

MAJHIS' ROLE IN SHARING INFORMATION IN THE CAMPS

INFORMATION REACH COULD EXPAND WITH SPECIFIC PROVISIONS TO OVERCOME LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS FOR MAJHIS AND THEIR AUDIENCES

For more than the past 3 decades *majhis* have played a central role as community leaders in the camps in Cox's Bazar. Hundreds of *majhis* work across all 34 camps, acting as a bridge between the Rohingya community and those providing support and services to refugees in the camps.

To better understand the role that *majhis* play in sharing information in the camps, TWB interviewed camp residents about their experiences and perspectives regarding receiving information from *majhis*. We also interviewed *majhis* about their experiences of sharing information with the community.

We found that in comparison with imams, *majhis* have the advantage of more direct and regular access to trusted information sources,

and more opportunities to share information with women. However, *majhis* could expand the reach of information with specific provision for the needs of harder-to-reach groups. *Mahjis* themselves could benefit from more language support and improved access to their own information sources.

This report outlines findings from the interviews and provides recommendations to the humanitarian community on supporting *majhis* to share information with the community.

Who we spoke to

In November 2021, TWB conducted semi-structured interviews with 55 members of the Rohingya community, 30 men and 25

women aged 18 to 60 years old living in camps 1E, 1W, 2E, 2W, 3, 4, 5, 9, 13, 18, 26, and Kutupalong and Nayapara registered camps. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 10 *majhis* aged working in camps 1E, 1W, 2W, 5, 26 and Nayapara registered camp.

NGOs and CiCs are key sources of information for *majhis*

Forty-five of the 55 community members interviewed report having received information directly from *majhis* in the previous 12 months, some also receive information from *majhis* through third parties, while 7 say they have not received information from *majhis*. People receive information from *majhis* face-to-face in Rohingya.

Majhis report sharing information with the community on topics including food distribution, shelter issues, camp security and crime prevention, administrative issues, changes in humanitarian services and site management, as well as health services, COVID-19 awareness and vaccination, hygiene and sanitation, child marriage awareness, and emergency and disaster preparedness and response,

The *majhis* themselves mostly receive information from NGOs and CiCs, as well as from camp police, the army, and Rohingya volunteers, mostly in meetings and over the phone. They share the information with the community during prayers at mosques, particularly on Fridays, and at block-level

meetings in the camps. They extend the reach of the information by phoning people who cannot attend meetings, and communicating through loudspeakers at mosques.

The community trust *majhis* and are comfortable approaching them for information

Forty-five of the 55 community members interviewed say they trust information shared by *majhis*. Many link this to the fact that *majhis* receive information from reliable sources, particularly NGOs and CiCs. As noted in recent TWB research¹, NGOs and CiCs are themselves trusted sources of information for community members.

"Majhis receive information from NGOs and CiCs and I think that that information is genuine and correct." - Rohingya man, 21 years old

"The information *majhis* provide is useful because we usually don't know where to go for medication or other services but our *majhis* always show us the path and get us the help we need in times of difficulty." - Rohingya woman, 29 years old

Most community members interviewed say they feel comfortable approaching *majhis* for information. Twenty-six of the community members interviewed, 19 men and 7 women, say they had directly approached a *majhi* to

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<https://translatorswithoutborders.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Rohingya-information-preferences-and-perspectives.pdf>

request information in the previous 12 months.

All the *majhis* interviewed say community members spontaneously approach them for information, support, and advice. They report between 10 and 30 community members approaching them each day. Sometimes these individuals ask them for information about topics including emergency referral pathways, disaster and emergency information, and humanitarian services.

Others ask them to convey their messages or requests to NGOs or the authorities. Requests to NGOs and UN agencies concern matters like food rations, shelter issues, gas cylinder distribution, and medical issues. Requests to the authorities concern matters like repatriation and disease prevention.

Some *majhis* make efforts to get information to hard-to-reach community members, but others don't see the need

Six of the 10 *majhis* interviewed felt there are community members who face challenges accessing information more than others, particularly people with disabilities or mobility issues and older people. The same number also said they face challenges getting information to these sections of the community.

Most *majhis* say they make efforts to get information to people with disabilities or mobility issues and older people by visiting their homes personally or sending someone to visit them. With the exception of 1 *majhi* who believes that information he shares will

naturally be shared around the community, all *majhis* say they explicitly tell people to share the information with other people and their family members.

"I visit their respective homes to share the information, though I have to walk long distances. If I am busy, then I send my colleagues to share that information. Still, it is difficult for me to cover the whole block because I feel like some people may not get information." - Majhi, 28 years old

Five *majhis* believe people with disabilities have the same access to information as other community members as they make sure they visit their homes to share information or ask family members to pass it on. Six *majhis* say older people have the same level of access to information as younger people as they go to the mosque and are not busy with work like younger people. Four *majhis* believe that challenges like hearing impairments and limited mobility outside the home negatively impact older people's access to information.

Women approach *majhis* for information but not all *majhis* recognize the challenges women face accessing information

Almost half of the women interviewed found it hard to approach a *majhi* for information, and younger women seem less likely to do so. But the interviews revealed only partial awareness of these challenges among the *majhis*.

Twelve of the 25 women interviewed say that

being a woman impacts their ability to receive information from *majhis*. This was largely because husbands and family members don't allow it, as the *majhis* are men outside the immediate family. This may affect younger women particularly: of the 8 *majhis* who say women ask them for information, 2 said only older women do so, and 1 only women who are the heads of their households.

Despite this, half of the *majhis* interviewed think that women have the same access to information as men, largely because male family members pass on the information they receive. The other half say women have less access to information, as they generally are only able to leave their homes to collect rations or buy medicines, while men can go anywhere. One *majhi* said if men receive 5 pieces of information, women will get 2. One *majhi* noted that husbands sometimes feel it is not important to share information with their wives.

Majhis meet regularly with imams, NGOs and CiCs, but some face challenges engaging

Majhis interviewed report meeting with imams regularly to share information with one another and coordinate on sharing information at mosques. They have a good relationship with imams and respect them. It is common for *majhis* to share information at mosques, and when they are not able to attend they ask imams to share on their behalf. They also meet with NGOs, CiCs and others to share or receive information at least 2-3 times a week, while

during emergencies they will often meet every day.

One *majhi* says that in meetings he just listens and doesn't directly ask NGOs or CiCs for information, because they are more powerful so he doesn't feel comfortable to do so. Another *majhi* says NGOs and CiCs listen to what he has to say but never act on it.

Majhis want more support and resources to get information people who face access challenges

Majhis say that in order to help them share more information with the community, they need assistance from NGOs and the authorities. To increase their own capacity they called for better access to reliable sources of information, a better internet connection and more WhatsApp groups for receiving information. To get the information out further, they called for information to come to them translated into Rohingya, more megaphones, increased availability of venues (especially in each block) for sharing information, more volunteers, bicycles to travel to visit homes, and stipends from NGOs or CiCs to assist with transportation costs.

To increase women's access to information, *majhis* suggest increased miking in all camp blocks, engaging and recruiting women community leaders, more female volunteers to conduct home visits, more female-only spaces for meetings to be held, encouraging men to share information with their wives, and opportunities for women to attend NGO and

CiC meetings.

For people with disabilities, *majhis* suggest increased miking activities, home visits and organized meetings. They also recommended hiring additional volunteers specifically tasked with sharing information with people with disabilities, and providing gender-segregated transport options with volunteers supporting. Finally, for older people, *majhis* also suggest increased miking and home visits, creating spaces or facilities in the camps which older people can attend for meetings, inviting older people to mosques, and recruiting volunteers to share information specifically with older people.

Some *majhis* face language challenges gathering information; all want more information to share

Six of the 10 *majhis* said they had faced difficulties in the previous 12 months accessing information to share with the community. Receiving information in Bangla was a key challenge, as they have limited or no Bangla language skills. They had also struggled with the reduction in face-to-face meetings due to the pandemic, and a shortage of information from NGOs and the media about repatriation.

"Sometimes I don't understand the information when it's shared in Bangla by CiC or NGO staff, then I need to seek help from others to help me explain it." - Majhi, 33 years old

All 10 *majhis* want to receive more information

to share with the community. They want more information about topics including repatriation, international news, social cohesion in the camps, food distribution, hygiene and sanitation, conflict resolution, disaster preparedness and response, shelter and WASH issues. They mainly want to receive information verbally or in video and audio formats in Rohingya from NGOs, CiCs and the government, and UN agencies.

Recommendations for humanitarians

Based on the perspectives and experiences of community members and *majhis* shared here, we recommend that humanitarians:

- Increase Rohingya translation and interpreting support to *majhis* to overcome language barriers and increase community access to information
- Educate *majhis* about the information challenges and needs of women, older people, and people with disabilities and mobility challenges
- Support and educate *majhis* and the community to increase women's access to information, including encouraging male family members to share information with women in their households, making spaces available for women to receive and share information, and recruiting more volunteers to conduct home visits
- Provide resources and support to *majhis* to enable them to get information to older people and people

- with disabilities and mobility challenges, including support for transportation and recruiting volunteers to conduct home visits specifically with these groups
- Improve *majhis'* access to information from NGOs and CiCs, including creating more opportunities for them to engage in and be heard in meetings
- Explore means of expanding *majhis'* ability to share information with the community, including providing more megaphones and more designated spaces for sharing information
- Increase *majhis'* access to reliable and readily available sources of information



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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 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.

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