

WHAT MATTERS? 50

Humanitarian Feedback Bulletin
on Rohingya Response

Issue

50

The major problems impacting the life and future of the Rohingya community and their main concerns have remained the same over more than three years

Source: Since January 2018 BBC Media Action has been collating Rohingya and host community feedback data collected by different agencies through their community feedback and response mechanisms (CFRM) and listening group discussions. Thus far, around 225,000 comments and other feedback, the core of *What Matters?* articles, have been analysed. In 2019, BBC Media Action published four Foresight¹ papers, as part of the Foresight Service which highlighted the Rohingya community's perspectives on key issues predicted to affect the camps. This article compares this community feedback to current perspectives in relation to education, livelihoods, congestion and safety/security

Since August 2017, which saw the largest influx of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh, BBC Media Action has published over 50 *What Matters?* bulletins to inform sectors and agencies about the community's key concerns, as identified from community feedback data.

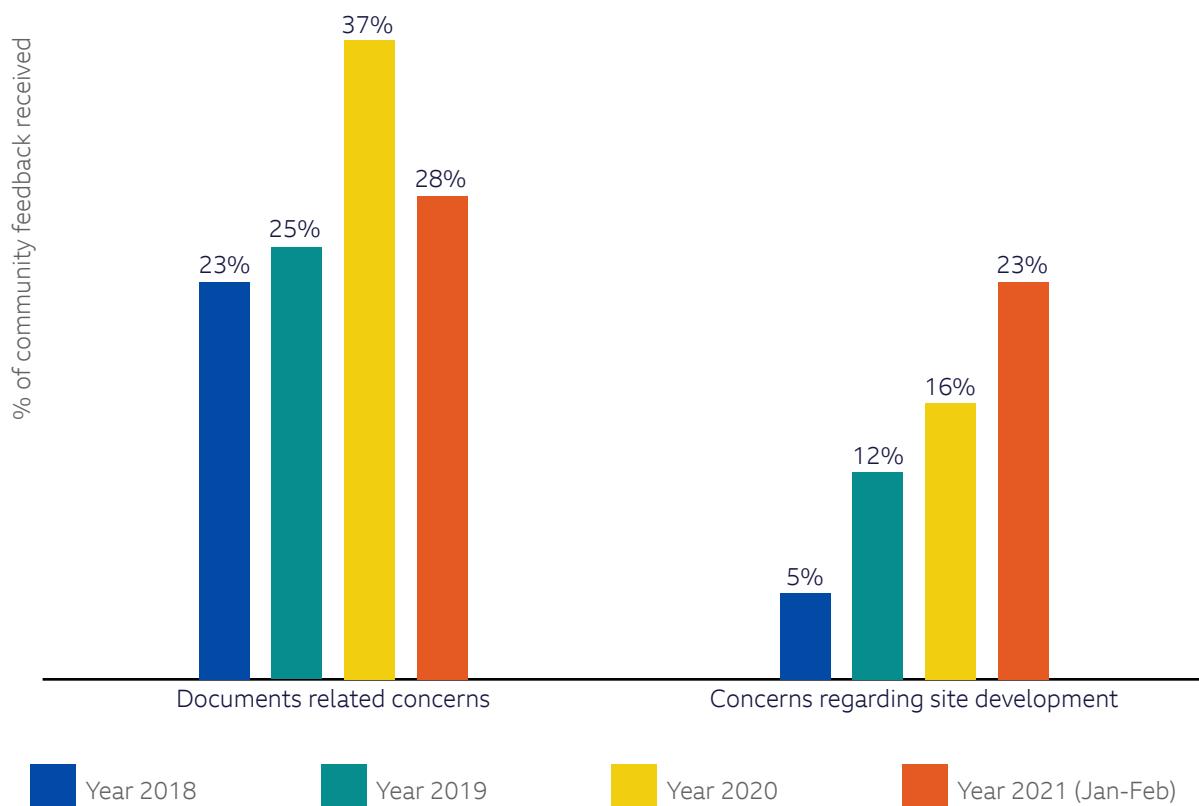
Documentation has been a consistent concern

Analysis of community feedback data collected in January and February of 2021 shows that the Rohingya community are facing problems with documents (such as relief cards which enable them to access aid and services) and also site development (such as stairways, roads, drainage

¹ <http://www.shongjog.org.bd/news/i/?id=040c37cc-3b27-4d8a-9b66-d26a74485bff>

systems, bridges, pathways, slope protection/retention walls) in the camps. The following graph shows how much of a concern these issues have been over the last three years.

Documentation vs. site development concerns



The Rohingya community's documentation related concerns have persisted, even as over the past three years, the system of documentation has changed to make it easier for Rohingya people to receive relief items, access health services, receive shelter materials, cooking materials like LPG cylinders, and EVI (extremely vulnerable individual) support. Despite this, Rohingya people are still struggling with their documents/relief cards which hampers their day-to-day life (as mentioned in previous issues of *What Matters?* - Issue 12¹ Oct 2018, Issue 18² Jan 2019, Issue 24³ June

1 <https://app.box.com/s/9ovr5e82mcvmkrh90m1ttstj0s8je9aq>

2 <https://app.box.com/s/ndtighuvg5u18w5mkeoy3nazlvm4b359>

3 <https://app.box.com/s/mab1542y2gls3ek3smll8m9rz1eg4xa0>

2019, Issue 28¹ Sep 2019, issue 40² June 2020). These unresolved issues have a ripple effect i.e., this effects the allotment of relief items such as food, hygiene kits, shelter kits or other non-food items. Specific issues include not receiving their latest cards, losing their cards, mismatch of fingerprints, the need to update family details (e.g. add or remove family members from the cards) and complications related to relocating from one camp to another. Issues with documentation seemed to peak last year alongside Covid-19 pandemic containment measures. To date, in 2021, this remains a key concern, with 28% of all feedback related to documentation.



“It’s been a while since we have been facing this problem (documentation). Coronavirus might be a reason why it hasn’t been resolved yet. We have informed this to different personnel working in the camps, but didn’t get any solution.”

– Male Rohingya, community leader/mahji, Camp 8W,

What Matters? Issue 40, June 2020



Site management concerns have increased

As part of the 2019 Foresight project, humanitarian practitioners predicted that due to the set up and terrain camps have been built on, congestion³ would be one of the priority issues in the future. Experts from different sectors predicted it would be difficult to meet humanitarian standards due to the inadequacy of space to build enough roads, schools, health centres, toilets, bathrooms and tube wells to serve the population. They also felt this would put the Rohingya community’s health, protection and safety at risk, especially since the camps would get more congested in the future.

1 <https://app.box.com/s/vh4mpnjz7mk1rsqc20bv2ysnu9f0jmlf>

2 <https://app.box.com/s/gaj09paldqy2vasmvybe3ypyc8uit2px>

3 <https://www.dropbox.com/s/lagaxu0iw05dvgx/CXB%20Foresight%20Service%20-%20Congestion%20-%20EN.pdf?dl=0>

Humanitarian practitioners correctly predicted that people would struggle with issues related to congestion as reflected in community feedback data collected through the years. The Rohingya community have continually expressed concerns related to different site related issues, such as roads, slopes, stairs, sewerage and drainage. In some earlier issues of *What Matters?* (Issue 25¹ July 2019, Issue 26² July 2019, Issue 28³ Sep 2019, Issue 32⁴ Jan'2020, we discussed these concerns.) Despite agencies' efforts to address many of these issues, feedback received in 2021 shows the following concerns remain priorities for the community:

- ▶ Due to the bad condition of roads, stairways, bridges, people (especially older people, women, and children) face serious risk of accidents while carrying relief items, water, and other materials from one place to another, as well as accessing other daily necessities. Older people feel that a lack of well-maintained pathways, stairs, and bridges are limiting their ability to move around.
- ▶ Poor waste management causes increased mosquitoes in the camps, and people are facing problems maintaining cleanliness and hygiene. In some cases, people said that existing drainage systems are overflowing or blocked which creates bad smells.
- ▶ Landslides have made some shelters vulnerable and damaged others. People have made requests to build more retention walls or slope protection to protect these shelters, especially during the monsoon season.
- ▶ People feel insecure while accessing the bathroom or latrine at night due to lack of street-lights or existing lights being damaged.



"I get scared when I go to the toilet at night as we do not have a light in the toilet. When I get scared, I take another female family member with me."

– Female Rohingya, 52, Camp 13,
What Matters? Issue 32, January 2020



1 <https://app.box.com/s/qmczs7ru6k6g6qqwetscbcfkuh9k7t8t>
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3 <https://app.box.com/s/vn4mpnjz/mk1rsqc20bv2ysnu9f0jmlf>
4 <https://app.box.com/s/fzuqlwsgbxtnwnryb1wqinlavj3l5338>

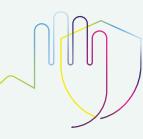
CXB

FORESIGHT

An insight into the emerging concerns in the Rohingya response

This was an initiative of BBC Media Action which aimed to assist humanitarian agencies with future planning, by better understanding community perceptions of issues which were likely to become priorities for the Rohingya community in Cox's Bazar in the short-term future. It was published in April 2019.

The service used an innovative methodology to identify and prioritise long-term topics – including input from local experts, analysis of existing data and participatory engagement to allow experts to form a consensus on what the priority issues in the camps would be. The experts identified a few key issues which were later contextualized with community feedback data, needs assessment data from Needs and Population Monitoring (NPM); and new primary research into these topics with the Rohingya community. Through this process, the Foresight Service identified four priority issues:

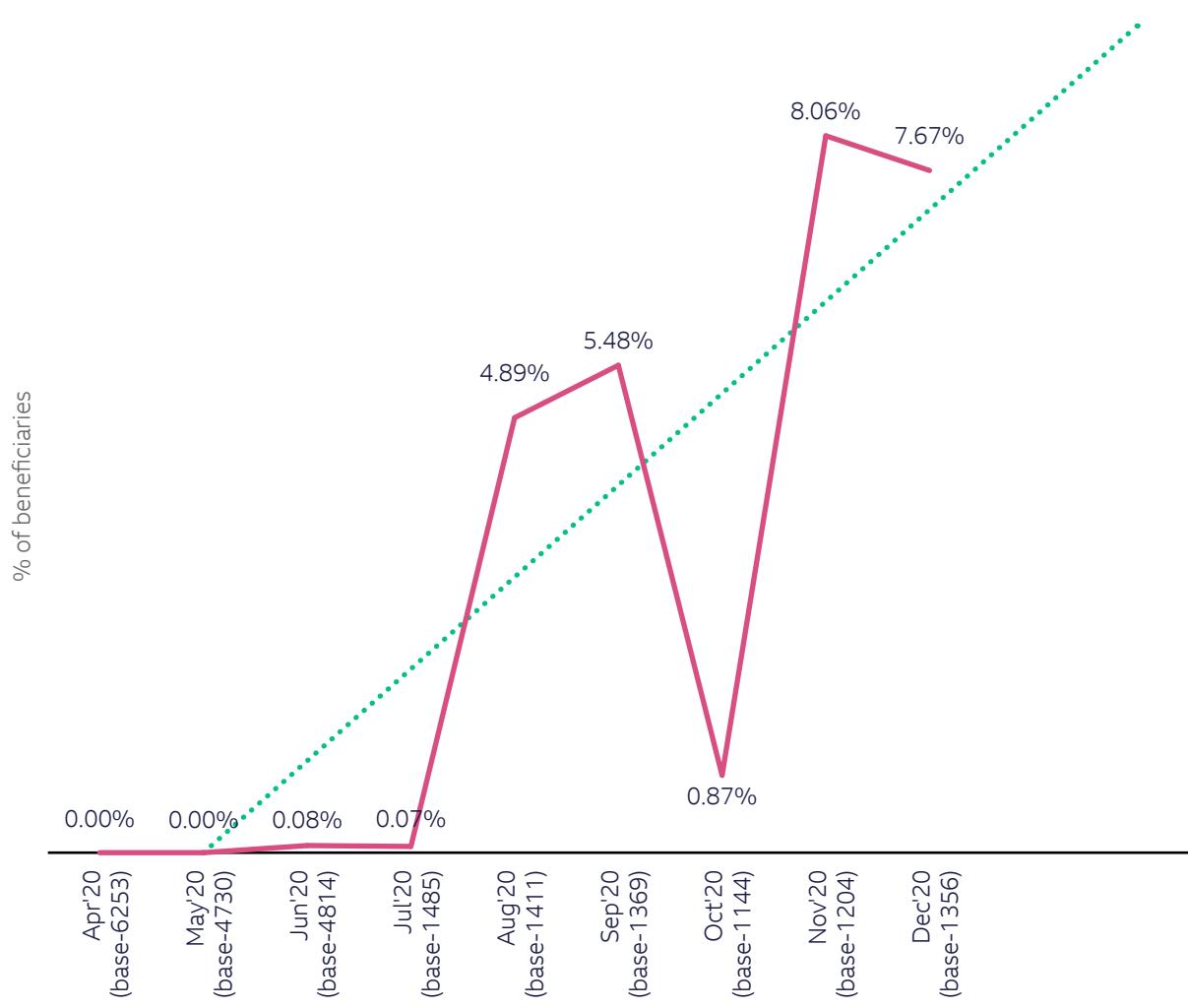
- ▶  Education: Selected by the panel of experts as a priority issue because the majority of Rohingya adolescents were not accessing any education or vocational training in the camps. Due to limited funding and restrictions on what education was allowed to be provided, education provision was relatively basic and aimed at younger children. Young people and their parents were expected to be concerned about their future, and how they would catch up on the formal education they were missing out on.
- ▶  Livelihoods: Identified by the panel of experts as a priority issue, because the majority of the Rohingya community are completely dependent on food relief to feed their families, which is a vulnerable position to be in, particularly if global donor priorities change.
- ▶  Congestion: Humanitarian experts had seen congestion in the camps as a priority issue because they felt it was putting Rohingya communities' health, protection and safety at risk. The experts also added that due to inadequate space it was and will be difficult for them to build enough toilets, bathrooms, tube wells, roads, schools, and health centres for the population.
- ▶  Safety and security: considering the issues of crime, personal safety and health and safety, the panel of experts selected safety and security as another concerning issue.

Education and livelihood have emerged as key concerns with the arrival of the pandemic

Education

Throughout 2019, people did not raise many concerns about education compared with the other issues they were facing in the camps. Due to the pandemic, throughout 2020, Temporary Learning Centres (TLC)/Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) were closed for a long time. Children started to spend their time playing more, studying less, in some cases spending time with friends without continuing their studies. Parents were worried about the impact this will have on the development of their children's futures because children were forgetting what they learned in schools/

Concern related to educational infrastructure of children among Rohingya community



TLCs. As mentioned in issue 47¹ Dec 2020, the trend analysis suggests that education-related concerns might increase in upcoming months. As facilities are closed for longer and longer, parents feel the increased need of a house tutor for their children to continue their studies. However, families struggle to afford private tutors because their financial situations are worse due to the pandemic.



“Our children play the whole day as the schools are now closed. This will hamper their intelligence. They won't get any job in the future.”

– Female Rohingya, 30, *What Matters?* Issue 47, December 2020

“Our children are forgetting what they learned as the schools are closed.”

– Female Rohingya, 43, *What Matters?* Issue 47, December 2020



Livelihoods

Experts participating in the Foresight² Service project were concerned that lack of work would lead to frustration (particularly among men), increased crime and domestic violence in the camps. Humanitarian practitioners also feared that female-headed households in the camps could be vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking due to lack of livelihood opportunities.

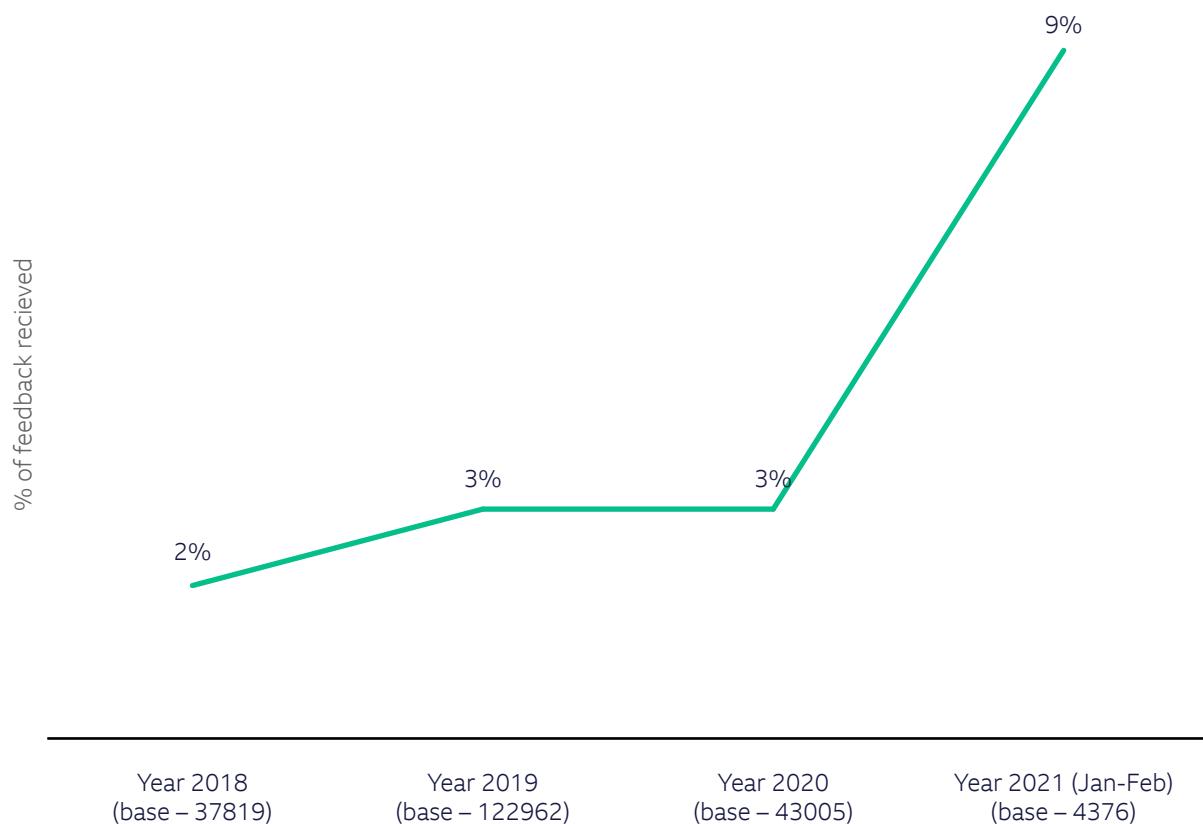
Our research has found that people in the Rohingya community do not rely entirely on the relief items provided by humanitarian agencies. They need additional to meet expenses such as buying meat/fish or other food items, paying for tuition for their children, to seek better health treatment when in need and so on. To meet their family's needs, some

1 <https://app.box.com/s/wwa0pmjh6foikgoedb9pp9md8cyesdb6>

2 <https://www.dropbox.com/s/p3faqrby1zkkdf/CXB%20Foresight%20Service%20-%20Livelihoods%20-%20EN.pdf?dl=0>

have worked as day-labourers in the host community or in the camps in different capacities. Many have found work via the cash for work programmes organised by different agencies. Since their movements are now restricted due to security measures such as fences erected around the camps as well as pandemic containment measures their access to income generating activities has been limited¹. (*What Matters?* Issue 48, Jan 2021). This has had a huge impact not only on their ability to earn, but has also had a ripple effect, as they worry about their children's futures since they are unable to afford tuition.

Concern related to the increasing financial burden among Rohingya community



In summary, the Rohingya community have raised concerns via discussions and other community feedback mechanisms. They are confronted with documentation issues, as well as site management, livelihood and education related issues. And Covid-19 has only made these problems worse.

¹ <https://app.box.com/s/aenpxw3kvzpeakyjrobnntmjfv0aoeix>

Three years, fifty issues: A look back on What Matters?

This 50th edition of *What Matters?* marks a significant milestone. Through this medium, Translators without Borders (TWB) and partners have presented the perspectives and concerns of many thousands of members of the Rohingya and host communities in Cox's Bazar. Through hundreds of interviews, *What Matters?* has provided a voice to these vulnerable communities, channelling their feedback to the humanitarian community. *What Matters?* has been and continues to be an important platform for sharing the valuable perspectives of the Rohingya and host communities to better equip the humanitarian community to support these communities. This article looks back over TWB's contributions to *What Matters?* over the past three years, reflecting on the ongoing importance of language and communication in the response.

2018: Developing cultural understanding

During 2018, TWB shared guidance and insight on language, terminology, and cultural perspectives relating to important and diverse topics including weather, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), Muslim and Hindu religious traditions, gender, repatriation, numeric and measurement systems, and colours. TWB's very first contribution to *What Matters?*, an article titled Communicating Weather with Local Communities (<https://app.box.com/s/9lfgyo432ekkdwwxe4cuib8w2vjc3vst>), provided readers with advice on how to communicate potentially lifesaving information about weather patterns to the Rohingya and host communities. As many of TWB's *What Matters?* articles over the past three years have done, this article highlighted the unique linguistic and cultural perspectives of the Rohingya community, including in relation to seemingly standardised concepts such as the seasons. Whereas Bangladeshis traditionally consider there to be six seasons, the Rohingya community generally only count three seasons: winter, hot, and rainy. When communicating information about extreme weather, such as severe storms or cyclones, it is essential

that the community receive the correct information to prepare for and respond to these events. In emergency contexts, understanding these differences and the potential impacts of misunderstandings is essential.

2019: Recognising differences

During 2019, TWB covered topics including safety, security, protection, mental health stigma and perceptions, disability, and medicine. The first *What Matters?* issue of 2019, Issue 17 (<https://app.box.com/s/1a8mod923we8xlmcfaoag3kw4pkahuzmt>) , titled *Chittagonian and Rohingya: So near and yet so far*, explored the differences and similarities between the Rohingya and Chittagonian languages. This article discussed the importance of understanding the differences between the two and emphasised the importance of organisations using Rohingya interpreters and volunteers whenever possible, a stance that TWB maintains. Chittagonian speakers have played and continue to play a central role in the response, and they are an incredibly valuable part of humanitarian activities in the camps. Although Chittagonian and Rohingya speakers are generally able to communicate with one another, the differences between the languages mean that there are often communication challenges. These challenges are particularly important when it comes to contexts where miscommunication or misunderstandings can have serious impacts for those involved. Healthcare settings are one such example of a context where effective communication in Rohingya is integral and potentially lifesaving. In the Rohingya language, technical terms and concepts often require descriptive language to express their meanings. It is important that Chittagonian speakers and service providers understand the extent of variation between their particular dialect and Rohingya. This issue was magnified by the sudden arrival of Covid-19 in Bangladesh in early 2020.

2020: responding to Covid-19

In early 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a swift and substantial change in the overall response. As was the case for many organisations working in the response, for TWB the pandemic brought about the need for rapid reflection and reaction to mitigate the risk posed by Covid-19 to the vulnerable communities in the camp. From the outset of the

pandemic, the language and communication needs of the Rohingya community were a priority.

TWB's first contribution to *What Matters?* for 2020 was titled "How Rohingya people talk about viruses and disease", included in Issue 33 (<https://app.box.com/s/ce8zycs0r8fgfxp45r6f93sx51z2l6va>), published 20 March. The article discussed Rohingya terminology and perceptions in relation to the spread and treatment of viruses and disease. Interviews with camp residents provided valuable insight into perceptions and misconceptions among community members in relation to Covid-19, as well as viruses and diseases more broadly. As noted by TWB at the time, these findings reinforced the need for the application of plain language principles when communicating Covid-19 information to Rohingya people, including using terminology and concepts already familiar to the community.



"There are viruses (fuk) in dirt (ho*sara) which give you diseases (biaram)."

– Male Rohingya, 25

"If there is rubbish (furari) next to your home, the virus (fuk) will enter your mouth through the smell from the dirt (ho*sara)."

– Male Rohingya, 50



The dozen articles TWB contributed to *What Matters?* during 2020 primarily focused on addressing Rohingya language, communication, and information needs in relation to Covid-19. Topics covered include the Rohingya Covid-19 and medical terminology, information sources and trust, the role of Majhi in communicating information to the community, pictorial communication and signage, concerns surrounding the reduced presence of NGO staff in camps, specific information challenges of women, information format preferences, and perspectives on vaccines. The pandemic brought the need for understanding of Rohingya linguistic

and cultural perspective into the spotlight. Rohingya is primarily a verbal language with no standardised written form and limited technical terminology. Complex or unfamiliar concepts are generally described through repurposing of existing terms or through descriptive phrases. For instance, the Rohingya term for “pandemic” (duniyat agagura foli za goide aba biaram) translates to “disease occurring across the world”.

Building understanding and knowledge of Rohingya language and culture and the community’s language and communication needs has been a priority of TWB since the outset of the refugee response in Cox’s Bazar. Building and sharing this knowledge is central to the overall success of TWB and other response actors in understanding and meeting the needs of the Rohingya community.

BBC Media Action 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 work is funded by EU humanitarian aid and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

If you have any comments, questions or suggestions regarding *What Matters?*, you are welcome to get in touch with the team by emailing info@cxbfeedback.org

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