

PARTICIPATION OF ROHINGYA ENUMERATORS IN DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES

FINDINGS OF A PILOT ASSESSMENT IN COX'S BAZAR, BANGLADESH

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Since August 2017, an estimated 734,000 Rohingya refugees fled from Myanmar into Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, increasing the total number of Rohingya refugees to over 900,000¹. In order to effectively and efficiently respond to the evolving needs of the Rohingya community, the humanitarian community and Bangladesh government require detailed and up-to-date information about their needs, vulnerabilities, and perspectives on their current situation. To date, the response has largely used Bangladeshi enumerators from the host community to collect qualitative and quantitative data from Rohingya refugees within the camps in order to address the information needs of the response.

Globally, it is common practice to involve affected populations in the implementation of data collection for humanitarian needs assessments. As part of this process, it is assumed that having data collectors who share experiences, language, behaviour and cultural reference points with research participants can help build trust and strengthen comprehension, resulting in more nuanced data that most accurately represents the needs and experiences of affected communities². However, the participation by Rohingya as enumerators in assessments in the Cox's Bazar context has been heavily limited by a number of key obstacles.

First, due to lack of formal education opportunities available in Myanmar, the self-reported literacy rates among refugees are low³—especially among women. Further, the Rohingya language itself has no commonly-agreed script and is not taught in Burmese schools⁴. This makes translation of and training on assessment tools especially challenging since there is no commonly accepted way of transliterating the Rohingya language, and Rohingya who are literate are not always familiar with the same script; some are more comfortable with Burmese script, while others prefer English or even Bangla⁵. Second, constraints around freedom of movement within the refugee camps mean that a research team of Rohingya enumerators would be assumed to face substantial obstacles in moving between camps to carry out their work⁶. Further to this, Rohingya refugees are not legally allowed to work or to leave the camps, meaning

they cannot become full-time staff members for research organisations or attend training or planning sessions conducted at offices in Cox's Bazar, Ukha, or Teknaf. For these reasons, REACH and other research organisations in Cox's Bazar have generally (although not exclusively) preferred to use Bangladeshi enumerators.

Despite these challenges, the importance of involving Rohingya refugees in data collection activities is threefold. Practically, the language gap between current Bangladeshi enumerators (communicating in Chittagonian) and Rohingya respondents may pose limitations to the quality and accuracy of data collected⁷. In addition, the reported experiences of REACH enumerator teams suggest that refugees can be hesitant to trust Bangladeshi enumerators—especially when discussing sensitive topics. Most importantly, there is increasing recognition of the need to expand efforts to improve accountability to affected populations and involve refugees in decision making that affects them. This, by extension, includes participation in the data collection processes that drive these decisions.

For these reasons, REACH in collaboration with Community Partners International (CPI) and Translators without Borders (TWB) conducted a pilot assessment with Rohingya enumerators to understand the feasibility of involving Rohingya enumerators in data collection activities, and how this may impact the quality of data collected moving forward.

Methodology

The overall objective of this assessment was to determine the feasibility of using Rohingya enumerators for large-scale, quantitative household data collection processes. Its specific objectives were as follows:

1. To understand the logistics and barriers of moving Rohingya enumerators through the camps to collect data.
2. To determine the best practices for translating tools for Rohingya staff and which media are most effective for enumerator comprehension.
3. To understand how data collected by Rohingya enumerators vary in quality and findings as compared to that collected by Bangladeshi enumerators.

The assessment was mixed-methods, using both a quantitative household survey and qualitative group discussions with enumerators to achieve the research objectives. Ten Rohingya enumerators were mobilized by Community Partners International (CPI), seven male and three female. As a control, a Bangladeshi team of eight enumerators completed the same number of surveys in the same camps in parallel. Each enumerator of this team had at least one year of experience with REACH at the time of data collection. A past assessment tool focused on water, sanitation, and hygiene topics was used as the basis for the quantitative data collection, shortened to take 15-20 minutes total for each survey, and six perception-based questions were added from a past Protection tool. The tool was translated into written Burmese and Rohingya (i.e. the Rohingya language using the Bangla alphabet), and each question

1. All figures from UNHCR. Bangladesh Refugee Emergency Population factsheet, Cox's Bazar, 15 March 2019.

2. ALNAP. 2003. "Participation by crisis-affected populations in humanitarian action: A handbook for practitioners" p. 44. <https://bit.ly/2YUijAq>

3. Sixty-six percent of refugees report that they cannot read or write in any language. See Translators without Borders. 2018. "The language lesson: What we've learned about communicating with Rohingya refugees". <https://bit.ly/2C9X7qw>

4. Translators without Borders. 2017. "Rohingya Zuban". <https://translatorswithoutborders.org/rohingya-zuban/>

5. Ibid

6. Given that the refugee population is divided into 34 camps, the alternative of having a single team per camp is not viable as a solution given the resource implications and quality control issues associated with running 34 trainings and managing 34 data collection teams simultaneously.

7. There is roughly a 70% overlap between the Chittagonian and Rohingya dialects. See Translators without Borders. 2017. "Rohingya Zuban". <https://translatorswithoutborders.org/rohingya-zuban/>

was accompanied with an audio recording in Rohingya, all of which were provided by Translators without Borders. For data collection, the tool was provided in 3 written versions (English, Burmese, Rohingya) and audio. The pilot was conducted in Camps 1W, 3, 4, 4 extension and 17.

Training

Prior to data collection, Rohingya enumerators underwent a two-day training facilitated by REACH to familiarise them with research ethics and methodologies, the code of conduct, and how to use the Kobo and Maps.Me applications generally used by REACH and other organisations during survey data collection. After this training, both the Bangladeshi and Rohingya teams participated in one day of questionnaire training and comprehension testing. Experienced Bangladeshi enumerators were paired with Rohingya enumerators for survey practice during training, so that Rohingya enumerators could observe standard protocols for securing informed consent and conducting interviews. Training was followed by a one-day pilot to identify and troubleshoot issues with tools and protocols.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted by two teams of five Rohingya enumerators and one team of eight Bangladeshi enumerators, overseen by three Bangladeshi team leaders who were in turn overseen by a Bangladeshi Field Coordinator. During data collection, GPS points and a map of each camp were then uploaded to enumerator phones using the Maps.Me app. Each day, enumerators were assigned a list of GPS points by their team leaders, and instructed to navigate to each point and select the nearest household for interview. Informed consent was sought, received, and documented at the start of each interview. During interviews, data was entered directly onto smartphones using the Kobo app. All completed interviews were uploaded to the REACH server at the end of each day. Throughout data collection, Team Leaders monitored enumerator interview practices using a quality checklist and provided feedback on an ad-hoc basis and during daily debriefings.

There were two group discussions with Rohingya enumerators during the two weeks of quantitative data collection, as well as one with Bangladeshi enumerators after the completion of data collection. The facilitated conversations sought to inform each of the pilot's three objectives, as well as provide space for enumerator reflections on the assessment experience as a whole.

Findings

Logistics and barriers to movement

Camp movements

Overall, the Rohingya enumerators faced little difficulty from authorities in moving across camp boundaries. During informal discussions, the enumerators identified no major issues with authorities in regards to

crossing camp boundaries, neither when commuting to work nor during work hours. Enumerators noted that being issued with temporary organisational ID cards for the duration of the assessment likely reduced the risk of issues with camp authorities.

Each Rohingya enumerator was given a package of documents that proved REACH's permissions (Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) and Camp in Charge (CiC)) to be working in the camps. It is the Field Coordinator's perspective that Rohingya enumerators were stopped more often to check IDs and permission compared to Bangladeshi enumerators, though both teams reported being stopped by authorities in focus group discussions.

When enumerators were stopped and questioned, it was either by Site Management Sector (SMS) volunteers while walking between households, or by Mahjis⁸ who were called to households by families or their neighbours. In most cases, enumerators explained who they were, answered questions about the project, showed permissions, and were permitted to carry on. Each enumerator was able to answer SMS or Majhi questions to their satisfaction and to show the necessary documentation, and no enumerator was detained or prevented from working during this pilot. Staff time was saved and enumerator harassment minimized by providing each enumerator with this

package of documents. These issues were also regularly encountered by Bangladeshi enumerators, suggesting the pattern is not unique to Rohingya enumerators.

Working Hours

Rohingya enumerator teams have the ability to take advantage of the full working day without restriction, as they do not need to travel the hour and a half by car from Cox's Bazar to and from camps, nor abide by the camp curfews set for Bangladeshi teams and NGO staff. This assessment, however, was unable to take advantage of this opportunity as there was apprehension about leaving equipment (phones, chargers) in the camps overnight, and also debate on who would be responsible to upload forms to the server each night if Team Leaders leave the camps before enumerators finished data collection. Leaving phones overnight in the camp may place a target on the person responsible for their safekeeping, or if each enumerator keeps their own, makes data uploading inconsistent and delays checking by data teams in Cox's Bazar. Also, internet access in the camps is unreliable and weak, so it is possible that data may not be uploaded in an efficient manner for data checking and cleaning.

In terms of coordination and working hours, one challenge identified by REACH's Bangladeshi Team Leaders was having less time with teams each morning. This made it difficult to correct issues flagged in the daily data checks and debriefs, and also gave them less time to answer enumerator questions/concerns. Each organization will have different priorities and resources for managing equipment in the field, but one possibility for future assessments is to further develop the Rohingya team structure by training Rohingya Team Leaders and Coordinators to oversee the significant communications and coordination responsibilities associated with large-scale data collection.

8. Individuals selected by the Government of Bangladesh to support camp management authorities and the police in maintaining order in the camps and act as focal points for camp management activities—in general one Mahji oversees an unofficial "block" of around one hundred households. These individuals were selected rapidly after the onset of the crisis without any specific formal process. See ACAPS. 2018. "Rohingya Crisis Governance and community participation", p. 2-3. <https://bit.ly/2zuW2qP>

Permissions

Permissions for the five camps where this pilot was held were no more difficult to obtain than permission for other, Bangladeshi enumerator-facilitated, assessments. To obtain a broader understanding of how a similar exercise might be received by CiCs, staff visited three additional camps to explain the project and understand potential challenges to gaining consent. Two CiCs were new to their camps, and expressed their desire to consult with RRRC and other staff before granting permission for the project, but did not express concern with the project nor methodology explicitly. One CiC would only sign permission for the pilot if the Rohingya enumerators were hired from that camp specifically. For future assessments, extra time and detail will need to be given to the permissions process, ensuring that CiCs understand the process and value of the methodology.

Enumerator-community relationships

During informal group discussions, five instances were reported where the enumerators either interviewed a household when they knew the respondent (relatives or neighbours from Myanmar) or ran into old colleagues from Myanmar while walking through the camps, suggesting that even though enumerators may not be from the camps they work in, there is still the potential for bias.

Mobile data collection

Rohingya enumerators identified that using the Map.Me app to navigate through the camps and find the sampled households was one of the more challenging components of this pilot. They encountered issues with orienting themselves in the camps using the maps and finding small paths between shelters, however most noted these challenges improving with practice. Similar challenges with Maps.Me are also common with new Bangladeshi enumerators outside of this assessment. Overall, monitoring of enumerator performance suggests that these issues had

only negligible impacts on overall efficiency. Enumerators had no issues with Kobo for data collection.

Tool and translations

Enumerator capacity

This assessment would not be possible without literate enumerators with a high learning capacity. Enumerators should be bi-lingual at minimum, meaning spoken Rohingya in addition to reading comprehension in Burmese, Bangla or English, in order to comprehend written questions and response options in Kobo while being able to interact with respondents verbally. These skilled enumerators are critical to the success of future assessments, yet the extent to which that labour force exists within the camps remains unknown. Should the response seek to expand initiatives with Rohingya enumerators, recruiting and retaining large numbers of qualified staff may become challenging.

Audio

Rohingya audio translations of the tool were built into the Kobo form, along with written versions of questions in English and Burmese. English transliterations of Rohingya were not provided with this tool. The original intention was for enumerators to listen to each question through headphones, and then repeat word-for-word to respondents. This was in order to keep the way in which questions were asked as consistent as possible and minimise inconsistencies – the audio was identified as the ‘correct’ form of the question. The written versions (English, Rohingya transliterated into Bangla script, or Burmese depending on enumerator preference/literacy) were provided to support with audio questioning and to facilitate recording answers. However, while the audio version was reportedly helpful for long or complicated questions, it was not used consistently by either team of enumerators over the course of the assessment.

During the group discussion at the end of the first week of data collection, eight of the ten enumerators reported using the audio for at least one question while conducting a survey during the morning of discussion. By the end of the second week, the number of enumerators using the audio had dropped to five. It was further clarified that, as enumerator confidence and familiarity in the tool grew over time, they relied less on audio recordings and leaned more on written or memorized versions of the tool. Specifically, the Rohingya enumerators reported self-translating the questions into Rohingya using one or both of the Burmese and English tool versions, and occasionally using the audio recordings to confirm their translations were correct. The audio was particularly useful when the meaning of the question was not immediately clear through the Burmese or English translations. One enumerator reported not using the audio at all because it became confusing to listen and speak at the same time.

The audio still proved useful during the informed consent statement, which was a paragraph of text. Using the recording here allowed enumerators to keep the correct phrasing and ensure they said everything required before obtaining informed consent. The audio was also key in supporting the delivery of more complex questions, where linguistic nuances made self-translation of the Burmese/English written tools into oral Rohingya especially challenging. For example, enumerators expressed that translating the word for “safety” from Burmese to Rohingya proved consistently difficult, as there is no straightforward, conceptually equivalent term in Rohingya. In this respect, the audio was crucial to asking the question correctly. The Bangladeshi team did not report using the audio, as they were already familiar with the question intention and

Logistics: Lessons learned and best practice

1. Ensure each enumerator has a copy of permissions documents for the assessment and is trained to explain the project to authorities.
2. Plan additional time to gain CiC permissions for projects involving Rohingya enumerators. There was no uniform acceptance of this project by CiCs, and some permissions would require days to weeks of follow up with additional coordinating bodies (e.g. RRRC).
3. There are pros and cons to working with Rohingya enumerators in terms of working hours and field team operations. Pros include that enumerator working hours are not truncated by travel from Cox’s Bazar nor NGO curfews in the camp, meaning more hours of the work day can be allocated to interviews. Cons include the limited time that enumerators have with Bangladeshi leadership staff to receive feedback on data quality and address enumerator concerns. This pilot suggests a different coordination structure for field staff may be needed to optimize team interaction and working hours.
4. Community relationships often span beyond the enumerator’s own camp, so include in training that enumerators may not interview households with whom they have an existing relationship.

Rohingya transliteration from past assessments. Overall, most Rohingya enumerators agreed that it was useful to have audio as a support when shifting between three tool versions (English, Burmese, Rohingya transliterated into Bangla script), and recommended including it with future tools.

Languages used for surveying

English was the primary language of the tool Rohingya enumerators were using to both ask questions and record answers, however it took time working across two or more languages to build enough confidence to work exclusively with the English version. While most agreed the Burmese translation was useful, especially to confirm they have understood the meaning of the question from the English text, some enumerators reported that the Burmese actually created more confusion than clarity. This was partially due to inconsistencies in meaning between English, Burmese, and Rohingya versions of the tool. However, it was also an issue due to the fact that fewer than half of the enumerators were fluent in Burmese. In general, once enumerators felt confident that they understood the questionnaire (supported by a mix of translations), most enumerators switched to using only the English version. While it is beneficial to have multiple languages with which enumerators can triangulate their comprehension of each question, having the questions in a third language also increased the likelihood of inconsistent question delivery across enumerators.

Language: Lessons learned and best practice

1. Screen potential enumerators for literacy and ensure that the team are all literate in the same script.
2. If using written script, pick one language (Burmese or English) to minimize inconsistencies.
3. Consider using audio-only tools to minimize tendency of people to self-translate and therefore risk inconsistency.
4. Consider using non-script response options (e.g. pictures for key questions, ticks/crosses for yes/no options). Part of this could involve minimized use of open questions with long lists of responses, and re-framing these as a series of individual yes/no questions.

Community reception and data quality

Community reception

Rohingya enumerators reported in group discussions that households often asked whether enumerators were Rohingya or Bangladeshi, and were much friendlier and open in their responses and behavior upon learning the enumerator was Rohingya. Rohingya enumerators further asserted that some respondents would not have participated if the enumerator identified themselves as Bangladeshi. It was observed by the Field Coordinator and Team Leaders that Rohingya enumerators would emphasize certain Rohingya phrases or cultural norms upon initial engagement with the household, so that respondents would understand that they were speaking with someone from their own community and be more inclined to participate. However, given that the Bangladeshi

enumerator team were able to obtain consent and collect data from all respondents, the assertion that some households only agree to speak with other Rohingyas as reported by Rohingya enumerators was not substantiated through this activity.

Regardless of whether enumerators are Rohingya or Bangladeshi, Rohingya households are reportedly skeptical of anyone collecting information about one’s household and perspectives on the response. Occasionally, households asked enumerators before giving consent if they were interviewing every household in the camp. Rohingya enumerators reported that this question was linked to a fear of being singled out and put on lists for repatriation or relocation to Bhasan Char⁹. This skepticism was reflected in what Rohingya enumerators reported as polished answers from respondents that made a camp- or block-level issue sound less severe than it is. Bangladeshi enumerators in this pilot and past REACH assessments have also reported this pattern of respondents under-reporting so to avoid complaining. These issues suggest that the background of enumerators is not in itself enough to overcome households’ scepticism of the motives of data collection activities as a whole.

The Rohingya and Bangladeshi teams reported similar rates of ‘non-eligible’ (Bangladeshi: 12 surveys/day average; Rohingya: 12.3/day average) and ‘non consent’ surveys (Bangladeshi: 0 surveys total; Rohingya: 4 surveys total). Reasons for households refusing consent or not completing the survey for either team were all in line with reasons given during past REACH assessments with Bangladeshi enumerators (e.g. needed to go to distribution, needed to go to clinic, needed to care for child, not interested in participating).

Chart 1: Differences between the rates of responses for perception of security in the camps as recorded by Rohingya and Bangladeshi enumerators¹⁰

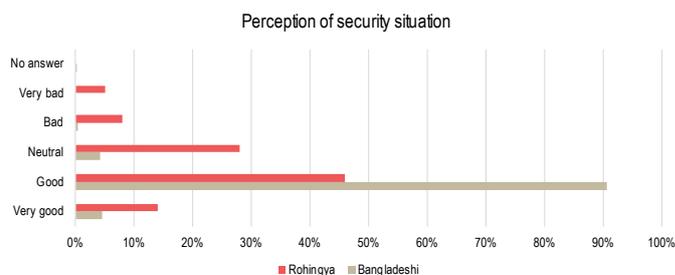
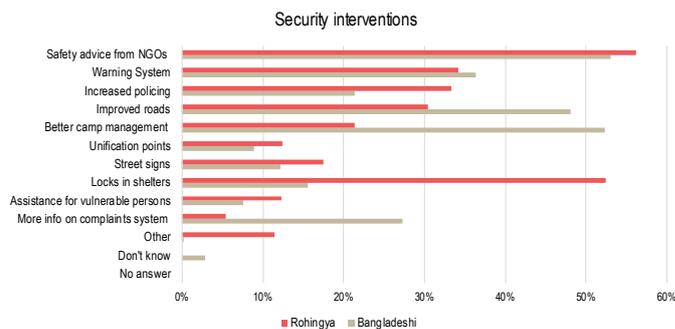


Chart 2: Differences between the rates of responses for security interventions needed to improve safety in the camps, as recorded by Rohingya and Bangladeshi enumerators¹¹



9. For further details on this process, see Strategic Executive Group. 2019. “Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis”, p. 12.

10. Percentages shown represent the proportion of households that reported each answer. Note that this data is collected for the purpose of comparing two enumerator teams only, and should not be interpreted as findings about the situation in assessed camps.

11. Ibid

Chart 3: Differences between the rates of responses for households' main water source as recorded by Rohingya and Bangladeshi enumerators¹²

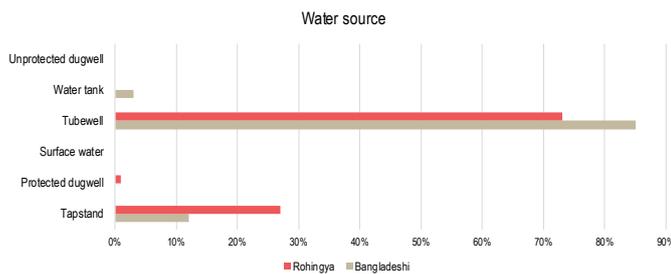
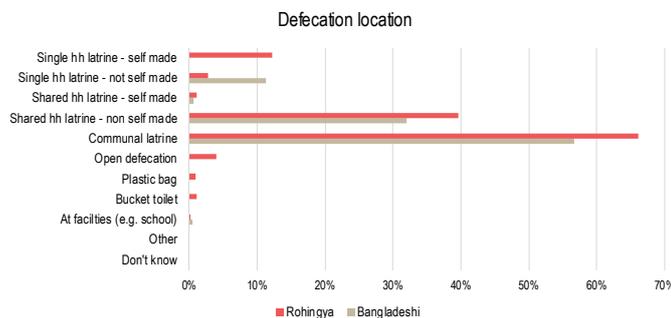


Chart 4: Differences between the rates of responses for households' primary location for defecation as recorded by Rohingya and Bangladeshi enumerators¹³



Consistency of responses and inputs

The findings from the analyzed data suggest that households provide different responses when asked sensitive or perception-based questions depending on the background of the enumerator. For example, a much higher proportion of households reported negative safety conditions to Rohingya enumerators as compared to Bangladeshi enumerators. Specifically, households reported very bad (5%) or bad (8%) safety conditions to Rohingya compared to 0% to Bangladeshi enumerators for both options (see Charts 1-2).

When asked their perspectives about potential improvements that would increase their family's sense of safety, the Rohingya community seemed to respond differently to Bangladeshi and Rohingya enumerators. Bangladeshi enumerators were more likely to record answers related to the humanitarian response and management of the camps, such as improved roads within the camps (Bangladeshi enumerators: 48%; Rohingya enumerators: 30%), better management of the camps (Bangladeshi enumerators: 52%; Rohingya enumerators: 21%), or more information on complaints systems (Bangladeshi enumerators: 27%; Rohingya enumerators: 5%). A possible explanation could be that the Rohingya community was more likely to consider Bangladeshi enumerators as representatives of the humanitarian response community and/or programmatic NGO workers, and were aligning their responses to express the types of needs they believed could be addressed by those enumerators. By comparison, findings for non-sensitive or objectively verifiable indicators were more consistent between

Table 1: Differences between the rates of responses for 'shelter' and 'inside the household' reported when asked about areas unsafe in the camps for men, women, boys and girls, as recorded by the Bangladeshi and Rohingya enumerators teams¹⁴

	"Shelter"		"Inside the Home"	
	Rohingya	Bangladeshi	Rohingya	Bangladeshi
Men (18+)	17%	1%	12%	0%
Women (18+)	40%	2%	24%	6%
Boys (below 18)	18%	1%	12%	0%
Girls (below 18)	33%	4%	16%	4%

Bangladeshi and Rohingya teams, for example in questions about the respondent's primary water source or main location for defecation (see Charts 3-4).

This pattern of differing response rates was observed prior to the second informal group discussion, so clarifying questions were prioritised for that meeting. It was found that, in some cases, Rohingya enumerators had a different understanding of response options than the Bangladeshi team. For example, the options listed for 'areas of the camp identified as unsafe' for men, women, boys and girls, Rohingya enumerators recorded responses 'inside the home' and 'shelter' at a higher rate than their Bangladeshi counterparts (see Table 1). When asked for examples of responses that would be considered shelter, Rohingya enumerators referred to 'every house in the camp' or 'travelling between shelters', while inside the home was understood more as 'danger around and within the respondent's structure' such as weak fences making them vulnerable, or landslides that may affect the home. These understandings varied from the Bangladeshi team's understandings reported during the informal discussion, where shelter was described to mean 'physical structure', which inside the home refers to 'what happens within the 4 walls of the home'. The Bangladeshi and Rohingya teams were trained on the tool at the same time, so it is unclear when the difference in understanding occurred.

While misunderstanding of certain options may explain some of the differences in findings, these significant cleavages between teams occur too often for option misunderstanding to be the only justification for differences. Households are likely reporting different options while enumerators are also likely recording responses differently. Team Leader monitoring forms suggest, and FGDs later confirmed, that Rohingya enumerators were providing examples to some questions that then created a leading question. This has been an issue with Bangladeshi enumerators in the past, but corrected with training over time. So, while not a hindrance to using Rohingya enumerators long-term, this may have skewed the findings between Bangladeshi and Rohingya teams in this assessment.

In several questions, respondents were asked to list up to three responses. The Rohingya team was able to record three answers for each of these questions more frequently than the Bangladeshi team, which tended to record only one or two answers more frequently. This could suggest that households were willing to talk more to Rohingya enumerators, that the

12. Percentages shown represent the proportion of households that reported each answer. Note that this data is collected for the purpose of comparing two enumerator teams only, and should not be interpreted as findings about the situation in assessed camps.

13 - 14. Ibid

more experienced Bangladeshi team are failing to adequately prompt respondents to give three answers, or that Rohingya teams were assisting respondents by providing examples believing they had to record three answers to move to the next question.

Another contrast in inputs between the two teams is the use of “other” answers, an option for nine of the questions. The Rohingya team selected the ‘other’ option 78 times, often listing multiple answers at a time, compared to only once for the Bangladeshi team. In roughly one third of ‘other’ answers, the responses were valid ‘other’ answers not listed as options in the tool (e.g. ‘roads’ are unsafe areas for men/women//boys/girls; ‘light’ as security interventions needed in the camps). Another third of the answers were irrelevant to the questions (e.g. ‘dustbin’ for disposal of waste; ‘child trafficking’ as unsafe areas for men/women//boys/girls). Lastly, one third of answers elaborate on community needs beyond the scope of the question (e.g. for the question about security interventions needed in the camps, Rohingya enumerators recorded ‘sanitation services for drains’, ‘repairs to mosques’, ‘a hospital’, ‘curriculum for higher grades at schools’, and various NFIs). There may be various reasons for this reporting. It is possible in training enumerators were not clear what qualifies as an appropriate answer to this question, and thus recorded all responses. It is also possible that Rohingya enumerators over-reported issues or requests from respondents in an effort to draw NGO attention to their fellow community needs. This is also suggested by the length and amount of detail given in many ‘other’ responses recorded by some Rohingya enumerators (15+ words).

Interview speed

The speed at which the 10-enumerator Rohingya team worked was equivalent to that of the 8-enumerator Bangladeshi team. The Bangladeshi team took more time with each interview than the Rohingya team, with the average Bangladeshi enumerator interview lasting 20.89 minutes, whereas the average Rohingya enumerator interview was 16.21 minutes. The Rohingya team had significantly more surveys fall below the 15 minutes minimum time threshold for this assessment (54 surveys vs the Bangladeshi team’s 12). Discounting surveys completed too quickly, Bangladeshi enumerators completed on average 2-3 more valid interviews per day than the Rohingya enumerators. Often, survey pacing comes with practice, so this finding does not necessarily suggest that efficiency of Rohingya enumerators will consistently be lower than that of Bangladeshi teams.

Data quality: Lessons learned and best practice

1. Data collection actors should carefully consider that the choice of who is engaging with the affected population may have a substantial impact on the findings, particularly for perception-based and sensitive topics. To the extent possible, actors should weigh carefully the validity of including these questions in household surveys and how the results are interpreted and used for decision making.
2. For all enumerators, training should be clear on the use of leading questions and/or include commonly agreed on prompts so that any bias is consistent.

Ways Forward

The results of this pilot indicate that involving Rohingya enumerators in household data collection exercises is a viable option for organisations

interested in pursuing it. In addition to the normative importance of involving affected communities in decisions that affect their lives, Rohingya enumerators may be better placed to ask questions on people’s perceptions or on sensitive topics, due to the higher level of trust they enjoy with Rohingya respondents. While logistical barriers to working with Rohingya teams exist, they can be overcome with adequate planning and anticipation. Starting with smaller projects is advisable to test and refine a coordination structure, ideally with Rohingya team leads, before expanding data collection to large-scale assessments.

However, any such efforts will also need to take careful account of the unusually steep challenges related to language and literacy, which are related to the long history of systematic persecution and marginalization of Rohingya communities in Myanmar. This includes making clear and consistent decisions about the use of language in research tools—including decisions over the mix of audio/written media to be used, and which written languages (if any) to include. Any such decisions should also be used as the basis for selection criteria for enumerators, taking into account the differing degrees of literacy in different languages/scripts that exist within the refugee community. Further, as in all assessments, it is important to provide enumerators that are new to conducting rigorous quantitative research with extensive training on research approaches, objectives and ethical guidelines, and consistent monitoring once in the field. Additional research and innovation is also needed to develop better approaches to supporting data collection by lower-literacy enumerators, in terms of both questionnaire design and audio/visual cues.

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About REACH Initiative

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).