

GETTING INFORMATION TO ROHINGYA WOMEN IN THE CAMPS OF COX'S BAZAR

Door-to-door information sharing is key to meeting Rohingya women's information needs

Most Rohingya women do not leave the home to find information, and rely on male family members for information. Sharing information verbally door to door is the most effective and trusted means of both hearing from and getting information to Rohingya women.

Rohingya women have limited options for giving and receiving information

Ensuring that refugees have unhindered access to available information is central to ensuring that they also have access to the resources, services, and support they need. Despite making up more than half of the population of the camps, Rohingya women have much less access to information than Rohingya men. Compared with Rohingya men, Rohingya women have less telephone and internet access, fewer sources of information, and fewer opportunities to seek out information. This report outlines key findings from interviews with Rohingya men and women about their information needs and experiences.

Who we spoke to

In February, 2021, we conducted semi-structured telephone interviews with 24 Rohingya community members, twelve women and twelve men, ranging in age from 20 to 57 years, living in camps 1E, 1W, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9. Two of the woman interviewees reported being the head of their households, with the other ten reporting that their husbands are the head of their households. Seven of the men say they are the head of their households, three their fathers, one their elder brother, and one their mother. Men were included in the study as a point of comparison and, in light of the male-dominated the culture of the camps, to gather insight into male perspectives on women's information



access. All women participants were interviewed by Rohingya-speaking female researchers and men were interviewed by Rohingya-speaking male researchers.

Most women do not own their own phones and do not have internet access

In the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, mobile phones hold particular importance as they are the only means of staying in touch with friends and family in Myanmar and elsewhere. Mobile phones are also a key means of communicating and receiving information for both women and men, particularly for those with smartphones and internet access. However, poor and inconsistent mobile reception and, in particular poor and inconsistent internet connectivity, are a constant challenge for mobile users in the camps.

All the twelve men interviewed own telephones, with eight of them having internet access on their phones. Six of those use the internet every day, while the other two use the internet a few times a week. All eight men with internet access use social media; they all use WhatsApp and most use Facebook too. On the other hand, just four of the twelve women interviewed own their own telephones, while the remaining eight borrow phones from (mostly male) family members; five from their husbands and three from their children. Just two women report having access to the internet, with one using the internet one or twice a week and the other once or twice a month. Only one woman, who is the head of her household, reported using social media (WhatsApp). With most women not having internet access and sharing phones, the internet is not a viable source of direct information.

Women rarely venture outside the home to access information or provide feedback

to service providers

Due to a combination of cultural and security concerns, most women in the camps have limited mobility and generally stay inside or near their homes. Of the twelve women interviewed, eight said they do not go outside of their homes to get information, with the other four very occasionally attending community meetings or visiting NGO offices.

"I think men are getting more information than women because the Rohingya community is very conservative so women can't go out to get more information."

A lack of mobility also impacts women's opportunities to provide feedback or make complaints. Just two of the women interviewed report having provided feedback or making a complaint to a service provider. Some women said that they don't feel comfortable submitting feedback or making complaints specifically because they are women. Men, however, are much more likely to provide feedback and make complaints, with nine of the twelve men interviewed reporting having provided feedback or made complaints to service providers.

"Most of the Rohingya women cannot go outside because we are from conservative families."

Women spoke of conservative community values and security concerns as reasons for rarely venturing outside of their homes. Conversely, eleven of the twelve men say they go outside to get information from sources including NGO and Camp in Charge (CiC) offices, tea stalls, and community leaders. The twelfth prefers to rely on online sources.

Women rely on male family members for information

Ten of the twelve women interviewed report

relying on either their husbands or sons for information. Although most report that they feel they have access to the information they need, most also say that they must rely on their male family members to provide them with information. While in many instances this is an effective means of sharing information, it means that someone else is in charge of deciding what information is important for women to know.

“A woman can't go outside, everyone has to stay in their home. Most women only get information from their husbands and volunteers. So, women only get whatever information their husband or volunteers give them.”

This has the potential to impede the freedom of women to decide what information is important to them. This can be particularly problematic when it comes to gender-specific information, such as information regarding sexual and reproductive health or gender-based violence. In order to make informed decisions about their lives, women need to know what information and support is available to them and decide for themselves what to do with that information.

“Many husbands don't allow their wives to participate in any of the meetings and so most women are deprived from getting information.”

NGO volunteers are a key source of information for Rohingya women

Echoing Joint Multi-Sector Needs Assessment findings from late 2020¹, Rohingya-speaking volunteers were reported as a preferred source of information. Recognizing Rohingya women's limited freedom of movement, NGOs and CiCs have long mobilized teams of

volunteers to go door to door in the camps to share important information with them in their homes. Ten of the twelve women interviewed report NGO volunteers as a main source of information, with friends and family the second most commonly reported source. Some also mention CiC volunteers.

“Volunteers work for our betterment in the camp and many volunteers have come to our house to teach us how to stay clean and how to overcome coronavirus.”

While most men interviewed also cite NGOs as key sources of information, they reported much more varied information sources than women, particularly online sources including WhatsApp, Facebook, news sites, and YouTube channels.

NGOs are the most trusted source of information

For information to have the maximum positive impact, those receiving the information must deem it to be accurate and trustworthy. The most trusted source of information for both the women and men interviewed is NGOs. The information provided by NGOs is generally considered to be more trustworthy than other sources as the organizations are working in the camps directly with the community, with a perception that most NGOs are there to improve their lives.

“I believe NGO people because as they are working for us they will always provide us accurate information.”

Despite many men getting substantial information from online sources, they consider many of these online sources to be the least trustworthy source of information. Both men and women report receiving information from friends and neighbors, who are considered by some to be an unreliable source of

¹

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/bgd_2020_jmsna_preliminary_findings.pdf

information.

“I got some information about coronavirus from my neighbor and friends but I think most of the information was fake.”

Door to door and face to face: the best way to communicate trusted information to women

“NGO volunteers are our only source of information”

For the Rohingya women interviewed, NGO volunteers were not only the most common source of information, but also viewed as the most trustworthy. The women appreciate the services provided by these volunteers. The volunteers come to their homes and speak to them directly, providing them with information, answering their questions, and building relationships and trust. The role of volunteers in sharing information in times of crisis, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic and cyclone seasons, appears to have increased community trust. A Ground Truth Solutions report from 2020² found that 97% of Rohingya refugees feel respected by aid providers and 99% trust that aid providers have their best interests at heart. In addition to the trust built up through sharing important information, face-to-face, verbal interactions in Rohingya are central to the effectiveness of this approach. Literacy rates in the camps are low, particularly among women, and when coupled with low internet and phone access, as well as limited mobility, amplify the value which these volunteers have for women in the camps.

“When coronavirus first started, many volunteers came to our house and told us about protection measures. And also before

cyclones many volunteers come to our community to give us hints for safety. Because of this, we trust volunteers.”

“I trust NGOs because I have seen many volunteers working hard for us and giving us good advice.”

Both women and men suggest creating more opportunities for women receive information face-to-face

When asked for suggestions on how to improve women’s access to information, some women suggest organizing regular women-only information-sharing meetings near their homes, and increasing door-to-door information sharing. These ideas were broadly supported by male interviewees. Many of the men interviewed suggested that NGOs build or set up more women-only facilities where women can receive information. Men also suggest increasing door-to-door information-sharing efforts. Experience from the camps also indicates that the use of loudspeakers is an effective means of communicating information. When widespread, audio communication such as this breaks down the barriers of low literacy and limited mobility. In order to ensure that information also reaches individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, volunteers who can sign should be mobilized or recruited for door-to-door feedback gathering and information sharing.

Recommendations

The perspectives and experience shared by these interviewees give an insight into the ongoing challenges that Rohingya women face in accessing information about matters that impact their lives. TWB recommends that responding organizations:

1. Consider gender dynamics when developing

²

<https://groundtruthsolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/GTS-Bangladesh-report-R4.pdf>

information dissemination strategies.

2. Prioritize face-to-face oral communication in Rohingya and mobilize or recruit volunteers who can sign to reach community members who are deaf or hearing impaired

3. Improve accessibility of complaints and feedback mechanisms for women, in women-friendly spaces and through increased door-to-door visits



**TRANSLATORS
WITHOUT BORDERS**



Department
for International
Development



This publication is part of the Common Service for Community Engagement and Accountability. The work is funded by EU humanitarian aid (ECHO) and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The views expressed in this report should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the European Union, nor do the views expressed necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies. The UK government and the European Commission are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained in this report.

About Translators without Borders

TWB is a nonprofit organization offering language and translation support for humanitarian and development agencies and other nonprofit organizations on a global scale. TWB Bangladesh has supported the Rohingya refugee response since 2017, providing language and translation support to response partners and conducting research and training to meet the language and communication needs of the Rohingya and host communities.

Contact us

General enquiries: info@translatorswithoutborders.org

Sponsorship opportunities: info@translatorswithoutborders.org

Press/media enquiries: communications@translatorswithoutborders.org

Bangladesh team enquiries: bangladesh@translatorswithoutborders.org

Translators without Borders - US, Inc.

Suite 500, 30 Main Street

Danbury, CT 06810 USA

+1 (203) 794-6698 (United States)

Kenya office

6th Floor, Senteu Plaza, Galana / Lenana Road Junction

Nairobi Kenya

Postal address: P.O Box 22494 - 00505, Nairobi, Kenya

+254798985410

Ireland office

Marina House, Block V

East Point Business Park

Dublin 3, Ireland

Registered charity number: 474505

translatorswithoutborders.org