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Our Thoughts

Rohingya share their experiences and recommendations

May 2021

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Overview of Research

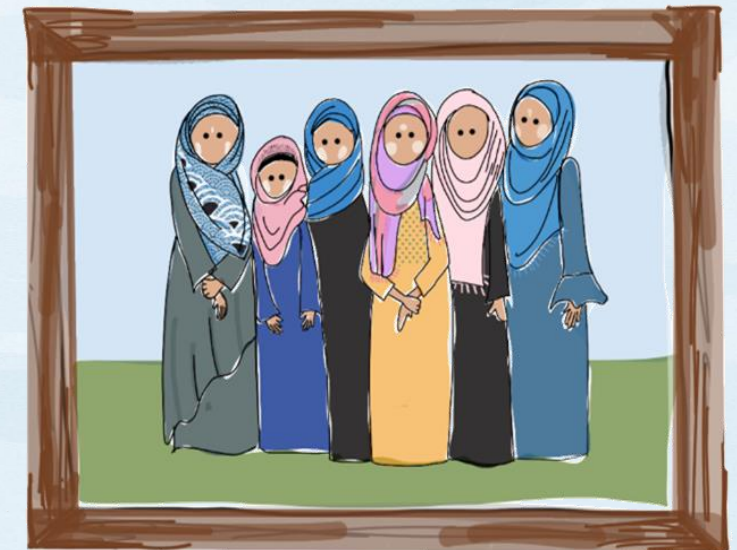
The **objective** of the research was to critically explore accountability and inclusiveness and to go beyond “whether Rohingya people are consulted” to understand their thoughts on the response, how they feel treated, what solutions they propose to resolve their biggest problems.

Research outputs:

- Full research report
- Summary report
- Audio product on research process
- A catalogue of detailed experiences of Rohingya refugees from different ages groups living in the camps with which more nuanced analysis could be done.



Male Rohingya Research Team



Female Rohingya Research Team

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



RESEARCH IDEA

Complement existing quantitative research with qualitative data giving voice to the preferences, suggestions & feedback of the Rohingya refugees about the response.

1 RESEARCH DESIGN

Collaboration between IOM CWC & ACAPS

- Purposive sample
- Focus group discussions inclusive of -
 - * Age
 - * Gender
 - * Disability
 - * HH Composition
 - * Location
- Key Informant Interviews

2 QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING

- * Open ended, semi-structured, interviews.
- * Piloted with Rohingya Researchers.
- * Multi-sector, multi-stakeholder review process.
- * Experts on research with persons with disabilities & children engaged.

4 TRANSLATION

All discussions :

- Recorded
- Transcribed (Rohingya Research Team)
- Verified (IOM CWC Team)
- Independent check

3 DATA COLLECTION

- Rohingya Research Team
 - * 6 Female researchers
 - * 11 Male researchers
- * 1 Female & 2 male Bangladeshi CWC researchers
- 17th August - 23rd October 2020

FGDs			KII
FEMALE	MALE	HIJRA	
67	126	1	18

5 DATA ANALYSIS

- Analysis framework designed around research questions
- **DEDUCTIVE** & **INDUCTIVE** methods

Coding planned before data is collected.

Tags created during data coding process.

- Analysis led by ACAPS.

6 DATA VALIDATION, REVIEW & FINDINGS PREPARING the REPORT

Findings shared with -

- * Rohingya Research Team
- * Review committee of humanitarians working in the Rohingya refugee response

What do you think they are saying about us?

7 DISSEMINATION

- The entire report is made available online.
- Presentations to humanitarian community.
- Shared with Rohingya community in an effort to close the feedback loop.
- Audio report of research process.

THE GOAL

Where possible, the response adjusts in line with Rohingya expressions, concerns, and recommendations, and through this wellbeing in the camps improves.

Community Engagement & Accountability



Gratitude

- Most participants (45% of male FGDs and 81% of female FGDs) expressed an overwhelming sense of gratitude for responders and the host community and acknowledge that they do not pay for any assistance received and that without assistance they would not be alive today.
- An uneven power dynamic where many of the Rohingya refugees struggled to provide negative feedback, suggest changes, or request more assistance.
- Female participants were much more likely to express high levels of gratefulness and to qualify any critical feedback.
- Though levels of unwavering gratitude are high, all participants highlighted that their most basic needs are not fully met.

'[A humanitarian organisation] provides us with gas, which is very helpful for us. If they did not provide gas, we might have many more fires in the camp. Now, we no longer need to go to the hills to collect firewood. In the past, we used firewood to cook and there was a risk that the shelter would catch fire and the whole camp would burn. In the past, we used to go to the hills to collect firewood and some people were kidnapped and murdered in the hills. But now, we don't have such fears and problems because we have gas.'

(Men aged 18–24, FGD, AH03)



"We like it so much. Even if they provide us with hay, we will like it because they are giving that for free and we don't need to buy it."

(Women aged 41–55, FGD, NL08)

Relationship with responders

- The Rohingya reported varying degrees of respectful treatment by humanitarian actors. They discussed primarily Bangladeshi and Rohingya humanitarians simply because they have less contact with foreigners.
- Participants were more likely to report negative experiences with non-Rohingya humanitarian staff than with Rohingya volunteers.

Participants report positive and negative interactions with Rohingya volunteers and humanitarian staff				
Experience	Respectful & positive behaviour		Disrespectful & negative behaviour	
Respondents	Male FGDs (n=123)	Female FGDs (n=64)	Male FGDs (n=123)	Female FGDs (n=64)
Rohingya volunteers	92%	98%	36%	30%
Humanitarian staff	80%	84%	61%	53%

What behaviour commonly led to people’s opinion on a negative or positive interaction:

- Cultural appropriate greetings and taking the time to do proper introductions.
- Language barriers.
- Discriminatory behaviour, shouting, and not proactively trying to solve problems
- Highly appreciated consultations and engagement at the shelter a quiet and safe space within block and sub-block level.

‘They call us Burmaya [people from Burma]. They say that we are dirty people, like animals. They say that it is good that Buddhists raped us in Myanmar. They make jokes about [rocket] launchers. They say that it is good that we were shot with launchers in Myanmar. We say that [rocket] launchers were used to burn our houses in Myanmar. Bangladeshis do not understand what [rockets] launchers actually are. I do not know what they think of [rocket] launchers. When we go to clinics, they make jokes in a dirty way that we were shot with [rocket] launchers. We feel so embarrassed.’
(Girls aged 13–17, FGD, NL12)

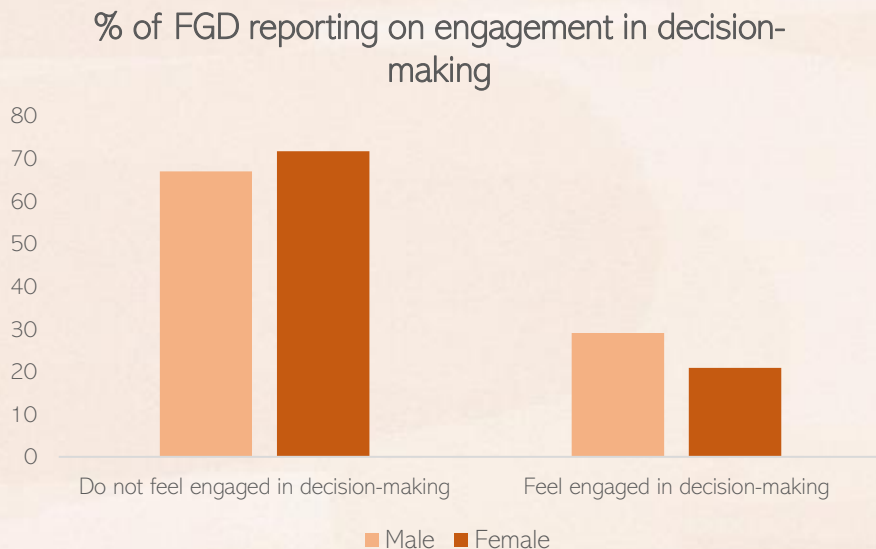
Inclusion in decision-making

'As an imam, I am invited to meetings to discuss with them [humanitarians]. They include us in discussions but not in decision-making.'

(Man with disabilities, KII, AR08)

'They don't include us in decision-making. If they build something, they don't even allow us to get close. After building something, they invite us to join and say that it was built for us.'

(Boys aged 13–17, FGD, AR07)



Issues raised with their inclusion in decision making

- Needs assessments were not interpreted as being included in decision-making.
- Participants who had given their opinions to responders commonly voiced frustration because they hadn't heard back or saw results.
- Consultations are ad hoc, irregular, and conducted by different people representing different agencies each time. There is no space to create meaningful relationships with decision makers.
- There is a perception that only the Mahjis, volunteers, literate people with specific roles (imams), and older men in the community being properly consulted.
- Lack of clarity around how the humanitarian system works and why there is a difference in programme delivery has been a source of frustration and confusion.

Preferences

Participants preferred meetings organised at the block level and within shelters and appreciated it when consultations were followed by tangible action and where they could see that their opinion was taken into consideration.

Feedback and complaint mechanisms

Where do people go to provide feedback and complaints?

- Feedback and complaints are mainly shared with CiC, Mahji, and Site Management offices.
- Most participants did not know of other avenues for filing complaints
- Women and girls were less accustomed to raising complaints or providing feedback and struggled to even discuss their experiences
- For most participants, the existing feedback mechanisms were reported to be unreliable or unclear.

What are people experiences providing feedback and complaints?

- Participants in approximately half of all FGDs (both female and male) reported negative experiences.
- There is a lack of clear communication around what the complaints process is.
- Lack of clarity on the types of problems that can be fixed and who is responsible for what has also caused frustration and contributed to distrust and a lack of reliance on those providing assistance.
- Some participants report no longer reporting issues at all and others note because of the inability to respond to and resolve their issues in the past they no longer trust humanitarians to help them at all.
- Only 33% of male FGDs and 19% of female FGDs could recall a positive experience. Those who were able to report positive experiences said they were listened to and, after some time, their complaints and feedback were followed up on and issues were resolved.

Where complaints and feedback are reported – main five answers

Female FGDs (n=54)		Male FGDs (n=119)	
Don't know where to complain or don't report complaints	73%	CiC	80%
Mahji	52%	Mahji	50%
CiC	43%	Site Management	42%
Specific humanitarian organisations	13%	Specific humanitarian organisations	29%
Site Management	6%	Don't know where to complain or don't report complaints	19%

*"The complaint was that rats had damaged our tarpaulins and they leaked water when it was raining. We used branches to cover up the roof, but it didn't work. So, we went to complain to the office, and they said that they would send volunteers to check our shelters and that we would get tarpaulins as well. When I came back, my house was already damp and no volunteers came. Then I was going to work one day, on the way, I found a piece of paper...It was my complaint paper."
(Boys aged 13–17, FGD, AH07)*

Cross cutting themes



The collection of distributed assistance

Across demographic groups, challenges with the collection of assistance and solutions to these issues were raised. These issues often result in people using negative coping mechanisms which either puts them at risk, leaves them with less assistance, or both

*"The NGOs have hired 100–200 labourers. If they want, they can hire 100–200 more. What we want is for NGOs to hire more labourers and when we go for distribution, they'll carry our rations to our shelters and give us his [the volunteer's] identification number. After he escorts the rations to our shelters, we'll check whether all the things are there. Then we'll give him back the identification number. If this process is implemented, then our rations will not get lost, and it will be better for us."
(Men aged 41–55, FGD, ZB08)*

Main issues when collecting assistance

- Being unable to carry assistance home because of its weight
- Distribution points being too far away across difficult terrain
- Long distribution lines
- Registration challenges and staff behaviour that hindered the collection of assistance.

Solutions

- More support to carry assistance home
- Increase the number of distribution points to reduce travel distance with heavy packages
- Call fewer blocks to collect their assistance at a time to reduce wait times, quarrels, and crowding. Other suggestions included using registration or card numbers to call people one by one to collect assistance or assigning people a number to symbolise their place in line which would allow people to wait in the shade until their number is called.
- More flexibility about who from the household can collect the assistance.
- Improve staff behaviour and monitor conduct at distribution sites.

Unsafe and undignified access – Women & Girls

Upholding dignity and honour, and safety is nearly impossible with crowded distribution points, non-gender-segregated lines and public facilities, and a lack of proper clothing.

Coping mechanisms mentioned to reduce social prejudice included:

- relying on others to access services on their behalf
- substantially reducing or not using essential facilities, services, or items
- sharing clothing and accessing services and facilities together
- only accessing facilities at specific times to avoid crowds
- selling assistance and borrowing money and items

'I worked in the constructions of roads. I even got an injury on my legs doing it. I worked as a daily labourer. We carried bricks and sand there. They provide cash for work to a person only once. I had never done such work in my life before. I worked with men. I used to earn money – but by working in people's homes as a maid. I have never worked with men. It was very embarrassing.'
(Single female-headed household, KII, DK09)

These put women and girl's wellbeing at risk and as a result, participants in both male and female FGDs requested:

- properly segregated facilities and distribution sites using partitions and different entry points
- IGAs for women that can be done in their homes
- distribution sites closer to home or home delivery
- increase in the amount of appropriate clothes distributed.

Unsafe and undignified access – Older persons and people with disabilities

Long queues, difficult terrain, and a lack of adapted facilities and assistive devices were commonly cited as major challenges for older people, people with mobility challenges and their caregivers that impact on their access to services and their dignity.



Feelings of guilt and shame were discussed by those who depend entirely on others to complete daily tasks. People with disabilities and older people said they often feel like a burden and are shy or reluctant to ask for support, which results in their needs not being met.

Essential changes suggest to ensure their access to services and assistance is safer and more dignified:

- Increased distribution of assistive devices and NFIs such as lighting, chairs, and clothing that support safe and dignified access.
- Construct essential facilities such as toilets inside or near shelters.
- Provide access to income to pay for transportation and other additional needs, such as medical care.

"Most importantly, we face problems with latrines because there is only one latrine available for seven to ten houses. Youth can control their urine and defecation, but we can't. We sometimes even pee and defecate in our clothes. As we are old, we can't hold it in for that long if we have to use the toilet... We also don't have a place to wash or dry our clothes properly."

(Men aged 56+, FGD, N001)

Increased self-reliance

- The Rohingya want to be self-sufficient. They do not want to continue to rely on assistance and want more control over their lives and the ability to provide for their families.
- The Rohingya want humanitarian support for long-term outcomes that can provide them with hope for a future beyond the refugee camps.
- Quality of aid and Rohingya inclusion in decision-making would improve if more Rohingya volunteers could work and take on greater responsibility within the humanitarian response.

Potential roles and responsibilities in the response			
Main 5 answers from male FGDs	Male FGDs (n=131)	Main 5 answers from female FGDs	Female FGDs (n=66)
Rohingya refugees could fill more positions in the camps if given the chance.	73%	Making handicrafts and items such as mats and netting and sewing clothes.	65%
Educated people could fill positions such as teachers, office staff, management, and running religious studies.	26%	Taking on work that can be completed inside the house.	30%
Those who are less educated could be guards and watchmen for the facilities in different areas across the camps.	26%	Rohingya refugees as a collective could fill more positions in the camps if given the chance.	26%
General comment that "IGAs that are not hard labour"	22%	It is inappropriate for women to work and/or they are unable to work because of childcare duties.	15%
Construction and cleaning services for latrines and showers.	19%	General comment that "IGAs that are not hard labour"	12%

Sector-Specific Findings



Food assistance

The most discussed sector.

QUANTITY OF FOOD PROVIDED: Participants belonging to larger households said that the quantity of some items was insufficient, especially rice, oil, and spices.

QUALITY OF ITEMS RECEIVED: Participants in just over half of all male FGDs and almost half of female FGDs reported problems with the quality of some food items.

PREFERENCE: Participants in more than half of both female and male FGDs explained that eating the same food every day and eating less preferred foods is very challenging.

TRANSPORTING THE PACKAGES: Being unable to transport ration packages home from the distribution points was a major issue.

STORAGE: Participants in 15% of male FGDs and 27% of female FGDs explained that receiving a month's worth of food rations at once resulted in storage issues because they do not have proper storage in their shelters to protect food from insects, rodents, and the weather

'I suffer a lot after the rations are released, I have nobody to carry the rations, so I have to hire a labourer and pay him 200 taka. I have to sell rice or oil to pay for this, decreasing the ration that has been provided to us for the month. To prevent this suffering, [humanitarian organisations] should provide us with labour to bring the packages to our shelter...Then we will be rid of all this suffering.'

(Men with disabilities, FGD, AN10)

'Two bags of rice are not enough for a family of eight. We have to borrow ten to 20 kilograms of rice from others. Whenever we settle our debt after receiving rations, we have to borrow again. And they provide a litre of oil per person per month. It is not enough because we have to cook chickpeas, pulses, and potatoes. We also have to make breakfast with this oil.'

(Women aged 18–24, FGD, DK12)

Main 5 problems raised relating to food assistance	Male FGD (n=124)	Female FGD (n=67)
Food package not lasting the month	65%	85%
Unhappy with the type and/or quantity of food items	58%	55%
Issues with the quality of food	53%	48%
Issues with accessing assistance (hard to carry, long queues, distribution point far away)	41%	54%
Paying for porters to carry assistance home	40%	39%

Trade food or pay for someone to help carry food back to the shelter.



Monthly food distribution

WHY MONTHLY FOOD RATIONS DON'T LAST

Once the food is unpacked, some of it is inedible because it is rotten or damaged.



Sell some food to repay debt from last month & buy preferred food not included in ration pack.



Shelters don't provide a safe place to store food and protect it from the elements.



When rations run out, the only option for some households is to borrow from slightly better off friends & neighbours - meaning they begin the next month in debt.



Food Sector feedback:

Problems by Rohingya	Proposed Solutions by Rohingya	Sector response
1. Quantity: Larger households esp. those with more adult and adolescents said that the quantity of some items was insufficient, especially rice, oil, and spices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase the quantity of staple items - Reassess the allocation of food quantity per HH size making HH with more adolescent and adult members more food. 	
2. Quality: Participants report that the commodity-based e-voucher meant that they had less power to ensure they were receiving good quality products because they were not allowed to inspect the packages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whenever possible use value-based e-voucher to allow choice - If commodity-based e-voucher is to be used again ensure that people can inspect their packages before receiving and change items that are of poor quality. - Increase accountability mechanisms for those working on the distribution centre 	
3. Preference: The commodity-based e-voucher meant that household could not choose the food that prefer. Participants also reported that it reduced the diversity of their diet.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whenever possible use value-based e-voucher to allow choice. 	
4. Transportation: package too heavy to carry home which resulted in many households selling rations to pay for a porter. Esp. those travelling longer distances.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase porter system to provide support to more HH. - Increase number of distributions per month to reduce the size of the package. - Decrease distance to dist. Points by increasing the number of locations. 	
5. Storage issues: some items such as potatoes in the food packages were not lasting the whole month because households could not protect them from the elements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many participants suggested that the frequency of distributions needs to increase, especially for perishable items. 	

Food Sector Feedback Cont.

Problems by Rohingya	Proposed Solutions by Rohingya	Sector response
6. Distribution sites are crowded, and lines are too long which resulted in people waiting long time in the sun for their rations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Call fewer blocks to collect rations.- Create a queuing system where people do not have to physically line up to receive their rations. E.g. assign people numbers.	
7. Staff behaviour: people report being shouted at and rude behaviour by staff at distribution sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Increase accountability of staff at distribution staff	
8. Porters: some EVI report porters running away with their rations or not transporting them to required location.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Increase accountability of porters	
9. Primary collectors: some people report being unable to collect their assistance or being yelled at for collecting assistance because of the inflexibility of the primary collector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Allow more than 1 person the household to be registered to collect assistance on behalf of their household.	

Ways forward

Rohingya recommendations on how to rebuild trust

- Regular and consistent engagement and consultations
- Follow through on promises and help fix problems that are reported.
- Speak respectfully and show empathy.
- Increase job and education opportunities
- Hold meetings per block and in shelters so women can attend.
- Communicate more frequently with community leaders who are not Mahjis.

'Humanitarians need to stop pretending that what we receive is enough for us to live our lives the way we want to live them. We understand that agencies don't have enough money to meet our needs and that what they give us may be the best they can do, but please don't try and tell us it should be enough when it isn't.'

Reflection by the Rohingya Field Researchers

