

Winter woes in the camps

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Clothes, shelter and disease of increasing concern as winter starts

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Winter Special Edition

WHAT MATTERS?

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Winter woes in the camps

Winter (*sheeth haal*) in the northern parts of South Asia is typically welcomed as a comfortable season, a respite from the scorching heat and monsoonal rains. The cool weather starts in late November and ends in mid-February, though there are of course regional variations. Cox's Bazar, being further south and on the ocean, has a less pronounced winter season. However, though daytime temperatures are usually comfortably warm, nights can be quite chilly (*thanda*), particularly in the hilly areas of the camps.

Winter in South Asia also means the beginning of the dry season (*udeen haal*), which lasts from December to April. The dry season is particularly troublesome during the colder months because the dry air, dust, and colder nights lead to respiratory issues (*niyash tainte mushkil*). These conditions

will be more acute in the camps, as there is more dust and loose soil where trees have been cut down and the flimsy shelters lack insulation. Other health issues that may arise are the common cold (*soddi*), cough (*haashi*) and severely dry skin (*samra-fada*). These terms are similar in Chittagonian, therefore there should be no difficulty in comprehending them. However, the term for 'sore throat' differs (*golar bish* in Rohingya and *golar dorod* in Chittagonian).

To keep warm, Rohingya people traditionally used portable pots called *ailleh* to carry hot embers or to create a small, controlled fire. However, in the camps, most people just gather around open fires or stoves (*oin fuwon*). These fires, coupled with the dry season, may be a fire hazard in the camps.



Rohingya community concerns: Preparing for winter

Source: 17 Internews community correspondents and one feedback manager using Kobo Collect app in camps 1E, 1W, 2E, 2W, 3 and 4 collected feedbacks from 720 Rohingya respondents; community feedback collected from 5584 IOM listener group sessions between May and 17 November 2018; and qualitative data from focus group discussions in camp 15 (Jamtoli).

Although winter is coming, recent community feedback from Rohingya people suggests that people are not yet particularly concerned about the coming colder weather. Only a small proportion (less than 1%) of issues raised in listener groups in October were related to winter preparations, with a slight increase (2.3%) in the month of November. People who did mention concerns about winter focused on the need for warm clothes and blankets and were also worried about health-related issues in winter and how to take care of children properly in the upcoming winter season. The lack of spontaneous mention of winter in community feedback suggests that more efforts might be needed to sensitise the community to the risks associated with colder weather.

Despite the lack of spontaneous mention of issues related to winter, qualitative analysis can help to further understand what the concerns of the Rohingya community are likely to be in the upcoming winter season.

Rohingya people are mostly concerned about the relief items they feel they need for the upcoming winter season, such as special mats and pillows which are more effective in the cold weather. They also mentioned the need for more blankets, as they felt that the numbers received previously were not enough for their whole family. People also mentioned the need for more shoes, at least one pair for inside and one pair for outside use.

“ We received two blankets last year even though my family has eight members. Those who have a family of four received the same number of blankets. I need more this year as the clothes we received last year are torn and there are not enough for my family.”

– Male, camp 15

Rohingya people also feel that they do not have sufficient clothes to face the upcoming winter season. People said that the clothes they received last year were not enough to support their entire family and some people mentioned that their clothes had become torn and damaged. People also said that they had previously used polythene over their clothes to keep themselves warm.

“ Last year, we got through the winter season somehow. But we are thinking about this year. Our children need winter clothes. To protect ourselves from winter, we need to buy clothes. We have neither money nor jobs and we can't even go out of the camps to work. We need blankets, rozai (thick blankets), bed sheets, shawls and sweaters.”

– Male, 42, camp 2E

Rohingya people are also worried about their shelters and are asking for shelter kits to protect themselves during winter. Many of the people are worried about their houses as they feel that

they are not sturdy enough to protect them from the winter. People have explained that their houses were made over a year ago, after their arrival in Bangladesh, and they feel that the condition of many houses is now not good enough. According to them, their shelters are not strong enough to protect them from cold winds, since the roofs are made of tarpaulin, which holds dew drops and increases the cold. People also said that some of these tarpaulins already have depressions in many places, which allow fog to easily enter the houses through the roof. People also mentioned that they were using polyethene, old clothes and other materials to fill the gaps and insulate their shelters better. People feel that they need more straw, tarpaulin and bamboo for the upcoming winter season to cope with this issue.

“ During winter, we need to fix our houses again. We need to make sure that the wind is not entering the house. We need money to buy shelter kits to prepare our houses for winter as we haven't got anything from NGOs. If the NGOs could provide us with shelter kits, then we could stop the winter wind from coming into our houses.”

– Female, 28, camp 1W

People mentioned that everyone in the camp sleeps on the floor and that, during winter, the floor becomes very cold. People also mentioned that sleeping on a cold floor might increase the chance of diseases such as colds, coughs, fever, asthma and pneumonia.

“ The floors are very cold. We didn't bring any of our furniture here and we don't have money to buy new furniture. If NGOs can buy us mattresses to sleep on, that would protect us from cold and winter.”

– Female, 37, camp 2E/3

Rohingya people are particularly worried that the winter season could affect people at high risk such as children and older people. People feel that children in the camps often don't wear enough clothes and so are susceptible to pneumonia, fever and cold. People also feel that older people are especially at risk from asthma. Another concern is insufficient health facilities in the camps: people said that health facilities provided by different agencies are not good and tend to just give out paracetamol, regardless of what the medical issue is.

“ The children are children, they don't wear their clothes properly all the time and get cold very easily.”

– Female, camp 15

Rohingya people feel that, to keep children and older people safe from cold-related diseases, they need separate pans (*dekchi*) to boil water for bathing. As such, they also need more firewood to keep themselves warm in the winter.

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 work is being delivered in partnership with IOM, the UN migration agency, and is funded by EU humanitarian aid and the UK Department for International Development.

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