concerns, that sometimes stand in stark contrast to each other.

A lot of the people giving feedback express eagerness to return to Myanmar; however, the reasons for wanting to return are at times different. Some people are worried that the humanitarian support and donations from different sources to maintain their livelihoods in Bangladesh is not a sustainable solution. Other themes of the wish to return relate more to identifying Myanmar as 'home'.

A sub-theme within the group that is eager to return is the wish to gain legal status as residents of Myanmar. These community members want clear information about the process of repatriation and initiatives that are being taken by relevant agencies to send them back to Myanmar legally and safely.

While some community members express positive or neutral feelings towards repatriation, there is also feedback reflecting reluctance and anxiety about returning to Myanmar. Within this group individuals express fear of uncertain living situations in Myanmar, repetition of violence, lack of financial resources and an insecure legal system that fails to protect them.

Additionally, some of the Rohingya community who have been living in Bangladesh for many years and possess a Bangladeshi National Identity card have concerns about whether they will be considered citizens of Bangladesh or Myanmar.

In summary, repatriation is a hot topic within the Rohingya community with a wide range of questions, concerns and many requests for transparency on the current situation.

Ramadan

“ We have problems regarding *iftari* [food eaten to break the fast after sunset during Ramadan]. We don't have money to buy *iftari*, we cannot go far away to work as there is no permission from the Government [of Bangladesh]. No one here can afford good *iftari*. If some NGO or someone came here to give something, it would have been better.”

– Woman, 35, Camp 1E

“ It's a huge problem because we don't have a tube well in our block. During Ramadan we need more water because we need to wash ourselves five times a day for praying and for cooking. We need to go far to collect water, we don't know what we should do!”

– Man, 56, Camp 1W

“ We are suffering a lot because of not having enough firewood [fuel for cooking]. They say that they give us the firewood for one month, but it does not even last one week. It's Ramadan now, and we cannot go to the forest [to collect firewood]. If we have been able to go to the forest, you would not have needed to provide us cooking fuel.”

– Man, 25, Camp 1W

There have been a lot of requests and concerns by the community relating to Ramadan such as asking for more firewood for cooking, additional drinking water and streetlights in order to move around the camp safely at night when community members prepare food, go to ritual washings and go to the prayer spaces. Additionally, some community members share that the food they receive from humanitarian organisations is not appropriate for Ramadan. Instead, individuals suggested they would prefer to receive chickpeas, a staple during Ramadan throughout the South Asian region. There are also concerns about a lack of water and shower spaces (especially for young girls) to stay clean as part of the Ramadan rituals.

Extreme weather

“ All the sufferings that we face while we came to Bangladesh from Myanmar, it's not forgettable. We are grateful to all of you for sheltering us. Will we suffer again if the storm comes?”

– Woman, 26, Kutupalong MS Extension

“ How can we stay in this type of house in monsoon season? If a landslide happens we will die.”

– Man, 40, Moynarghona

“ If our fireplace and wood become wet, where can we find these immediately?”

– Man, 36, Kutupalong MS Extension

Rohingya people have given feedback relating to extreme weather events since early March and these issues prevail within the data sets from April and May. The feedback includes concerns about how to prepare for extreme weather events such as cyclones, landslides, and storms. There are also still some individuals that ask about the availability of cyclone shelters and evacuation. Some individuals have noted that they have been given information on how to strengthen their shelter. However, community members have also expressed that they find it difficult to plan and prepare for extreme weather because they do not feel they have sufficient materials; and because they feel that they have gone through terrible trauma and currently spend so much effort to survive every single day that it is difficult to think about the future.

Mahjis

“ Mahjis are not giving us things properly. We have not been getting rice for many days.”

– Woman, 35, Thangkhal

“ Our mahjis do not provide us tokens correctly”

– Woman, 25, Jamtoli

Some Rohingya community members have expressed concerns about the services and support they receive from mahjis and accuse some of the mahjis as being corrupt. There are worries that some mahjis are only addressing issues that impact themselves or their family members rather than taking action on behalf of the whole community.

Skin diseases and lack of water

“ Since we can't take bath due to lack of water, we are suffering from skin diseases.”

– Woman, 35, Unchiprang

“ Because we are drinking unsafe water, we are suffering from stomach diseases.”

– Woman, 20, Uchiprang

Within the analysed data, access to safe and clean water both for drinking and washing has been a key concern for the Rohingya community for the last few months and continues to be an issue the community is worried about. Many community members have expressed concerns regarding skin diseases since they cannot shower and wash themselves every day. Some community members also expressed that they fell ill after drinking unclean water. Another worry that the community frequently mentions are tube wells, which are perceived to be too shallow and therefore dry out too quickly.

Betar Sanglap: Fishing ban causing financial crisis in riverside communities

Cox's Bazar district is home to almost 80 thousand fishermen, with most living in in Moheshkhali (40 thousand) and Teknaf (22 thousand). The rising tension among fishermen was reflected in the most recent episode of *Betar Sanglap*, which was recorded on 7 May at Hnila High School, Teknaf – an area close to the river Naf. Though there was a mix of different occupational backgrounds in the audience, most of the audience were either fishermen or involved in fish-related business.

The audience mainly raised questions about financial problems that they say they are facing due to the ongoing prohibition of fishing in the Naf river. Initially, fishing was prohibited in the river for two months¹, ostensibly to stop cross-border movement of persons and increased drug smuggling². But this

ban has continued until today, and was the principal worry evident in the *Betar Sanglap* audience's questions.

According to the *Betar Sanglap* audiences, most of the people of the Hnila community are fishermen. Fishing is the only source of income for them. They say that prohibition of fishing in the river Naf has made it very difficult for them to earn money and to take care of their family.

Audiences also talked about how they were struggling to repay loans that they had previously taken out to buy boats or fishing nets; and that this was causing knock-on difficulties on their ability to pay for their children's education.

“ My only means of earning is fishing. But after the Rohingya influx, I cannot go fishing. My source of income has gone. If it continues like this, we will starve to death.”

– Male, Age 35, Fisherman

“ I am a fisherman and I earn my living through fishing. The BGB [Border Guard] has banned fishing in the Naf river after the Rohingya influx. As we are not catching fish, we cannot earn anything. If the government does not allow us to catch fish in the Naf river, what is the alternative for us?”

– Male, Age 58, Fisherman.

“ Because of the Rohingya crisis, local fishermen cannot go to fishing now. Some of them cannot repay their loans, cannot send their children to school and are struggling to manage food for their family. What can be done to solve that problem?”

– Male, Age 30, Fisherman

“ I took loans from different NGOs/organisations to buy fishing nets to go fishing and earn my and my family's livelihood. But after the Rohingya influx we are not allowed to go to the river to catch fish. This has left us helpless.”

– Male, Age 48, Fisherman

¹ www.banglanews24.com/national/news/bd/600707.details

² <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/173260/Over-5m-yaba-pills-seized-on-Myanmar-border-in-3>



Local Newspapers of Cox's Bazar are being critical of Rohingya activities as time passes

Cox's Bazar has about 19 local daily newspapers, all of which have been publishing news on different issues related to the Rohingya crisis. Looking at how this coverage has changed over time, can give us an indication of the roles of the local newspapers and what kind of messages they are directing to the readers, which can both reflect and influence public perception.

Back in November 2017, news related to the Rohingya crisis was very frequent, and most of the local newspapers published four to five news articles daily. These were mainly focused on how many people were crossing the border, which crossing points they were using, who was visiting the camps, and the registration process for members of the Rohingya community.

Gradually the number of news articles related to the issue decreased, but a sympathetic view towards the newcomers remained. In December the news coverage shifted towards the needs and issues faced by the Rohingya community and the people living adjacent to the camps. A prime topic was the need for firewood as cooking fuel, and how this was contributing to deforestation. Issues like selling relief goods in the local markets, price hikes of daily commodities and fear of disease outbreaks were also covered extensively.

In mid-January the newspapers started publishing more stories of crimes committed by Rohingya people. Some newspapers reported that Rohingya men and women in the camps were engaging in illegal (non-marital) physical interactions and that some women were getting pregnant because of this. Some reports mentioned that

Rohingya people had been involved in several crimes like drug trafficking, kidnapping, robbery and human trafficking. There was also a prominent news story about nine NGOs (both national and local) being accused of encouraging the Rohingya community people to fight against repatriation.

In February, local newspapers covered the security concerns of the host community and ran stories on NGO corruption. They mentioned that Rohingya people had started working in areas adjacent to the camps, contributing to scarcity of work for the host community. Simultaneously, reports mentioned that lack of security in the camps was resulting in large numbers of Rohingya people moving to other regions of Bangladesh.

The most recent newspaper analysis from March to mid-May shows a significant increase in Rohingya-related news, with repatriation being the most common issue. Almost every outlet published multiple pieces on issues including:

- how the Myanmar government was delaying the repatriation process;
- details about the visits of UN, OIC and different international delegations to the Rohingya camps;
- what Rohingya people thought of the repatriation process;
- how the international community felt about the environment in Rakhine and if it was safe enough for repatriation.

Recent news articles show Rohingya identity being emphasised in headlines when reporting any crime-related news. For example, multiple newspapers ran the headline 'Rohingya robber arrested with arms and bullets'; another was 'Three Rohingya arrested with yaba' (4 May). Host community concerns regarding Rohingya people getting involved in Yaba smuggling also got the attention of the local news outlets. News related to risks of landslides and flood in the coming monsoon got

high treatment during this period along with the news of the suffering of the Rohingya people due to lack of water in the camps, as the reports suggested 70 to 85 percent of the tube wells were out of order. Some of the newspapers ran stories on pregnant Rohingya women who were raped in Myanmar and are now about to give birth to what the articles call 'unwanted children'.



Change in Coverage of Rohingya issues in Cox's Bazar local newspapers

