



Rohingya Community Feedback

Snapshot on the MOU, smartcard, returns and repatriation

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(Photo on cover page: Internews community correspondent collecting community feedback, credit Internews/Rahaman)

Introduction

This document aims to offer a snapshot of the diverse opinions and questions of the Rohingya community on the recently signed MOU between UNDP, UNHCR and the government of Myanmar, the smart card, returns and repatriation. The verification process is endorsed by the Government of Bangladesh and aims to replace the current MOHA and Family Counting cards with a new identity card (the smart card). This identity card will be used as the basis for receiving humanitarian assistance. The smart card is included in this analysis since some community members believe the card is closely related to their return to Myanmar; therefore, these issues must be seen as linked concerns of the community.

Questions on the MOU are quite often phrased as concrete questions on returns rather than abstract questions on negotiations or the MOU document. Therefore, the questions on returns, repatriation and the MOU must be understood as parts of a whole.

The key finding from the data is that the Rohingya community while not united in their opinions for instance on returns and have very different questions on the discussed topics, appear to agree on one thing: a great desire for more information. Additionally, there are some calls to make transparent not only the process of negotiations between UN and governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar but also the involvement of Rohingya representatives in these discussions.

The analysis in this report does not claim to be fully representative as the community's opinions on these issues are varied and the data sample is limited. The data was collected by BRAC and Internews using the ETC connect app. BRAC data is used to contextualize the newer data and to show that the topic of returns was discussed as early as February 2018. For questions please get in touch with Viviane Lucia Fluck, Internews HIS humanitarian project lead (vfluck@internews.org).

Internews April 15th to July 17th, 2018

Total Feedback	Men	Women
1591	898	693

BRAC 27th February to 24th April, 2018

Total Feedback	Men	Women
7726	1755	5971

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

“They say that the agreement signed between Bangladesh and UNHCR was broken by the Government of Myanmar. The Government of Myanmar says that it will not take the Rohingya people back to Myanmar by giving them citizenship rights. Different countries say that the Government of Myanmar needs to accept us as Rohingya people and take us back. They [the government of Myanmar] cannot give any excuse. But the Moghs¹ [in Myanmar] are saying that ‘this is not the country of the Rohingya. They are Bengali and they were sent to Bangladesh’. The Moghs say they will not take us back.”
(Man, 40, Camp 2E)

‘We have heard that they will take us back to Burma. For that reason, UNHCR and the Government of Burma had reached an agreement to take us back. But China advised the Burmese Government for not taking us back. At first, we felt happy knowing that they were taking us back but now after knowing that they were advised by China not to take us back, we are very sad’
(Woman, 32, Camp 1W)

‘We heard that UNHCR and UNDP agreed upon an MOU with Myanmar. The MOU is not about repatriation. UNHCR said that the agreement had to be done with Myanmar because the Moghs cannot be trusted [to keep to their promises]. Myanmar allowed them [UNHCR and UNDP] and other NGOs to visit our pillaged houses. So, we agreed to that. The refugees said that Myanmar has been persecuting us for a long time, which you won’t know about. They added that it will be better if Rohingya representatives are also called while making agreements. In 1992, when refugees were being repatriated with the help of majhees, UNHCR did the repatriation and gave every person a paper with ‘Rohingya’ written on it. After some years, UNHCR sponsored Myanmar to provide us “white cards.” Before providing white cards, “Rohingya” was written on many of our documents. But now they are writing “Bengali” on the cards.’
(Man, 47, Camp 1W)

There are many questions about the MOU, they range from what the ‘MOU’ exactly means in their language to why the MOU was kept secret. Some members of the community assume that now that the MOU is signed, there will be a swift process to return to Myanmar. There are questions on what the MOU means for the community, with some questions being very concrete, for instance whether individuals will be returned their former land and if there will be compensation. There is also anxiety on whether the MOU will have the same results as

¹ Rohingya people use the word ‘Mogh’ to refer to both monks and non-Rohingya people in Rakhine state

negotiations in 1992. Several community members have requested to receive information from UNHCR and UNDP on the current state of affairs in Rakhine.

Smart card

'We have heard that they will provide a smart card, we don't think we will take it. It should say 'Rohingya' [on the card], if it says Bengali we will be very unhappy. If you want us to live in peace, you should not rush the process of distributing these smartcards. Because if we take the smart card we will suffer even more, that's why we will not take the smart card.' (Man, no age, camp 3)

'I heard that the cards that are distributed across the camps are the same cards that the Government of Burma wanted to give us. But the one they gave in Burma is called NVC card. But the one they are giving here, they say that it's not NVC card. Also, if it's not going to help us, then why should we take it? Although we are old refugees, they say that we also should take it. If the Government do not want to give us rice [if we don't take the card], then we will not get rice; but we will not take the card. [...]' (Man, no age, Camp 2E)

'We heard a news, Rohingya refugees are provided smart card, but it does not mention Rohingya. Because the name [Rohingya] is not mentioned, people here are really spending their days in agony. People have asked UNHCR questions regarding this that they should write Rohingya on the card. The smart cards that are being given now in camp are exactly the same as NVC card. That's why people here aren't happy.'
(Woman, no age, Kutupalong OO).

Our data shows that there are numerous questions and misconceptions in the Rohingya community about the smart card. One of these is whether the smart card is the same as the national verification card (NVC) given by the Myanmar government. Pictures of the card are being shared amongst the community and discussed. Some community members argue that the smart card is the same as the NVC since it looks very similar and also does not use the term 'Rohingya'. The fact that the card does not use 'Rohingya' is a major concern for the community as it is seen as evidence that the card is part of a political move by the Myanmar government to deny Rohingya citizen rights. Some of the community are not clear why the card is being given at all, which leads to speculation that this is a trick by the government of Myanmar to identify

members of ARSA or to force the Rohingya community to return to Myanmar. Several community members have said they will refuse to share any personal details connected to the card as they are afraid the data might at some point be shared with the government of Myanmar. These community members have stated that even if the card was conditional to receive relief they would refuse it.

Repatriation and returns

'We have heard that after Kurban [Eid-Ul-Azha], they will send us back to Burma. We will not go back. They killed our sons, grandchildren, great grandchildren, killed the pregnant woman, burned our houses, the Moghs have taken away our cows and goats. We will not go back. They need to recognise us as Rohingya, otherwise we will not go back. Whatever properties that belong to us that were destroyed by them, they need to return them. In Burma there are 35 different kinds of people, we should be able to live like them. The education and job opportunities that they have, we should have the same. We did not come here to stay. We want to be recognized as Rohingya and we want to get freedom so that we can live in our own country. The bottom line is, we should be recognized as Rohingya.'
(Woman, no age, Camp 3)

'I have been living in Bangladesh for 35 years. I have a Bangladeshi NID card. What shall I do if I am being sent to Myanmar?'
(Woman, 80, Kutupalong MS)

'When they will take us back to Burma, how will we survive there?'' What will we eat when they send us back to Burma?'
(Woman, 19, Nayapara RC)

'What will be the future of our children? We're worried about their future life. We know it's totally uncertain.'
(Man, 38, Kutupalong MS Extension)

Feedback on repatriation and returns includes a wide spectrum of concerns and questions that range from refusal to return to Myanmar to a clear wish to go back. Community members that want to return to Myanmar ask for support to rebuild their lives in Myanmar and legal rights. Concerns about returning to Myanmar relate to anxiety about further violence against the Rohingya community and fear to return receive no humanitarian assistance. There are also

concerns about not receiving legal rights when returning, a theme that relates to the smart card that some community members believe are connected to receiving legal status (see p. 4). There is also frustration about having been in the camps for almost a year and not knowing when a return to Myanmar may be possible.

Summary and Recommendations

The collected feedback gives a clear signal that there is a great need for continuous, coordinated and diverse communication about returns, repatriation, MOU and smart card. There is significant confusion about the process of the MOU and the verification and smart card procedures. While some community members are keen to return others are fearful of experiencing violence and being denied legal rights if they return to Myanmar. Overall, there is a clear sign that Rohingya refugees are keen to receive more information. The following are a brief set of recommendations that are based on community feedback that Internews received when playing the narrowcast episode on the MOU:

- Use a diverse set of channels to communicate about these issues (visual, audio, face-to-face)
- More detail and transparency are needed on how Rohingya voices are included in negotiations with the Myanmar government
- More continuous communication efforts, rather than one-off mass communication
- Arrange community meetings with UNHCR staff to explain MOU and smart card process
- All agencies should do information sessions with their field staff so that they can answer basic questions on these issues
- As one option for a 'ready-made communication tool' use Internews Bala-Bura narrowcast episode 3 for an interview in Rohingya/Chatgaya in which UNHCR is answering community questions on the MOU (episode 5 will include an interview on the smart card) <http://www.shongjog.org.bd/resources/i/?id=8ef4981c-a0c1-4dad-99b4-52673972b347>
- Use Rohingya language to communicate and brief Chatgaya speaking field staff on how to accurately translate terms such as 'MOU' (Translators without Borders are happy to help)