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WHAT MATTERS?

Humanitarian Feedback Bulletin
on Rohingya Response

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Concerns & rumours: Relocation, repatriation and ID cards

Source: Data collected from 3265 listener group discussions held by DRC, IOM and Bangladesh Betar Cox's Bazar from November 2018 to March 2019 in camp 1E, 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24 and 25, as well as BBC Media Action weekly focus group discussions in camp 24, block-B-10 in April 2019 with men and women aged 18-25 and 26-40.

While the majority of concerns raised by Rohingya people over the past few months have continued to be about WASH, access to relief items and issues connected to cooking, a growing minority of concerns are being raised in recent months related to relocation, repatriation and joint registration ID cards. Data shows that Rohingya people spontaneously mentioned concerns about relocation to Bhashanchar and repatriation to Myanmar in 10% of listener group discussions between November 2018 and March 2019 (n=330 groups, 5,400 participants of which 4,093 men and 1,307 women). Most of the groups raising the issue were from camp 19. People also talked about rumours related to relocation, repatriation and joint registration ID cards, with almost all of the rumours reported coming from camp 24.

Other concerns raised during the period included the perceived lack of child friendly and women friendly spaces, people's inability to get SIM cards and restrictions to Rohingya people leaving camps during election periods.

Rohingya people are getting information from different sources

In the camps, Rohingya people get information from different sources including CiC officers, distribution points, army personnel, NGOs, mahjis, television news channels like APN and R Vision, and Facebook pages like R Vision and Arakan Times. Substantial amounts of information also circulate on WhatsApp and Facebook, typically in the form of video blogs and voiced-over video footage, both from people in the camps and from people still living in Myanmar. Rohingya people tend to trust all of these sources without question, with many people believing that they are being made by educated Rohingya people living in different countries, who they are inclined to follow as leaders. People feel that the information they get from Rohingya people remaining in Myanmar is very trustworthy, since they consider these sources as first-hand witness accounts of events happening in Myanmar.



Concerns and rumours related to relocation

All focus group participants said that they had heard about the plans for Rohingya people to be relocated to Bhashanchar, an isolated island far from the mainland, where the Bangladesh government has made shelters for the Rohingya community. People believe that members of the Rohingya community will be sent to the island but are not sure who will be sent there.

People have heard a variety of information about relocation. Some people believe that only registered Rohingya people will be sent to the island, some said that only 100,000 Rohingya people will be sent to the island, some believe that those who are involved in illegal activities like trafficking, drug dealing, robbery and murder will be sent to Bhashanchar.

All of the participants said that they didn't want to go to Bhashanchar as they had heard that the island is far from the mainland and not safe for living, because it is a disaster-prone area and is flooded most of the time. Moreover, they believe that it is not yet habitable because it is a newly-emerged island.

“ We don't want to go there...It's an isolated land which is affected by flood and storms most of the time. It is not safe for us. We cannot live there.”

– Man, 30

Participants had heard that, even in times of emergency, they would not be able to leave the island. They are also concerned that they will not get any humanitarian support in Bhashanchar. Some participants said that if they were sent to Bhashanchar it would be difficult for them to return to their country. Many people have seen several permanent structures in videos on-line and think that such a move would delay repatriation, because they think the Bangladesh government would not have spent large amounts of money on a temporary living arrangement.

Concerns and rumours related to repatriation

Focus group participants said that they had not heard a lot about the repatriation process. Some participants mentioned the agreement between the Bangladesh and Myanmar governments about sending Rohingya people back to Myanmar. Some had heard that the Bangladesh government had sent a list of Rohingya people to the Myanmar government for repatriation, but that the Myanmar government had then identified around 200 Rohingya people as ARSA¹ members and did not want to take those people back.

Participants said that they would not go back to Myanmar until their demands were fulfilled. They think that, if they go to Myanmar, they will face torture, rape and killing by the army. They said that they wanted justice, to reclaim all the assets that they have lost and to acquire citizenship of Myanmar.

“ We will not go back until our demands are met. We have faced torture from them, they killed our family members, raped women, burned everything. We want justice.”

– Woman, 28

Some participants had heard from Rohingya people living in Myanmar that the Myanmar government had made a camp to house Rohingya people after repatriation. Participants said that they did not want to go there because staying in a camp in Myanmar would prevent them from being able to settle down in their own ancestral lands and villages. Female focus group participants said that rumours have spread that the Myanmar army is keeping bombs in the camp in Myanmar.

Participants felt that different international organisations and NGOs could play a role in helping to solve the problem, including the UN and the ICC (International Criminal Court). They thought that the Bangladesh government should seek help from the USA, which they feel is very powerful.

Concerns and rumours related to joint registration ID cards

All the focus group participants mentioned that they had heard about the new ID card and some of them had already received it. They said that the Bangladesh government has taken the initiative to distribute the card to Rohingya people with the help of UNHCR. They understood that the card contains information about the location they have come from and how long they have been in Bangladesh, along with basic demographic and identity information like their name, picture, age, camp and block number.

Most of the participants mentioned that they didn't like the idea of the card because it does not contain any information related to their ethnicity. People feel this will make it difficult for them to prove their ethnicity and origin to the Myanmar government when repatriation starts. Most people said that they could not read what is written on the card, but they have been asking the people distributing the cards what information they contain.

“ This card does not mention that we are Rohingya people from Myanmar, thus it will be impossible to prove ourselves as Burmese citizens when we return to Myanmar.”

– Man, 36

There was a perception among some of the participants that the ID cards are an initiative of the Bangladesh and Myanmar governments together and that, if they register for a card, all of their information will be shared with the government of Myanmar.

“ We saw in many videos made by educated Rohingya people that if we give our fingerprints to register in Bangladesh our information will be sent to Myanmar. Therefore, we didn't register when the Bangladesh government told us to.”

– Man, 26

Breastfeeding terms and taboos

The Rohingya community has a number of interesting cultural practices associated with breastfeeding. Because many mothers in the camp may be accessing ante- and post-natal care for the first time, it is important to understand the existing practices, taboos and language associated with breastfeeding, in order to help tailor programming to the community's needs.

Starting breastfeeding: Colostrum, sometimes known as first milk, is the highly nutritious breast milk produced right after giving birth. Rohingya speakers call it *ada dud*, which means 'sticky milk'. There is a perception in the Rohingya community that this milk is dirty and physically and spiritually damaging to the newborn. Therefore, many new mothers express and discard the colostrum until the mother's milk (*bukor dud*) comes in.

In place of colostrum, Rohingya mothers sometimes give honey, sugar solution or mustard oil to infants just after birth (called pre-lacteal feed). People believe that this helps clear the baby's throat and stomach. Many Rohingya women also believe that honey makes the breast milk sweet. Health experts discourage this practice, especially in the camp environment where these substitutes may carry bacteria (*fuk*) that could be harmful to a newborn.

Stopping breastfeeding: Women commonly breastfeed exclusively (*shudu bukor dud habon*) for several months, and supplement breastfeeding with solids until the child is two or three years old. When a baby starts eating solids, or supplemental feeding, the Rohingya community call this *tula habon*. It is not uncommon for a friend, family member, or neighbour to act as a wet nurse (*dudu ma*) who breastfeeds another woman's child. This allows the mother to rest if she is sick or has other work to do.

Re-lactation centres in the camps - places where mothers are assisted to re-start breastfeeding if they have had a break from it - are commonly referred to as *shanti hana* (peace room). Women see the service as a private, peaceful environment away from their daily chores and other distractions. The term *shanti hana* is also commonly used to describe other services that are women only, such as Women Friendly Spaces.

There is a stigma attached to stopping breastfeeding (*dud sarai falan*) early. Also, if a mother does stop breastfeeding her child for more than three days, she is unlikely to start again (*abar dud habon*). Many believe that if a mother begins to breastfeed again after a break, the milk will be unhealthy. This taboo is shared by many neighbouring cultures.

If a woman cannot breastfeed, many Rohingya people will assume that she is not healthy. Yet the community tend to discourage formula feeding (*tula dud*). If a woman cannot afford pre-packaged milk formula a common response is to substitute rice water or powdered milk. In the camp

environment where water may be contaminated (*hosara fani*), this could be very dangerous for babies.

Producing more milk: Many people in the Rohingya community understand the connection between eating healthy foods and an increase in milk supply. Locally sourced leaf fish, or *fathamas*, are a favourite for this. However, if a woman's breasts are engorged (*dud bara*), meaning she has too much milk in one or both breasts, she uses traditional remedies. For example, she might tie the root of a papaya tree seven times with string and place it on the painful breast. (A similar practice using cabbage leaves exists in many Western cultures.) Alternatively, she might use sweet yam creeper root in the same way or wear a mango tree leaf as an earring.



BBC Media Action 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.

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