WHAT MATTERS?

Humanitarian Feedback Bulletin on Rohingya Response

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Finding the right words in the Rohingya language

Clear communication with the Rohingya community is one of the most challenging aspects of the current response. It requires us to understand how their language is evolving, how different languages have influenced it, and how distinct dialects are emerging. Importantly, we must acknowledge linguistic variations within the community, and use appropriate vocabulary in all communications.

In this response we often talk about the 'Rohingya refugees' as if they are a homogeneous group of people. Yet they come from different parts of Rakhine and they have different levels of literacy and access to education. Language is another key area of difference, with discrete Rohingya dialects emerging.

There have been many flows back and forth along the porous Bangladesh-Myanmar border over the last 50 years. In the early 1990s, about 250,000 Rohingya people fled to Bangladesh from northern Myanmar to escape a military crackdown. Some of those people returned to Myanmar, but many remained in Bangladesh. The community that stayed behind is usually referred to as the 'registered Rohingya', even though some of them are not officially 'registered' as refugees by UNHCR and the government of Bangladesh.

In 2017, another 700,000 Rohingya people crossed the border fleeing a fresh wave of violence. They are often referred to as the 'new Rohingya'. Now over half of the world's Rohingya speakers live in camps in Cox's Bazar district.

More than 30 years of geographic separation has influenced the language that the two groups of refugees use, resulting in diverging dialects of the original Rohingya language. Language is like a sponge: it absorbs from its surroundings. So while the 'registered Rohingyas' were soaking up Bangla and Chittagonian terms into their vocabulary, other Rohingya people were borrowing from standard Burmese and Rakhine. When the 'new Rohingya' joined the registered community in the camps, the linguistic differences became clear. So did the need to consider those differences when communicating with the community.

'Registered Rohingya' now use many Bangla words

In the past three decades, various government and non-government institutions exposed the 'registered Rohingya' community to standard Bangla. Those that went to Bangladeshi schools learned how to read and write in standard Bangla. Rohingya men learned Bangla in their interactions beyond the camp, through trade or employment for example.

The 'registered Rohingya' community uses many Bangla words associated with health. For example, they use *betha*, the Bangla word for 'pain', rather than the Rohingya word *bish*. Most 'registered Rohingya' people use the Bangla *oshudh* for 'medicine', instead of *dabai*. The Rohingya language does not have a distinct word for 'treatment', so the 'registered Rohingya' people adopted the Bangla word *chikitsha*.

The newer arrivals in the camps are not so familiar with those Bangla terms, and might not immediately understand them.

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Chittagonian has also influenced vocabulary in the camps

Chittagonian, the local dialect spoken by the host community, has also influenced the 'registered Rohingya' community's vocabulary and pronunciation. For example, the words *beda* ('man') and *bedi* ('woman') also mean 'husband' and 'wife' respectively in Rohingya. However, the 'registered Rohingya' now prefer to use the Chittagonian terms *zamai* and *bou* for 'husband' and 'wife'. In terms of pronunciation, words like *aishsha* ('okay') now sound closer to Chittagonian *aichcha*.

Although there is overlap between Rohingya and Chittagonian, unfamiliar Chittagonian terms might confuse the new arrivals.

The 'new Rohingya' brought Burmese words to the camps

Just across the river, the Burmese language influenced the Rohingya people who remained in Myanmar.

Standard Burmese is the state language of Myanmar, so Rohingya people attending government schools were taught that language. Though reading and writing levels are still low, quite a few standard Burmese words entered the Rohingya language. Burmese words also entered the Rohingya language through administration, trade and, increasingly, through conventional and social media. For example, the words *ukkata* ('chairperson') and *myuney* ('district') are borrowed from Burmese. The 'registered Rohingya' have not been as exposed to

Burmese for the past three decades, so are sometimes unfamiliar with these new words.

Rakhine, the dialect of Burmese that is spoken in Rakhine state where many Rohingya people lived, has also influenced the Rohingya language. Rakhine and standard Burmese have marked differences in pronunciation and some terminology. Rohingya people pronounce Burmese words with a Rakhine accent. For example, *seyama* is the Burmese word for 'teacher', but *serama* is the Rakhine pronunciation of the same word. The Rohingya community also address teachers as *serama*.

These variations add an extra layer of complexity to communicating with the Rohingya community.

Consider the different vocabularies when working in the camps

When working with the community or designing information, education and communication materials, choose terms that Rohingya people are most likely to understand. Provide explanations of words that have been introduced from other languages. Encourage Rohingya-speaking field workers to use the terms they remember their grandma using, because a wider audience is likely to understand those words.

New arrivals rarely understand standard Bangla, so Chittagonian and 'registered Rohingya' field workers and interpreters should use simple terms and contextual phrases (as opposed to academic Bangla and jargonistic terms) that the new arrivals will more easily understand.

Host Community Feedback

Road traffic from UN / NGO vehicles and increased transportation costs are among the host community's top concerns.

Source: Feedback collected from the host community audience of the radio discussion programme Betar Sanglap, recorded at Palang High School in Ukhiya on 5 September 2018. The concerns came from questions asked during the programme by 36 men and 18 women. The programme is produced by Bangladesh Betar, with support from UNICEF and BBC Media Action.

Host community members said that students in Cox's Bazar are struggling to reach school on time due to heavy traffic on the roads as the NGO and UN offices and schools start at the same time. The host community also said that transport costs have increased since the Rohingya influx: previously BDT 10 was enough to get to school, but this has doubled to BDT 20 and in some cases even more.

> " The school hours and office hours of the NGOs are the same, which makes it difficult for the students to reach school on time"
>
> - Male, teacher

The host community is also concerned because they say they can no longer get birth certificates for their children. These certificates are an essential part of the school admission process. People said that officials from the Union Parishad (local government) have stopped providing birth certificates in order to stop Rohingya people collecting birth certificates for their children (click here for details). Host community members who didn't collect a birth certificate for their child immediately after the birth say that they are now facing problems in obtaining one.

> " The Union Parishad has stopped providing birth certificates after Rohingya influx. This is causing problems for children during school admission."
>
> - Female, housewife

During this edition of Betar Sanglap, the host community discussed several other issues that concern them. These included high birth rates among the Rohingya community due to lack of awareness about family planning. The host community is also curious about what the citizenship status is for newborn Rohingya babies. Deforestation to accommodate the Rohingya population continues to be an issue and other concerns include a perceived increase in the spread of disease in the area, including diarrhea, jaundice and malaria.

> " The Rohingya community is continuously destroying the forest by cutting down trees, which is disrupting the environmental balance. Another issue is that the birth rate is high within the Rohingya community and they need to be aware of family planning methods."
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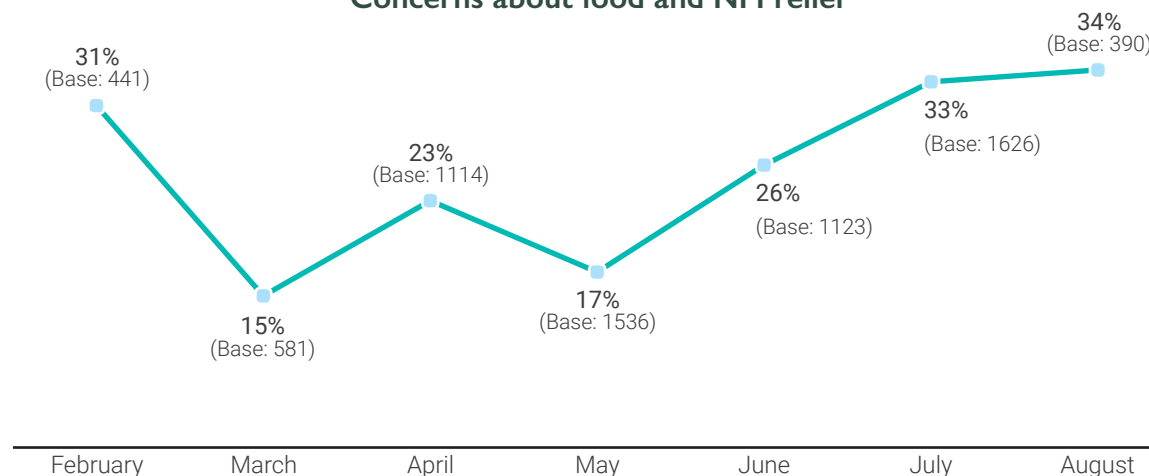> - Male, employee in private company

Getting relief goods: A re-emerging concern within the Rohingya community

Source: data collected from 6811 respondents by IOM community mobilisers from February to August 2018, in camps 8W, 9, 10, 18, 19, Leda, Leda MS, Shamlapur and Unchiprang. BBC Media Action weekly focus group discussions in camps 9 and 10 in late August and early September 2018 with men and women aged 18 to 40.

Concerns about food and NFI relief

31% (Base: 441) — February
15% (Base: 581) — March
23% (Base: 1114) — April
17% (Base: 1536) — May
26% (Base: 1123) — June
33% (Base: 1626) — July
34% (Base: 390) — August

Getting access to food and NFI relief has reemerged as the biggest concern amongst the Rohingya community.

Feedback shows that, in February 2018, problems related to accessing relief were mentioned the most. But in March, April and May, shelter issues such as lack of space and the need for shelter materials became the biggest concern expressed by the community. In June, July and August getting access to relief once again become the biggest concern. The graph below shows how feedback regarding access to relief has changed over the past seven months.

Data also included specific complaints that the community raised in terms of getting access to relief.

Concerns related to relief	Percentage of complaints raised
Didn't get relief card/lost relief card	13%
Need Hygiene Kit	5%
Not getting NFI (non-food items)	4%
Not getting enough food	3%
Not getting food regularly	2%
Didn't get family count number[1]	2%

Base: Total respondents - 6811

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1. The Government of Bangladesh and UNHCR launched a joint verification exercise for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar. A team of 100+ member collect information on the refugee arrivals and deliver a card and a unique identification number. The exercise will help consolidate a unified database for the purposes of protection, identity management, documentation, provision of assistance, population statistics, and ultimately solutions for an estimated 900,000 refugees who have fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar_refugees

Given the reemergence of these issues over the past few months, focus group discussions explored Rohingya people's current (August/September 2018) concerns around access to food and NFI relief in more depth. Some key themes emerged from these discussions:

Food quotas are not sufficient for every family

Some families believe they are receiving insufficient food and perceive that the current system does not fairly reflect the number and age of family members. Participants mentioned that a family of three receives half as much food as a family of four. Participants also said that families with small children receive the same amount of food as a family with all adults. For example, a family of three adults get the same amount of food as a family of 2 adults and 1 child. People feel that, if a family has small children, their total food consumption will be less than a family of all adults. People also said that they often receive 26kg of rice when they are supposed to receive 30kg of rice.

People also said they are not receiving diverse food items like fish and vegetables and that they are therefore selling rice and pulses to buy vegetables, onion, ginger, garlic and other food that they feel is necessary. If an emergency arises, for example if people need to go to hospital or buy medicine, they described how they may sell their food relief. People describe how they sometimes run out of the allocated portions of rice and pulses before the next distribution because they were sold.

> " The quantity of rice is not enough for us. However, sometimes we sell rice to buy other things that we need."
>
> - Male, 25+, camp 9

Lack of cooking fuel remains a big challenge

People say that they are struggling to cook because they don't receive any firewood. People described how they try to collect firewood from the forest and sell their food relief to buy firewood from the host community. Because of the lack of fuel, people also said that they use paper, plastic bottles and packets as alternative fuels, creating lots of smoke inside their small homes.

Participants also described how lack of fuel for the kerosene lamps means that they can only use them for a short period of time at night. People say that they are afraid of theft at night due to lack of light and, as a result, are selling relief food to buy kerosene. People are avoiding using candles for fear of fire and suggested that solar panels could help solve these problems.

> " We need solar light... If we use candles we need to be awake at night otherwise fire accidents may happen. Also, there is fear of theft. We sell rice and pulses to buy kerosene."
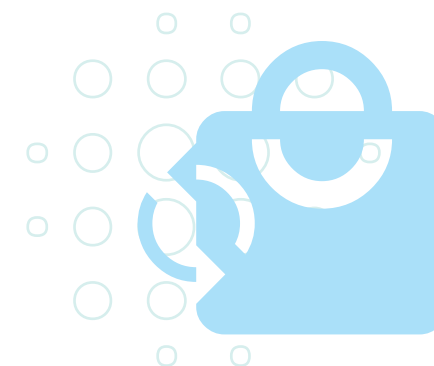>
> - Female, 25+, camp 9

People are facing challenges using radios

Some female participants mentioned that one radio had been distributed per five families. However, they said that the radio was not user friendly and that they found it difficult to tune it. People also mentioned that they thought sharing relief items creates conflict among families.

Hygiene kits are not widespread

Focus group discussion participants had not heard of hygiene kits, but female participants said that they had previously received a box of 60 soaps. Male participants said they didn't receive any soap, toothpaste or shampoo.