Language guidance session in Bangladesh. Image source: TWB.

Rohingya Language Guidance Note on COVID-19 for Bangladesh

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Introduction

Knowing what terminology Rohingya refugees use to discuss COVID-19 is critical if responders are to understand and respond to the refugees' questions and concerns. Even between similar languages, like Rohingya and Chittagonian, small differences in the use of words or how people interpret phrases can cause misunderstanding, confusion and mistrust. The risk of misunderstanding is high when communicating about a new situation like the COVID-19 pandemic. The difficulty is compounded for the Rohingya refugee community in Bangladesh, who are unfamiliar with many medical concepts and terms.

To assist humanitarians in minimizing confusion, Translators without Borders has developed Rohingya translations of terms used in the COVID-19 response. The full COVID-19 glossary can be found on the TWB website. In total, TWB's glossary for Bangladesh contains over 1000 terms in multiple languages, including in audio form so that the correct pronunciation can be heard. Below are the most common terms currently used as a handy guide. There is no official written form of Rohingya. The Rohingya terms below are in Latin and Bangla script as a guide to pronunciation. Written like this, this script would not be widely understood if used in posters or leaflets.

There are two versions of the full TWB Bangladesh glossary, which contains terminology for multiple sectors:

- A text-only version which is faster to download and takes up less memory.
  https://glossaries.translatorswb.org/bangladesh_text/

- An audio-enhanced version with recordings of each word or phrase so that people can hear the correct pronunciation; this version takes up more memory and so takes longer to download.
  https://glossaries.translatorswb.org/bangladesh/

For more about the TWB glossary, including help on how to download this onto your device, please see https://translatorswithoutborders.org/updated-twb-glossary-for-bangladesh-includes-gender-disability-and-inclusion/

We provide regular terminology updates in the What Matters? feedback bulletin, available at http://www.shongjog.org.bd/news/i/?id=d6ea30a3-be19-4747-bb90-64fdf255ef97

We also welcome feedback and comments about our glossary. Please send it to bangladesh@translatorswithoutborders.org

General COVID-19 terms

Rohingya speakers generally refer to COVID-19 as "coronavirus" or simply "virus;" most people don't use or understand the term "COVID-19." Rohingya is an oral language, with a limited number of technical words, so Rohingya speakers frequently re-purpose existing terms when describing complex or unfamiliar concepts. For more technical terms, such as "pandemic" *(duniyat agagura foli za goide aba biaram)*, more descriptive phrases are used. The phrase for "pandemic" in Rohingya translates to "disease occurring across the world" whereas "epidemic" *(aba biaram or gorom biaram)* literally means "dangerous disease" or "hot disease." The word for "virus" *(fuk)*, also refers to insects, germs, bacteria and (intestinal) worms, giving it a very generic meaning and opening it up to misinterpretation.

General terms		
English word or phrase	Rohingya (Latin script)	Rohingya (Bangla script)
COVID-19/coronavirus	Coronavirus / Virus	করুনাভাইরাস / ভাইরাস
Disease	Biaram	বিয়ারাম
Epidemic	Aba biaram / Gorom biaram	আবা বিয়ারাম / গরম বিয়ারাম
Pandemic	Duniyat agagura foli za goide aba biaram	দুনিয়াত আগাঙুরা ফলি যাগইদে আবা বিয়ারাম
Health norms	Aramiyotor niyom	আরামিয়তর নিয়ম
Terminally ill	Mooti biaram	ম'তি বিয়ারাম

COVID-19 transmission

Understanding how Rohingya speakers conceptualize the spread of diseases can inform how COVID-19 is discussed with the community. For instance, some in the community understand that *fuk* (viruses) cause people to develop diseases *(biaram)*, and they understand that COVID-19 is a form of *fuk*. However, other people believe that viruses are spread through dirt *(hosara)*, for instance when someone breathes in the smells from dirt and rubbish *(furari)*.

"If there is rubbish (furari) *next to your home, the virus* (fuk) *will enter your mouth through the smell from the dirt (hosara)."* – Rohingya man, 50 years old.

"There are viruses (fuk) *in dirt* (hosara) *which give you diseases* (biaram)." – Rohingya man, 25 years old.

"Environmental surfaces" is another term without a direct translation in Rohingya. It is most usefully translated into an explanatory phrase which literally means "Things that are touched by people, like doors, door handles, floors, or furniture."

Transmission terms		
Spread or transmit	Biaram faron	বিয়ারাম ফারন
Virus	Fuk / biaramor fuk	ফুক / বিয়ারামর ফুক
Environmental surfaces	Mainshottu dora zade chiz okkol, mesal- doroza, dorazar doroni, toros, siyar-thebil, hendhilla aro	মাইনশত্তু ধরা জাদে সিজ অক্কল, মেসাল- দরজা, দরজার ধরনি, তরস, সিয়ার-টেবিল, হেন্ডিল্লা আরও
Infectious disease	Hono kissur zoriya ode biaram	হন কিছুর জরিয়া অদে বিয়ারাম
Contagious disease	Farade biaram	ফারাদে বিয়ারাম
Droplets	Furi guri sefor iyato fanir fura	গুরি গুরি সেফর ইয়াতো ফানির ফুড়া
Dirt	Hosara	হসারা

COVID-19 prevention and mitigation

Terms such as "social distancing" *(ek zon arekzon loi duraduri gori takon)* need a more descriptive translation. The literal translation is "one should keep a distance from others." Other terms, such as "hand sanitizer," do not exist in the Rohingya language. Due to the unfamiliarity of hand sanitizer when it was first referred to in messaging, the earlier translation of the term was *aat duibolla fani ar sabunor bodoilla*, which literally means "an alternative if water and soap are not available." As familiarity has now increased, the simplified phrase *aat saaf goribar dabai*, which translates as "medicine to cleanse hands," is widely understood.

Prevention and mitigation		
Social distancing	Ek zon arekzon loi duraduri gori takon	একজন আরেকজন লই দুরাদুরি গরি থাকন
Hand sanitizer	Aat saaf goribar dabai	আত সাফ গরিবার দাবাই
Protective gear	Hefazot taibar samana	হেফাজত থাইবার সামানা
Prevention methods	Biaram rukibar torika	বিয়ারাম রুকিবার তরিকা
Reusable masks	Dubara estemal gori farede hendhilla maas	দুবারা এস্তেমাল গরি ফারেদে হেন্ডিল্লা মা'স

COVID-19 treatment

The Rohingya translations for the words "quarantine" *(mainshore alog gori rakon)* and "isolation" *(coronavirus oile sira gori rakon)* are also descriptive phrases. They mean "to be kept separate and alone" and "separate people when they are confirmed as coronavirus cases" respectively.

Like most languages, Rohingya also borrows words from other languages. The Rohingya terms for both "oxygen" and "oxygen tank" are Rohingya pronunciations of the English terms.

Treatment terms		
Quarantine	Mainshore alog gori rakon	মাইনশরে আলগ গরি রাখন
Self-quarantine	Nize baze alog oi takon	নিজে-বাজে আলগ অই থাকন
Isolation	Coronavirus oile sira gori rakon	করুনাভাইরাস অইলে ছিরা গরি রখন
Isolation center / facility	Coronavirus oile sira gori rakibar zaga	করুনাভাইরাস অইলে ছিরা গরি রাখিবার জাগা
Treatment center	Dhath'tha-hana	ডাট্টাহানা
Oxygen	Oksijen	অক্সিজেন
Oxygen tank	Oksizenor thangki	অক্সিজেনর টাংকি

Deaths and burials

Rohingya language borrows several Arabic terms, as well as Persian and Urdu translations of these terms, to refer to religious traditions associated with death and burials. For instance, *toyommum goron* (literally "doing toyommum") refers to a religious ritual where purified sand and dust are used to symbolically wash one's hands, feet and face before performing prayers and for symbolic washing of a body before burial. This is done in place of actual washing, generally when a health related issue prevents the use of water or when no water is available.

When describing the preliminary steps to prepare a body, the Rohingya people speak of *murudare saf gori gusol-asol gorai toyar gori don*. This translates as "prepare a dead body by giving a cleansing bath." It describes another death ritual in which bodies are washed with water, perfumes are applied, and a shroud is used. These rituals are generally performed by close relatives of the same gender as the deceased. The Rohingya term *hãda-rada goroiya* ("mourners") is yet another descriptive phrase, literally meaning "people who weep."

There is no word for "body bag" in the Rohingya language as body bags are not generally part of Rohingya culture. The phrase *muruda bori rakede bek* literally translates to "a bag to put a dead body in." When providing information or advice in relation to this, it is important to distinguish between a body bag and a shroud *(kofon)*, the white cloth with which the deceased are wrapped or draped in line with religious burial practices.

Death and burial terms		
Preliminary steps to prepare the body	Murudare saf gori gusol-asol gorai toyar gori don	মুরুদারে সাফ গরি গুসল-আসল গরাই তয়ার গরি দন
Symbolic washing	Toyommum goron	তয়স্মুম গরন
Not touching or kissing the deceased	Murudare doitto nodon ar summa dito nodon	মুরুদারে দইত্ত ন'দন আর সুম্মা দিত ন'দন
Mourners	Hãda-rada goroiya	হাঁদ-রাদা গরইয়া
Body bag	Muruda bori rakede bek	মুরুদা ভরি রাকেদে বেক
Shroud	Kofon	কফন