



Methods and limitations

This overview relates to a Translators without Borders (TWB) study of the role of language in humanitarian service access and community relations in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh and Sittwe, Myanmar.

Methods

This study assesses how language barriers affect humanitarian agencies' ability to provide services to Rohingya communities in Bangladesh and Myanmar. It also examines how language barriers influence relationships between Rohingya and other communities in each country.

The study focuses on Rohingya refugees and displaced people living in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar district in Bangladesh and in rural camps and villages in Sittwe township in Myanmar. About 910,000 Rohingya currently live in Cox's Bazar, while in Sittwe, there are about 99,000 Rohingya and Kaman according to UNHCR.¹

We conducted fieldwork for the study between March and May, 2019.

Qualitative component

We interviewed over 30 Rohingya humanitarian staff, volunteers, and community leaders, conducted 44 focus groups of Rohingya adults, conducted 6 workshops with children and youth, and observations of 5 humanitarian clinics and 1 hospital, 7 schools, and 6 public markets. We took a purposive approach to sampling and ensured as even as possible representation of women and men, various language and demographic groups, ages, and service or focus area (for example, health, education, social cohesion).

¹ A further 29,000 people live in other camps across Rakhine State. Between 404,000 and 472,000 Rohingya still live in other parts of Rakhine State.

We also discussed the language and communication challenges in Cox's Bazar, Yangon and Sittwe with over 100 non-Rohingya humanitarians, civil society leaders, and development partners in person and via Skype. In Myanmar, we conducted five group consultations on terminology, broken down by language and gender. These tested comprehension of a variety of terms among humanitarian staff and community members.

We held interviews, focus groups, and workshops in Yangon, Sittwe town, Sittwe rural camps and villages in Myanmar. In Bangladesh we used the same techniques in Cox's Bazar town, Court Bazar, Raja Palong, Nayapara and camps across the Kutupalong-Balukhali expansion site.

Qualitative method	Interviews (Rohingya)	Interviews (non-Rohingya)	Terminology consultations	Focus Groups	Workshops	Observations
Myanmar	15+	40+	5	18	3	7
Bangladesh	15+	60+	n/a	26	3	12

Quantitative component

We received 172 submissions to two online surveys on language barriers from a similar profile of humanitarian respondents in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Eighty-five submissions were from humanitarians in Bangladesh, and 87 from their counterparts in Myanmar.

In Bangladesh only, we conducted a survey of Rohingya refugee households. The sample comprised Rohingya refugees currently living in the Kutupalong-Balukhali expansion site, also known as the megacamp. According to UNHCR, approximately 800,000 Rohingya refugees were living in the area at the time of data collection. The target population does not include camps in nearby Teknaf or refugees living in neighboring host communities.

We interviewed 384 Rohingya refugee households, comprising 2,105 individuals. This sample size provides a 95 percent confidence level and a 5 percent margin of error.

The study can, therefore, be taken as generally representative of newly arrived Rohingya households living in the Kutupalong-Balukhali expansion site. We did not survey households in Kutupalong registered camp, since most residents are registered refugees.

We randomized household selection using GPS points generated by an ArcGIS sampling tool add-on. The Inter Sector Coordination Group provided camp administrative boundaries and OpenStreetMap provided a shelter map. Enumerators visited GIS points and attempted to enter the closest inhabited shelter to conduct the survey.

We surveyed heads of household where possible. If they were unavailable, we interviewed any other family member that was willing and able to answer questions on behalf of the household.

Quantitative method	Household survey - Rohingya	Online survey - Humanitarians
Myanmar	N/A	87 respondents
Bangladesh	384 households, 2,015 individuals	85 respondents

Study tools

We developed semi-structured discussion guides in English and then translated them into Myanmar and Bangla. Back translation of the guides ensured that questions were asked with the same intended meaning, and reduced the chance of questions being misinterpreted. Team

members and interpreters also received training on the discussion guides in the relevant languages to ensure familiarity with the material, understanding and preparation in advance of fieldwork.

Questions were accompanied by a series of prompts, and team members and interpreters were free to ask questions beyond the guides, as appropriate.

Fieldwork

A team of a dozen consultants conducted the study with the help of 18 enumerators (in Bangladesh only) and several interpreters. The consulting team comprised local national, non-local national, and international members.

In Myanmar, qualitative team members had either a half-day or one day of training in methods and the semi-structured guides before fieldwork commenced in March and April 2019. In Bangladesh, qualitative team members had either one or four days of training in methods and the semi-structured guides before fieldwork commenced in May 2019.

We assigned interviews and focus groups to team members according to their fluency in the languages that participants were most comfortable speaking. These activities took place in English, Bangla, Chittagonian, Rakhine, Rohingya, and Myanmar. Very few interviews, focus groups and workshops were conducted with interpreting support. A mix of team members conducted observations to ensure diverse perspectives.

Where possible, we recorded interactions through a combination of handwritten notes and voice recordings. These were later translated and transcribed into English. Qualitative data was then cleaned, processed, and analyzed.

The quantitative team participated in a two-day training exercise in Cox's Bazar and a one-day pilot test. The two teams of nine enumerators were provided by REACH Initiative and the International Organization for Migration. Enumerators collected data using KoboToolbox/KoboCollect via smartphones and tablets. We cleaned, processed and analyzed quantitative data using Microsoft Excel and R.

We held data immersion, data validation, and fieldwork debrief sessions with researchers, enumerators and key program staff. This helped us to understand limitations, further interpret the results and generate recommendations.

Limitations

Conducting a cross-border study in two highly complex and politically charged camp settings imposes some limitations on data accuracy. The following issues may have influenced the research findings:

We used a purposive sampling approach for the qualitative component to efficiently identify individuals with knowledge and experience of the study topics. We approached organizations in the health, education, water, sanitation, and hygiene, protection, livelihoods, and community development sectors. These helped us identify relevant actors and for interviews, focus groups, observations, and workshops. This meant that our sampling was largely dependent on other organizations' support. Many organizations were not able to participate due to political sensitivities. Other key organizations or individuals could not participate due to poor timing.

In Bangladesh, conducting fieldwork in the month of Ramadan was particularly difficult since team members, enumerators, and respondents were fasting. Survey fatigue was therefore present on both sides. Meeting times were also limited by shorter working hours during Ramadan.

The study in Bangladesh focused on the newly arrived Rohingya refugees in Kutupalong-Balukhali expansion site. We also visited Kutupalong and Nayapara Registered Camps (registered refugee communities), and Court Bazar and Raja Palong (host communities). However, we were only these other locations for one day each so our consultations were limited.

The dynamics and geography of newly arrived refugees in the Kutupalong-Balukhali expansion site are distinct from those of other subgroups. The large population size in the megacamp and greater humanitarian operational presence make it less insular or remote than refugee communities in the registered refugee camps or host communities.

The demographics or situation of Rohingya refugees in the Kutupalong-Balukhali expansion site cannot therefore be extrapolated to the Rohingya population across Cox's Bazar District.

In Myanmar, the need for travel authorizations restricted our ability to visit other parts of Rakhine State beyond the Sittwe rural camps and villages. We had difficulty consulting health and education sector organizations, in particular due to political sensitivities and school being out of session during the first phase of fieldwork. This meant we did not interview as many health service providers and observe as many clinics and classrooms as we had originally planned.

The quantitative team in Bangladesh used maps of GPS points in all study areas. However, enumerators reported that in some areas the maps were inaccurate or outdated. Enumerators mitigated this by selecting the shelter in closest physical proximity to the original point.

Another challenge was non-sampling error.

All enumerators were locals from Cox's Bazar and Chittagonian speakers. While all enumerators were accustomed to speaking with Rohingya refugees, most spoke Chittagonian and Bangla as their main languages of communication. This was less of a problem for the qualitative portion since all team members spoke the language of participants, as mentioned above. However, we did not translate all guides into the unstandardized or less standardized languages of Rohingya, Chittagonian, and Rakhine. It is therefore possible that some phrases or concepts were lost in translation.

Training for both qualitative and quantitative teams was focused on familiarizing them with the questionnaires and guides. The training was conducted in a mix of all six operational languages, as relevant.

Datasets

- [Online survey of humanitarians in Bangladesh](#)
- [Online survey of humanitarians in Myanmar](#)
- [Household survey of Rohingya refugee households in Bangladesh](#)

Questionnaires and guides (available on request)

- Online survey for humanitarians in Bangladesh
- Online survey for humanitarians in Myanmar
- Household survey of Rohingya refugee households in Bangladesh
- Interview guide for humanitarian health service providers in Bangladesh
- Interview guide for humanitarian health service providers in Myanmar
- Interview guide for humanitarian education service providers in Bangladesh
- Interview guide for humanitarian education service providers in Myanmar
- Interview guide for community leaders, political leaders, religious leaders, media, social cohesion and protection actors in Myanmar
- Interview guide for community leaders, political leaders, religious leaders, media, social cohesion and protection actors in Bangladesh
- Focus group discussion guide for Rohingya community in Bangladesh
- Focus group discussion guide for Rohingya community in Myanmar
- Focus group discussion guide for local Bangladeshi community in Bangladesh
- Focus group discussion guide for Rakhine community in Myanmar
- Workshops for children and youth in Bangladesh
- Workshops for children and youth in Myanmar
- Observation guide for humanitarian clinics
- Observation guide for humanitarian classrooms
- Observation guide for public markets

Funded by:



Fund managed by:



This project is funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the UK Department for International Development. The views expressed in this report should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the Swiss Confederation, nor do the views expressed necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies. The UK government and the Swiss Confederation are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained in this report.

TWB envisions a world where knowledge knows no language barriers. The US-based nonprofit provides people access to vital knowledge in their language by connecting nonprofit organizations with a community of language professionals, building local language translation capacity, and raising awareness of language barriers. Originally founded in 1993 in France (as Traducteurs sans Frontières), TWB translates millions of words of lifesaving and life-changing information every year. In 2013, TWB created the first crisis relief translation service, Words of Relief, which has responded to crises every year since.

For more information about this study or to find out how TWB is supporting the Rohingya response in Bangladesh and Myanmar, visit our website or contact myanmar@translatorswithoutborders.org or bangladesh@translatorswithoutborders.org.