Lessons Learned

Needs Assessments in Cox's Bazar

7 KEY PRIORITIES FOR NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

1. Assessment coordination
Improve data quality, use resources better, and reduce assessment fatigue.

2. Assessment design
All questions should fulfil an information need, fill an information gap, or be used to inform analysis or decision-making.

3. Understanding needs of vulnerable groups
Define key vulnerable groups, including by gender, age, disability, and other relevant factors of diversity such as date of arrival. Design data collection and analysis so that specific needs of different groups can be determined.

4. Simplified questionnaires
Use easy-to-understand vocabulary and less humanitarian jargon to ensure that questions are understood as intended.

5. Improved translation and communication
Ensure consistency, reduce errors, and improve quality through expert review of questionnaires, emphasis on translation, and enhance training to data collectors. Allocate sufficient time for appropriate translation.

6. Training
Value the role of enumerators and train them to be humanitarian field researchers.

7. Cross-sectoral and joint analysis
Strengthen shared situational understanding and reduce need for new assessment.

After finishing the assessment process: close the assessment loop and communicate results back to communities.

Introduction

Cox's Bazar district hosts over 900,000 Rohingya refugees, most of whom arrived after the military-led campaign of violence against Rohingya in Rakhine state, Myanmar, in August 2017. The majority of refugees reside in Ukhia and Teknaf upazilas, alongside an estimated 548,000 Bangladeshis (ACAPS 01/2018).

> This report reflects on lessons that can be learned from needs assessments in the context of the Rohingya crisis. It is based on reviews of assessments in Cox's Bazar since 2017 and conversations with key assessment stakeholders in the Rohingya response, grounded in global experience and assessment practice. It suggests a series of key recommendations and considerations covering all stages of the assessment process, with the goal to improve future assessments and data quality. It covers assessments targeting Rohingya refugees as well as the Bangladeshi host community.

The report begins by emphasizing the need for coordination and analysis and discusses implications and limitations of different data collection methods. In the next section, it highlights linguistic challenges, showing how they can impact data quality and assessment results. This is followed by a discussion of age, gender, and diversity considerations in the context of needs assessments and operational constraints. The next section discusses enumerator selection and training, followed by suggestions on communicating assessment results back to affected communities. After a series of key literature recommendations, the report closes by showcasing, in a Spotlight, the differences between two major datasets.

The ISCG's Assessment Registry counts 115 finalized, ongoing, and planned assessments as of March 2019 (ISCG 2019). 57% of assessments cover Rohingya refugees, 36% assess both refugees and host communities, and 8% focus exclusively on host communities. Protection and Health are the sectors most frequently assessed.

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Methodology: Planning, coordination, and analysis

Assessment and questionnaire design

As a first step in any assessment process, actors need to define the objective of the assessment, broad research questions, and the scope of the assessment. Stakeholders also need to be clear about the strategic or operational decisions that will be informed by the assessment. This will guide all subsequent stages of the assessment. (ACAPS 2014)

Most assessments in humanitarian contexts gather far more data than is analysed and reported on. Reflecting on assessment design, including the choice of data collection methods, allows for higher-quality, more targeted data collection that uses resources in the most efficient way.

The length of questionnaires and group discussions needs to be taken into consideration during the planning stages of the assessment. Both enumerators and interviewees need to be able to stay focused for the entire duration of the interview. The likelihood of inaccuracies and drops in the response rate increases with the length of the interview. Furthermore, depending on the season and the location where the interview is conducted, attention spans may be reduced due to heat and lack of space, particularly inside the Rohingya camps (UNHCR 11/2017). Other opportunity costs include the time and resources spent on data collection. Every unnecessary question included in the questionnaire will cost enumerators' and respondents' time, which, multiplied across the whole assessment, will have implications for the financial resources spent on the assessment.

Information from other crises has shown that, generally, household or key informant interviews should not exceed 50 minutes, while focus or community group discussions should take no longer than 90 minutes (ACAPS 07/2016).

> Questions included in the questionnaire should always refer back to the research question and the scope of the assessment. Questions that do not fulfil an information need, fill an information gap, or will not be used to inform analysis or decision-making, should not be included in the questionnaire.

Particularly for assessments that are conducted regularly, it is advisable to seek feedback from enumerators. They can provide insights on language, but also on the content of questionnaires. For example, they will be able to give feedback on which questions are frequently misunderstood by interviewees or which questions always require a more detailed explanation. They can also know what conversations happen between the structured questions, and can advise on themes which should be considered in further assessments because of their importance to affected people.

Questionnaire design should also be informed by the specific context of the Rohingya crisis and standardised questions should be reflected upon before inclusion in the questionnaire. This extends to host community assessments.

> Questions that were developed for assessments of refugees may not be appropriate to ask in host community surveys.

Key recommendations

- Define **research questions, scope, information gaps, and information needs** at the outset of the assessment process.
- **Limit** questionnaire and interview length.
- **Focus only on information needed** for the assessment's purpose and which you are confident can be reliably and accurately obtained using the assessment approach.
- **Engage with experienced enumerators** after each data collection exercise to understand which questions do not work well, for example because they are often misunderstood.

Assessment coordination

In the Rohingya crisis, a large number of assessments has led to a broad variety of assessment findings. While some complement each other, due to different thematic foci and/or methodologies used, others overlap significantly, often with diverging results which are difficult to explain. Conducting assessments in a coordinated manner should contribute to a unified understanding of the situation, greater coherence of data, and clearer outcomes for humanitarian decision-making. If stakeholders interested in the same themes are able to pool resources for assessment, the outcome should be better quality assessments with results that the broader humanitarian community can buy into.

A lack of coordination of assessments implies that time and resources are duplicated (ECB/ACAPS 10/2012). This concerns assessments both at a response and an operational level. For example, the existence of multi-sector inter-agency needs assessments at camp level may eliminate the need for implementing partners to run assessments such as Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) surveys if the required information is already sufficiently captured. By conducting a large number of assessments, humanitarian actors risk creating "assessment fatigue" among Rohingya refugees and in the host community, particularly if people see no actions that improve their situation following the assessment (SNAP 09/2013).

Assessment coordination should focus on understanding how the different datasets can be harmonised. This will improve analysis and inform better decision making. Harmonisation does not mean having a single methodology for assessments, but rather an understanding of how different methodologies can complement each other.

Key recommendations

- **Coordinate assessments** where possible in order to improve data coherence, quality, and analysis, and provide clear messages for decision-makers.
- Before beginning an assessment, **communicate with other assessment actors** in the humanitarian community in Cox's Bazar to learn if similar assessments are already being conducted and if information needs would be covered by ongoing assessment activities.
- Organizations can reach out to the **Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG)** or to relevant sectors to coordinate assessments. The Assessment Registry provides an overview of planned, ongoing, and finalized assessments. The Indicator Registry lists all indicators covered in recent assessments.
- **Harmonize indicators** across assessments to facilitate analysis.

Data analysis

Setting up an analysis plan at the beginning of an assessment process helps guide the data collection in order to ensure that the information gathered during the assessment will be useful for decision-making and fill information gaps.

An analysis plan should include the overall objective of the assessment and key research questions that define the scope of the assessment and information needs. Once these research questions are defined, one can evaluate which data collection methods and information sources are suitable to answer them. Secondary data review (SDR) should be considered as a data collection method on its own, as it may answer or help refine some of the research questions.

A lot of data is collected in the Rohingya crisis, yet analysis of collected data – particularly cross-sectoral and joint analysis – is limited. A review of assessments in the Rohingya response revealed that assessment data is often only superficially analysed and does not go beyond descriptive analysis (ACAPS 06/2017). Thorough analysis of assessment data should be part of any assessment process, in order to not only describe the current state, but also suggest why the situation is the way it is, explaining the context as well as trends and, where possible, the implications for the weeks and months to come. Furthermore, building severity indices that include assessment data can help identify pockets of need and populations most affected by adverse conditions. Beyond improving the understanding of the situation and needs of the affected population, comprehensive data analysis will also inform better humanitarian decision-making and programming.

This ties into previous recommendations on reviewing the information already available before beginning assessments. Properly analysing and triangulating existing information may:

- reduce the need to conduct new assessments,
- allow for assessments to shift focus to little-explored issues that have not been covered before, or
- examine how the situation has changed over time.

It may result in a "light touch" assessment being sufficient to see if problems are the same or different before embarking on resource-heavy assessments.

To ensure that assessment data can be analysed and translated into strategic and operational decisions, all assessment data should be made publicly available as soon as possible, in line with protection and privacy standards. Sharing assessment data is one of the assessment-related commitments agreed upon in the Grand Bargain. In Cox's Bazar, assessment data can furthermore be shared and discussed in fora such as the Information Management and Assessment Working Group or sector meetings to encourage response-wide awareness of assessment results.

A joint analysis process is known to bring about better-quality analysis. Bringing together different people who potentially represent different organizations, different sectors, and different perspectives to extract meaning from assessment findings is complex and needs to be well-structured and well-facilitated. It enables a situation to be seen from different angles and helps generate a more comprehensive overview of the situation and a jointly owned understanding. Joint analysis processes can be used for one assessment, such as a Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, or to bring several different assessments together to compare and triangulate.

Key recommendations

- Consider **analysis** an **integral part** of any assessment process. Plan analysis from the outset. Data collection and questionnaires should be **designed based on an analysis plan (not the other way around)**.
- **Share data** across the response to contribute to joint analysis and a common understanding of the situation and needs.
- **Plan early** for analysis and allocate enough time and resources for analysis exercises such as joint analysis workshops, multi-sectoral analysis, and severity indices.

Methodology: Data collection methods

Household interviews

For the Rohingya refugee population in the camps, sample sizes can be defined using the RRRC/UNHCR Family Counting data, as it is disaggregated by factors such as gender, age, and time of arrival.

Calculating a suitable survey sample size for the host community is problematic. The last census was conducted in 2011, which means that the population data is considerably outdated. Hence, sample sizes calculated on this basis may not be reflective of the actual demographics of host communities. Moreover, actors have different definitions of "host community", which may include Bangladeshis living within camp boundaries, within a certain radius of the camps, or the whole population at union or upazila level. Host community sample frames should be defined and agreed upon by response actors for host community assessment results to be comparable.

Every sampling methodology has its limitations. Contextualising the sampling methodologies is crucial. Understanding stratum, including social characteristics of Rohingya refugees, will be key to providing better precision in survey results and avoiding bias. As a new governance system is planned to be implemented in the camps, this needs to be considered while determining sampling in future assessments. Stratification of household surveys should be reflective of programming. For example, household surveys should only be representative at block level if programming is rolled out at block level as well.

> Alarger sample will not necessarily lead to better results.

Key recommendations

- Prior to conducting assessments, use key informant interviews and focus group discussions to **understand the strata** of Rohingya refugees that need to be considered for sampling.
- The **level of representativeness** should be informed by the level targeted by programming.
- For further information on sampling, consult UNICEF's Rapid Assessment Sampling in Emergency Situations.

Key informant interviews

Majhees are commonly used as key informants due to their position as leaders at the block level, their involvement in service delivery, and their assumed overview knowledge about their community's needs (NPM 09/12/2018). However, there are some key limitations and considerations that should be taken into account when interviewing majhees in a key informant survey. Firstly, as majhees are involved in the delivery of services and assistance, there may be an incentive to manipulate information, overstate or understate needs, because of what this says about the way they perform in their role or because of a perceived link between interviews and assistance (NPM 09/12/2018). Secondly, majhees are currently exclusively men and thus are not able to adequately speak to the specific needs and experiences of women or marginalized groups. As of the time of writing, majhees are appointed, not elected, which has implications for accountability. Importantly, majhees are in positions of power within their communities, which should be taken into consideration particularly when asking sensitive or protection-related questions (NPM 09/12/2018). As the governance structure of the Rohingya camps changes, power structures and possible implications for data collection need to be continually taken into account.

Key recommendations

- All data is biased. Be conscious about **limitations of key informant interviews** with majhees and other key people in the camp governance structures. While they may be uniquely informed about the general needs in their respective area of responsibility, they might not be aware of or sufficiently informed about issues faced by certain population groups, such as women or minorities, and may have reasons for distorting information.
- Design key informant questionnaires around what **expertise** the key informant can reasonably provide; do not waste time asking questions that they will likely give unreliable answers to.
- Possible **biases and power structures** need to be taken into consideration during key informant surveys.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) should ideally allow space for all participants to speak openly and safely. It has been noted that younger participants tend to be more quiet during group discussions out of respect for elders (UNHCR 11/2017; Oxfam 08/2018). In general, group discussions should be designed to include people of the same age group in order to ensure that all participants feel comfortable to speak. In mixed age groups, younger participants should be particularly encouraged to speak using group facilitation techniques (UNHCR 11/2017).

Another observation relates to the recruitment of participants for FGDs. One study noted that some FGDs took place in women-friendly spaces and participants were girls who already frequented these spaces instead of being chosen randomly (Plan International 06/2018). While this is convenient, it potentially leads to certain biases in the discussion.

Group discussions in public spaces are likely to attract attention and should be conducted in more private settings. This also helps to ensure that participants are able to speak freely.

The adequate size of the focus group can vary depending on the topic, although generally they should not exceed 8-10 participants. It can be difficult to conduct constructive and focused discussions in very large groups.

Focus group discussions lend themselves particularly to topics that are difficult to adequately explore in regular questionnaires, such as gender- or protection-related issues. Currently, in the context of the Rohingya crisis, FGDs are usually conducted during or after a quantitative survey, often to further explore such topics, or to probe key results or surprising findings of the quantitative survey. Sometimes, focus groups can be arranged around particular issues (for example WASH, child care) and be made up of people who participate in or have knowledge of these focus areas.

FGDs can also be used at the very beginning of an assessment process. Going into initial FGDs with a “blank page”, without a standard set of questions, and without a set of predefined optional choice answers, can help bringing issues to light that may not be well-covered in standard humanitarian frameworks, or that have not been given sufficient attention in previous surveys. Ideally, a FGD should be the starting point in the design of a questionnaire; it can ensure the questions are asked in a way that the group understands and that the options provided to assist with data entry are the right ones (not limiting the need to also include “other, specify” as an alternative). Such processes need to be planned well and grounded in information needs to avoid unnecessarily creating assessment fatigues among FGD participants.

Focus group discussions should be distinguished from community group discussions (CGDs). FGDs are a specific type of group discussion with a small and consistent group size and discussion participants who are purposefully brought together based on shared characteristics such as gender, to discuss a pre-defined set of topics and questions. CGDs are more flexible and loose and can be used to explore a wider variety of topics with a greater diversity of participants (ACAPS 2016). In the Rohingya crisis, CGDs have, for example, been conducted spontaneously by enumerators, when interviews with key informants in the camps attracted attention, and to give voice to community members (NPM Round 11). Using CGDs in a planned, structured way can be a useful tool for capturing the voices of affected people and getting consensus on what the main issues of concern are. They are particularly valuable when conditions (for example space, time or social dynamics) do not allow for maintaining the rigour of a FGD. If a CGD, rather than a FGD, is used, this should always be clearly explained in the methodology section of an assessment report.

FGDs and CGDs produce large amounts of qualitative data that needs to be systematically managed and analysed. Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software can greatly facilitate management and analysis of qualitative information. Software commonly used in humanitarian settings includes for example NVivo and MAXQDA. Using software for qualitative data analysis implies that data from FGDs/CGDs needs to be properly transcribed and translated. Exchange among assessment actors on best practices on qualitative data analysis should be encouraged. For reasons related to protection and privacy, it may not always be possible to share raw qualitative data gathered in FGDs. However, actors could make the codebook publicly accessible to encourage inter-agency learning.

Key recommendations

- Focus group discussions should be **gender and age specific** to give all participants room to speak.
- Wherever possible, do not allow convenience to limit the opportunity to participate in FGDs; **look beyond obvious locations** such as women friendly spaces, health centres, and schools. Avoid conducting FGDs in public to ensure that participants can speak freely.
- **Limit size** of focus group discussions.
- **Conduct qualitative, research-oriented** FGDs or CGDs to explore new topics and learn how communities define key issues and needs in their own words when not being prompted with standardized questions.
- **Employ FGDs in order to develop, test, and fine tune questionnaires** that will have multiple choice options to ensure the language used in the questions is understood and the options are appropriate. This will result in a better quality assessment.
- **Develop best practices** for analysis and sharing of qualitative data gathered in FGDs.

Secondary data review

A review of the assessment landscape in the Rohingya crisis reveals that many assessments overlap, with the same questions being asked despite there being no indication that a change is likely to have occurred. Many assessments have been conducted without having first reviewed the information already available through other assessments and secondary data. There appears to be a reflex to invest in agency-specific assessments rather than look for, trust, and use existing information. This can have an impact on the quality of assessments as well as on the assessment fatigue of the assessed population. This is also linked to the previous argument on data sharing and the Grand Bargain commitments – information that is not publicly available cannot be reviewed, and lead to duplication of assessment efforts.

Conducting a thorough secondary data review (SDR) at the beginning of the assessment process helps to consolidate the information already available and to identify information gaps. The findings from the SDR can then be used to inform the data collection method and design of the questionnaire.

Key recommendations

- **Always conduct a thorough secondary data review** at the beginning of the assessment process in order to identify information gaps and inform the questionnaire.
- The humanitarian community in Cox's Bazar should be responsible for **sharing and storing assessment data** and reports in an accessible way.

Direct observation

Direct observation is a powerful tool that enumerators should consistently use during data collection. Through direct observation, answers given by survey respondents can be cross-checked and contextualized. In FGDs, dedicating one facilitator to observing the discussion can yield insights into response behaviour and group dynamics. In order to be effective, observation needs to be conscious, whether structured or unstructured.

Direct observation is a useful method for capturing the information needed without over-burdening the assessed population. It can also be a way to engage with the people at a site, for example by asking them to show you features you are interested in such as latrines, drains, places they feel unsafe, etc.

While direct observation does not have to be structured to be useful, in assessments covering a broad area using a range of data collectors, it can be very useful to have a structured checklist for direct observation in order to make sure everyone is looking for the same features and important factors are not accidentally overlooked or forgotten. Collecting structured direct observations, for example through a checklist that has multiple choice options, also means information can be easily analysed. To reduce subjectivity of direct observation, enumerators should receive targeted training, and checklists should include specific guidance, for example in the form of pictures to illustrate what is meant by a certain question.

Key recommendations

- **Questionnaires** should contain space for enumerators to note down observations, as well as instructions for questions that should be accompanied by direct observations.
- Direct observation should be included in **enumerator trainings**.
- Consider developing a **direct observation checklist**.
- Use common sense about **what information to seek** through questioning and what information can be best achieved through direct observation.

Social desirability bias

Due to the dense population of the camps, it can be difficult to find private spaces to conduct interviews and group discussions. Data collection activities often draw attention and interviews are often conducted in the presence of other household members or community members (REACH/UNHCR 19/12/2018; UNICEF 15/10/2018; UNHCR 11/2017). This might lead to survey respondents giving answers that are socially acceptable, even if this does not accurately reflect their experiences or needs.

This may be impossible to avoid in many cases. For safety and protection reasons, it can also be preferable to conduct interviews in public spaces. Enumerators should be trained to use their own judgement to gauge when it is possible to politely encourage privacy during interviews, focus group discussions, and community group discussions, and when it is more appropriate and safe to remain in a public space.

Key recommendations

- If possible, interviews should be conducted in appropriate **private spaces**. For example, instead of conducting an interview at a market place or community space, enumerators could politely ask to speak further away from central spaces, such as in a residential area.
- **Safety and courtesy** need to be taken into consideration. Enumerators should only conduct interviews inside private shelters if they are invited to go inside, and only if they feel comfortable to do so.
- **Enumerators should be trained** to spot occurrences of the "social desirability bias", for example when people are interviewed in the presence of an authority figure or in a public space. The **questionnaire** or data collection tool should have a space for enumerators to note down their observations in relation to this.

Language and communication

Chittagonian dialect and Rohingya language

The language in which an interview is being conducted has a strong potential to influence assessment results. Within the humanitarian community in Cox's Bazar it has been generally assumed that the linguistic similarities between the Chittagonian dialect and Rohingya language are sufficient to ensure Chittagonian speakers and Rohingya speakers clearly understand each other.

> Recent research by Translators Without Borders shows that this is a misconception. 36% of Rohingya refugees in the Kutupalong-Balukhali camps have difficulties understanding basic sentences in Chittagonian (TWB 11/2018). This has major implications for the quality of assessments: If interviews are conducted in Chittagonian, there is large room for error as Rohingya interviewees may not be able to understand parts of the questionnaire, and may not feel comfortable asking for clarification.

Decades of separation between Rohingya refugees who arrived in the 1990s and new arrivals after August 2017 have led to differences in the vocabulary used. Rohingya spoken by the refugees who have been living in Bangladesh for years has borrowed vocabulary from Chittagonian and Bangla, while the Rohingya spoken in Rakhine has been influenced by Burmese and Rakhine (TWB 11/2018; BBC Media Action 03/10/2018). Understanding how the Rohingya language has evolved differently in Bangladesh and Myanmar should inform the use of vocabulary in questionnaires and orally translated interviews to ensure consistency in data collection and to avoid assumptions that all people of Rohingya origin understand each other equally.

Key recommendations

- Interviews with Rohingya refugees should ideally be **conducted in Rohingya language only**. While there may still be minor communication challenges to variances in the dialects spoken by Rohingya refugees, communicating only in Rohingya significantly reduces the room for misunderstanding.
- Non-Rohingya enumerators should receive **thorough language training** in order to be able to communicate in Rohingya. This should specifically ensure clear and consistent understanding of the themes that the assessment is trying to research.
- Consider **using Rohingya enumerators or interpreters** to ensure fluid and clear communication (this is further discussed in the section on enumerators, page 13). The potential value of using Rohingya refugees as enumerators has also been recognized by UNHCR staff, who have reflected on the benefits of enumerators speaking the same language as interviewees.

Usage of humanitarian jargon

Needs assessment questionnaires and response options often contain very specific or technical vocabulary that may not be well understood by survey respondents. Particular humanitarian terms may not be familiar to refugees who are not regularly in touch with humanitarian workers. Even non-technical concepts may be interpreted differently by Rohingya refugees and humanitarians. This "specification error" can lead to misinterpretation and misunderstandings, especially if data collectors do not fully understand the terminology themselves (ACAPS 20/06/2017).

For example, it has been noted that among Rohingya refugees and between Rohingya and the humanitarian community, the term "safety" may not be understood in the same way (Oxfam 08/2018; Oxfam 11/09/2018; REACH/UNHCR 19/12/2018). The Rohingya word *hefazot* is often used by new Rohingya arrivals, and refers to a variety of safety-related concepts such as "protection", "security", and "guard" (BBC Media Action 06/02/2019). The word "gender" has also been difficult to translate into Rohingya, as the term as such does not exist in Rohingya (TWB 15/11/2018).

> The onus is on humanitarian community to be very clear about what they need to know, what the specific terminology means, and how this can be expressed as clearly, simply, and consistently as possible.

One question commonly included in needs assessments is to ask people if they have "enough information" to make good decisions. Translators Without Borders found that this is very broad and ambiguous and that judging if one has "enough" information is difficult (TWB 11/2018). Similarly, knowing what is meant by a "good" decision is also difficult. Rephrasing such questions using more concrete terms can lead to more meaningful answers and survey results.

It is often difficult to accurately convey what stakeholders want to know in the simplest English possible without jargon, but this is the key to having a good translation. There should be no ambiguity in what words and concepts mean. This necessitates clarity among humanitarian workers at all levels: from those making decisions, through to those asking questions of the target population, and in all assessment stages including design, training, and data analysis.

Enumerators need to fully understand the questionnaires they are using. A Translators Without Borders study from Nigeria found that many English terms commonly used in assessment questionnaires were not understood by enumerators who sight-translated questionnaires from English into local languages (TWB 11/2018). While Bangladeshi enumerators in the Rohingya crisis will usually be given a translation of the questionnaire in Bangla, the Nigerian case study serves as a reminder that some terms may be unfamiliar to enumerators and enumerator trainings should include discussions on specific terminology used in the questionnaire, and practise using the questionnaires to ensure familiarity with them.

Regular enumerator comprehension tests can help identify comprehension gaps and training needs. Furthermore, enumerators' feedback on how they understand the questions can help to identify which questions need to be rephrased or simplified in order to ensure that enumerators can deliver them consistently.

Key recommendations

- Use **clear and straight-forward language** in questionnaires and avoid overly technical and ambiguous terms that may not be easily understood.
- Concepts that are ambiguous or difficult to translate should always be **contextualized** and **clear, standardized examples** should be given.
- **Further research on the Rohingya language** can contribute to better understanding of Rohingya vocabulary.
- **Expert review** of questionnaires by Rohingya speakers can ensure that Rohingya refugees and humanitarian organizations understand them in the same way.
- **Collect feedback from enumerators** on questionnaires in order to ensure that questions are phrased in an unambiguous way and understood by all enumerators. **Test enumerators' ability** to explain terminology and questions in their own words. **Role play** during enumerator trainings so that enumerators repeatedly practice asking and answering the questions themselves to help ensure consistency and familiarity with questionnaires.
- **Promote clear and consistent definitions** and terminology throughout the humanitarian community.
- **Pilot questionnaires** with key informants or focus groups in order to identify which questions are difficult to communicate and/or need revision.

Gender considerations with language

Due to cultural norms, women are less likely to be out in public than men. Many Rohingya women practice purdah, the practice of seclusion of the sexes, which means that they will usually stay inside the shelter to avoid being seen by unrelated men (TWB 11/2018). This has implications for women's exposure to different languages and humanitarian vocabulary. A study found that Rohingya women demonstrate a lower comprehension of Bangla and Burmese than men (TWB 11/2018).

Key recommendation

- When engaging with women, it is particularly important to do **interviews in Rohingya**, as they are less likely to have been exposed to other languages. Overly technical vocabulary should be avoided.

Cultural sensitivity: Appropriate vocabulary for specific contexts

Some topics can be difficult to talk about with Rohingya refugees as the more academic, direct translations of some terms into Rohingya are not commonly used. Instead, Rohingya people commonly use euphemisms to describe certain concepts. For example, many Rohingya women use the euphemistic word *gusol* (literal meaning: "to shower") to describe menstruation, instead of the academic word *haiz* (BBC Media Action 17/10/2018).

This also ties into another observation: for many sensitive concepts such as menstruation and gender, Rohingya women have developed a "sociolect", which consists of vocabulary and pronunciations that men do not understand (TWB 03/10/2018).

Key recommendations

- Use Translators Without Borders' **Rohingya Glossary** in order to use appropriate terms. Further vocabulary used in "sociolects" should be shared with all actors across the response. Develop **database of vocabulary** used in "sociolects" that is shared with all actors across the response.
- It is crucial to understand the particularities of "sociolects" and euphemisms in order to ensure that **interviewees understand questions as intended** and to **avoid making people feel uncomfortable** or embarrassed during the interview by using terms that are not considered to be appropriate.

Translation challenges

In the context of the Rohingya crisis, questionnaires and collected data go through various stages of translation during the assessment process. Questionnaires are usually developed in English, and then translated into Bangla. In some assessments, questionnaires are also translated into Rohingya – sounded out using the Bangla script, as both Rohingya and Chittagonian do not have official scripts. In other assessments, enumerators use the Bangla questionnaire to verbally translate on the spot into Chittagonian without having a written translation. Rohingya respondents then answer in Rohingya, which the interviewer translates back into Chittagonian. Responses are then translated back into Bangla and English, either on the spot by enumerators or after the enumeration.

These multiple rounds of translation leave large room for error as meaning and nuances can get lost (Plan International 06/2018). This is of particular concern when enumerators are translating the questionnaire or the responses on the spot during data collection.

Key recommendations

- Bangla/Rohingya translations of English questionnaires should always be **translated back into English**, to check for, and avoid, translation errors and to ensure that nuances in meaning are not obscured. This step is often omitted due to scarce time and resource, but a consequence of this rush is that the meaning of the assessment, and thus the relevance of the findings, run the risk of being seriously distorted. **Time for proper translation must be factored into assessment timelines.**
- Enumerators should always be given a **Rohingya translation of the questionnaire** – alongside a Bangla translation for reference – to ensure that the questionnaire is delivered consistently throughout the entire data collection exercise and to avoid translation errors and misinterpretation. This Rohingya translation can be verbal, through a pre-recorded questionnaire, or written, through a transliteration using the Bangla script.
- **Develop and share best practices** around translation, as well as **a question bank** with questions and key terminology that have been found to be correctly translated and that elicit the intended responses. These should be shared across the response. This way, the wider assessment community can benefit from others' lessons learned.

Age, Gender, and Diversity

It is important to consider cultural sensitivities when interviewing Rohingya women. Several assessment reports have noted that Rohingya women appeared to be restraining themselves when answering questions while in the presence of men, either male enumerators or men of their own community (Education Sector 25/01/2018; REACH 04/2018). This highlights the need to create safe spaces for women to speak freely during interviews. However, it may not always be possible to avoid men being present. For example, when conducting a household survey with a female household member, male family members might choose to remain present. Enumerators should be trained to sensitively deal with such situations. Protection considerations and a do-no-harm approach should always take precedence over the need for good data.

In order to understand the specific needs of women, girls, elderly, disabled people, and minorities, these groups need to be specifically targeted by assessment activities, and the data collection, sampling, and analysis processes need to be designed around disaggregating differences accordingly. While some assessments collect gender-disaggregated data, others pose generic questions without differentiating how particular population groups are affected by a specific problem. In household surveys, it is important to consider which indicators are objectively verifiable at the household level, such as reported coping strategies, and which indicators are based on the perception of an individual, on which the gender of the respondent could have an impact, such as whether someone feels safe.

Purdah may mean it is more challenging to represent women's voices and views in assessments. This is particularly true when assessments are being carried out in public sites such as water points, markets, etc. Even group discussions in women friendly spaces may miss the most secluded female members of the community.

Even when age, gender, and diversity considerations are incorporated into assessment design and questionnaires, capturing the experiences and needs of women and marginalized groups can be challenging. For example, Rohingya women have been noted to be underrepresented in some key informant surveys, due to a general lack of women in leadership and representative positions (Protection Sector 25/09/2018; NPM 09/12/2018). Women have also been underrepresented in surveys targeting heads of households (REACH 04/2018).

Accessing other sub-groups of the population who may have specific needs is even more difficult. For example, due to safety considerations and cultural practices, adolescent girls often remain in their shelters during the day and have little contact with humanitarian workers (Plan International 06/2018). It is thus more challenging to capture their perspectives during data collection. In order to engage with them, one study used young female enumerators to generate a comfortable space for girls to speak more openly (Plan International 06/2018). People with non-conforming gender or sexual identities are also highly marginalized and very difficult to reach during data collection. Safety and protection concerns need to be very carefully considered when addressing these people (WRC 08/11/2018).

People with disabilities are similarly difficult to reach during assessments and their needs may not be adequately captured with standard questionnaires.

Key recommendations

- Ensure that women are interviewed by **female enumerators** only and take the **age of enumerators** into consideration when interviewing different age groups.
- **Consider how age, gender, and disability disaggregated data** will be collected in the design phase of the assessment, and ensure that women, elderly, disabled people, and minorities are represented in the survey.
- In the planning stage of the assessment, consider **stratifying according to gender or age groups** in order to allow results to be representative for these population groups.
- **Protection considerations and a do-no-harm approach** should guide any assessment activity and should be taken into account in all stages of the assessment, including planning and data collection. Enumerators should receive training on do-no-harm and protection. Assessment coordinators are strongly recommended to maintain **close contact with protection actors**, such as the Protection Sector and/or protection staff of their own organization, throughout the assessment process.
- Consider that household interviews may be necessary in order to adequately capture different female voices if these cannot be found in the public space.
- Efforts should be made to identify and reach out to **female community leaders** for key informant interviews. Also consider that a key informant does not need to be a person with any formal leadership role. A woman who has a particular set of experiences and is willing to participate in an interview can be a key informant – for example mother of young children, elder woman or a female household head.
- The needs of **minorities and special needs groups**, such as sexual minorities, are not sufficiently understood. Any effort to better capture their needs should be conducted in close communication with the protection sector to mitigate protection risks and avoid doing harm.

Operational constraints

Physical access & cultural calendar

During the monsoon season, accessibility of some areas in Cox's Bazar, both in the Rohingya camps and in the host communities, is reduced and some locations can become inaccessible. For example, data collection for one host community survey conducted during the monsoon season could not take place on St. Martin's Island as it was inaccessible during the time of enumeration (XChange 28/08/2018). Within the Rohingya camps, mobility is reduced during the monsoon season as well, which may hamper data collection and increase assessment timelines.

The period of Ramadan has some implications for data collection. Muslim staff members will be fasting, and data collection in the camps can be physically exhausting. To prevent enumerators from over-exerting themselves, the number of interviews per day should be reduced. This will slow data collection, but avoid adverse effects on enumerators' health. Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi host community members will also be fasting during Ramadan and may be less positive about participating in interviews or discussions at certain times of the day during this period. Moreover, the collection of consumption-based indicators will be impacted, such as household food consumption or number of meals per day.

Key recommendations

- Accessibility and mobility constraints need to be considered during the planning phase if data collection is intended to take place during monsoon season.
- If some areas are inaccessible during data collection, assessment reports should indicate gaps in information and implications – no information should not be taken to mean no problems; in fact, it could mean the opposite.
- Explore non-face to face ways of getting information from inaccessible areas (for example mobile phone calls) as a "second best" option.
- Plan for reduced data collection activities during Ramadan.

Safety and security

Enumerators need to be, and feel, safe during data collection. Clear security protocols should be established and all staff involved in the assessments should be aware of them, in order to act appropriately in the event of a security incident. While the security situation in Cox's Bazar district, including inside the refugee camps, is mostly calm, localized tensions can arise, which could affect humanitarian operations, including data collection.

Some survey reports noted that Kutupalong RC had not been included in data collection due to security concerns (REACH/UNHCR 19/12/2018; REACH 09/01/2019). In early 2019, organizations reported increasing threats against female Rohingya volunteers in the camps (Protection Working Group 29/01/2019). While these threats did not immediately target Bangladeshi enumerators, it required assessment actors to closely monitor events around this situation in order to act proactively to ensure the safety of female enumerators.

Social tensions and social cohesion remain a salient issue, as some members of the host communities feel that their needs are being neglected by the humanitarian response to the Rohingya crisis (Dhaka Tribune 04/03/2019; The Daily Star 05/03/2019; BBC Media Action 13/02/2018). Assessment actors need to constantly monitor such tensions to evaluate their impact on operation movements and enumerators' safety.

Generally, as employees of the organization they are hired by, enumerators need to be aware of, and follow, security regulations stipulated by their organization. For example, enumerators hired by UN agencies need to receive UNDSS security briefings. Regulations and protocols around PSEA must apply to enumerators as well.

Beyond following basic security protocols, assessment coordinators need to constantly monitor and analyse the security situation in order to ensure the safety of their teams in the field. As enumerators are usually Bangladeshi locals who know local security dynamics and are well-connected in informal social and information networks, it is recommended to actively involve them in the analysis of the security situation. This can be achieved, for example, by encouraging enumerators to always report to the team security issues or tensions that they have become aware of through their own networks, as well as to share security concerns. Utilizing the knowledge of the assessment teams in this way also highlights that they are a valuable part of the overall response and that their work is important. Subsequently, assessment coordinators should feed any analysis of the security situation back to the enumerators. Furthermore, holding a feedback session with enumerators after finishing an assessment can help identify lessons learned on safety and security issues and formulate best practices for subsequent data collection activities. Maintaining open lines of communication around any security-related issues is crucial.

Female enumerators may have specific safety concerns, but may not feel comfortable reporting these to a male superior. Designating one, or several, female team members as focal points for women's safety issues can help ensure that female enumerators feel that they can safely voice security concerns or report concrete security incidents.

All safety and security concerns voiced by enumerators should be taken seriously and addressed, and follow-up actions should be communication to them. Enumerators should be actively involved in developing mitigation measures. In some instances, it may be advisable to proactively employ increased safety and security measures, for example by sending enumerators out in pairs or groups in areas where there are particular concerns around crime or hostility towards humanitarians.

Key recommendations

- **Security constraints** should be analysed before and during the data collection to ensure the safety of the enumerators.
- Actively **involve enumerators in monitoring the security situation**, taking their concerns seriously and develop mitigation measures jointly with them.
- **Proactively** improve enumerators' safety and security, particularly taking into account specific safety concerns for female team members.

Willingness to participate in data collection

In November 2018, the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar announced plans to begin voluntary repatriation of Rohingya refugees. This announcement and the lack of information around the process led to fear among Rohingya refugees who were afraid of being forced to go back to Myanmar. These fears impacted data collection and registration activities, with many Rohingya refugees refusing to fill out forms or to have their name listed anywhere for fear that this would be linked to repatriation processes (BBC Media Action 12/11/2018; ISCG 29/11/2018). Registration is a particularly sensitive issue in the context of the Rohingya crisis as data collection activities in Myanmar were largely conducted by the government and associated with repression and the denial of citizenship (Amnesty International 2017).

While repatriation plans have been halted and fears around repatriation have since abated, it should be kept in mind that refugees' willingness to participate in data collection could be hampered again if the political climate changes or rumours around repatriation spread in the camps. To avoid creating suspicion and allay any concerns, enumerators should always explain the purpose of the data collection to the people they are interviewing. In Kutupalong RC, fears of relocation from the camp led refugees to refuse taking part in data collection (Nutrition Sector 02/12/2018).

Key recommendations

- Before starting an assessment, an **operational situation analysis** should be conducted in order to understand the current political debate around the Rohingya crisis and how it impacts refugees' fears and concerns around data collection and rumours.
- In order to avoid exacerbating refugees' fears and creating suspicion, any interview or group discussion should always be preceded by an **explanation** of who is collecting the data and what it will be used for, as well as the level of anonymity participants can expect if they choose to participate.
- In general, humanitarian needs assessments should be **anonymous** – they are not beneficiary registration processes, and there should normally be **no reason to record names or identifiable details of the informants**. An anonymous process not linked directly to the receipt of assistance, in which participants are conscious of the anonymity of the process, should produce more truthful results. Only record identifiable details of informants if there is a reason to do so and with their permission.

Enumerators

Enumerator trainings

Many local Bangladeshi enumerators hired in the Rohingya response are young and have little experience in the humanitarian system. While this implies a great potential to prepare them for a future engagement in humanitarian organisations, it also means that there is a greater need for training enumerators, not just on assessment procedures but also on the humanitarian system in general. Trainings should include humanitarian principles and the core humanitarian standard and should help enumerators understand the part the information they collect plays in the overall response. Enumerators with a solid knowledge on humanitarian sectors will also be better equipped to engage with interviewees during the data collection, for example by being able to explain and contextualize certain concepts.

In order to reduce room for error during enumeration, it is important to explain to enumerators how, and for what purpose, the data they are collecting will be used. Knowing that their work is critical to analysing humanitarian needs and informing high-level decision-making can increase enumerators' diligence and motivation and reduce enumeration fatigue.

In humanitarian settings, there is often a tendency to condense and speed up enumerator trainings in the rush to finalize an assessment. Extending the training can have huge benefits on the quality of assessment data and should be seen as key to assessment accuracy rather than a "tick box" exercise.

Key recommendations

- Train new enumerators on the **basics of the humanitarian system and humanitarian work**, to increase their sector-specific knowledge around the data they are collecting.
- Thoroughly explain to enumerators **how their data will be used**, ideally giving concrete examples, for example by showcasing analytical pieces or decision-making documents such as the Joint Response Plan where assessment data is referenced.
- **Allow adequate time** for the development of training (including resources) and the delivery of the training in assessment planning and resource allocation.

Rohingya and Bangladeshi enumerators

Enumerators in the Rohingya response are usually locally hired Bangladeshis who speak Chittagonian and/or have some knowledge of Rohingya. As discussed in the section on language, conducting interviews in Chittagonian risks comprehension or translation errors.

One way to circumvent these errors is to use native Rohingya speakers as enumerators, so that interviews can be conducted in Rohingya. Furthermore, using Rohingya refugees as enumerators can increase their sense of ownership over the assessment process, and present an opportunity for refugees to be engaged with their community. Rohingya refugees may also be more willing to share their perspective when speaking to someone from their own community. UNHCR staff reflected that it has been easier for Rohingya enumerators to build trust with Rohingya households as one of their lessons from their Community Outreach Members Program.

Furthermore, pairing Bangladeshi enumerators with Rohingya interpreters can contribute to improving assessment comprehension and foster social cohesion.

However, protection concerns need to be taken into consideration when Rohingya refugees participate in interviewing people from their own communities. Protection-focused surveys in particular might be better conducted by people who are not Rohingya. Rohingya enumerators would ideally be rotated within the camps so that they do not conduct interviews within their own camp, in order to eliminate biases and to avoid making people feel uncomfortable when being interviewed by people they know about sensitive issues. Movement restrictions for Rohingya refugees need to be taken into account, and any data collection activity involving Rohingya enumerators needs to be thoroughly planned and communicated with local and camp authorities to ensure their safety. UNHCR staff also reflected that there are additional safety concerns for female Rohingya refugees, for whom it may not be socially acceptable or safe to engage with male refugees during data collection. UNHCR staff also highlighted that the low literacy of many Rohingya, particularly women, may present an obstacle during data collection. However, one way to circumvent this is to use recorders to play and record questions and answers.

For host community surveys, Bangladeshi enumerators should not conduct interviews within their own communities and instead be assigned to different locations. Biases in general should be explored during enumerator training. While biases are impossible to eliminate, efforts should be taken to understand any important attitudes and perceptions that would impact data collection behaviour and quality.

Key recommendations

- Using **Rohingya enumerators** for needs assessments in the camps can increase data quality due to improved communication between enumerators and interviewees.
- To **avoid biases**, enumerators should not be asked to collect data within their own communities or neighbourhoods.

After the Assessment: Communicating Results

Closing the "Assessment Loop"

One major gap in the assessment processes conducted in the Rohingya response is that assessment results are not communicated back to the interviewees and assessed communities. This last step of the assessment process is crucial in order to show people how their answers are being used and that the time and energy they spent answering questions is highly valued. Doing this is at the heart of humanitarian assessment actors' accountability to affected populations. Maintaining close communication with affected people and including them in a participatory way in the response is a key commitment of the Core Humanitarian Standard and a key work stream of the Grand Bargain (CHS 2019).

People have a right to know how their situation is being interpreted and shared. They should also have the opportunity to provide feedback on anything they disagree with. Finding meaningful ways to share assessment findings with communities will be challenging, but is essential. Ways of communicating assessment results could include distributing printed information material, using signboards, transmitting radio programmes or organizing follow-up group discussions. Different communication methods will be needed for different audiences. The majority of Rohingya refugees are illiterate, which needs to be taken into account when choosing a communication strategy – pictures may be better than text (TWB 11/2018). In Sittwe, Myanmar, one IDP profiling exercise used a video presentation with a subsequent feedback session to communicate survey results back to Rohingya communities (JIPS 04/09/2018).

Key recommendations

- Find relevant ways to **communicate assessment results back** to the people who have participated in the assessment as well as the community more generally.
- **Best practices** around communicating results to Rohingya refugees and host community members need to be developed and shared within the assessment community in Cox's Bazar.

Key literature recommendations

- ACAPS: Direct Observation and Key Informant Interview Techniques for primary data collection during rapid assessments. October 2011.
- ACAPS: Primary Data Collection Techniques. 2016.
- ACAPS: Questionnaire Design for Needs Assessments in Humanitarian Emergencies. Summary. July 2016.
- ACAPS: Questionnaire Design. How to design a questionnaire for needs assessments in humanitarian emergencies. July 2016.
- ACAPS: The Analysis Canvas. June 2017.
- ACAPS: Humanitarian Needs Assessments. The Good Enough Guide. 2014.
- CHS Alliance: Core Humanitarian Standard. 2014.
- IRC: Obtaining Meaningful Informed Consent. IRC Research Toolkit.
- JIPS: JIPS Essential Toolkit. Last accessed March 2019.
- TWB: TWB Glossary for Bangladesh. 2018.
- UNHCR: Assessment Lessons Learned with a protection focus, v.1. November 2017.
- UNHCR: Needs Assessment Handbook. Last accessed March 2019.
- UNICEF: Rapid Assessment Sampling in Emergency Situations. 2010.

Spotlight: REACH and NPM – reconciling two datasets

Building on the point about parallel surveys leading to diverging results, this section showcases some results from the Needs and Population Monitoring (NPM) and the REACH-UNICEF WASH Household Assessment to illustrate how different methodologies and questionnaires can lead to different results.

> As discussed, this is problematic if it is not explained, because it paints two different pictures of the situation of the affected population, making take-aways from the assessments for decision-makers and operational actors unclear.

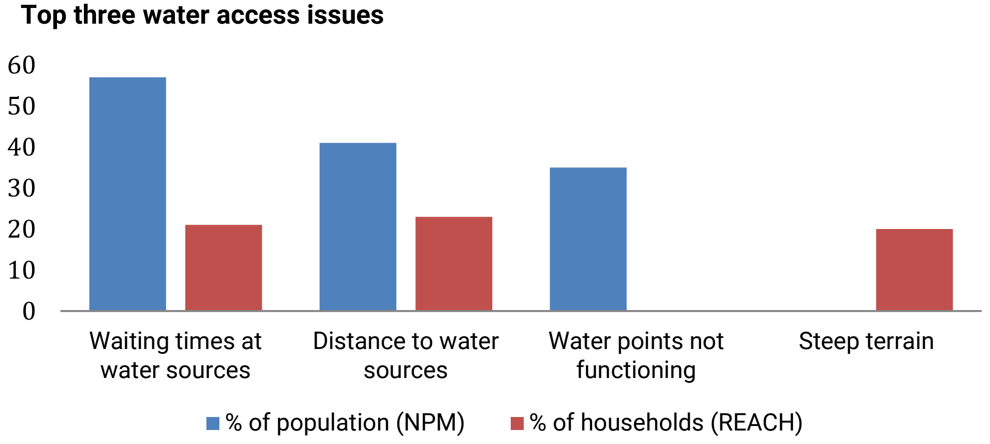
The discrepancies between the two surveys also highlights the importance of triangulation, explanation, and analysis to make meaning from data, and should be a caution against using one dataset in isolation.

The NPM data collection round highlighted here was conducted between 23 September 2018 and 10 October 2018. Approximately 2,000 key informants were interviewed with a closed-question survey. This was supplemented by qualitative interviews with key informants such as majhees and camp managers, as well as direct observation and community group discussions (NPM 10/2018).

The REACH assessment is a WASH-themed household survey that was conducted between August and October 2018 in the Rohingya camps. In total, 3,571 households were interviewed (REACH 02/2019). Data collection for both surveys occurred around the same time, making the results comparable.

Example: Problems with access to water

Both surveys asked respondents about the problems people face in relation to their access to water. In the NPM assessment, three issues came out on top: waiting times at water sources (affecting 57% of the population), distance to water sources (41%), and water points not functioning (35%). In the REACH survey, the three main water access issues are identified as: distance to water sources (affecting 23% of households), waiting times at water sources (21%), and steep terrain (20%). Despite the overlaps in the access issues named by respondents, the problems seem much more prevalent when using the NPM results as a reference.



How can this discrepancy be explained?

- Different perceptions: It is possible that majhees and household members have different perception of their level of need. While majhees might be exaggerating needs due to biases or misperceptions, household members might be underestimating them due to a high resilience and acceptance of negative coping mechanisms. Combined, these factors might be contributing to the divergence in the survey results.
- Questionnaire design: Response behaviour in both surveys was likely influenced by the way the question on water access was asked. In the REACH survey, people were first asked whether they faced any problems collecting water. If the answer was "yes", a follow-up question asked respondents to name specific problems. In the NPM survey, key informants were asked directly which problems people face when accessing water, with "no access problems" being one of several options.
- Comprehension: Questions were possibly understood differently by households and by key informants. As majhees are regularly involved with humanitarian organizations, they are likely more familiar with humanitarian vocabulary.
- Translation (1): Possibly there were differences in how terminology in the questionnaire was translated. The English version of the NPM question asks for "problems when accessing water", while the REACH question asks for "problems when collecting water". These questions may have been differently translated into Bangla/Chittagonian, contributing to discrepant results.
- Translation (2): Questionnaires of the REACH survey were provided in Chittagonian, while NPM enumerators were given Bangla questionnaires that they sight-translated into Chittagonian. This may have led to translation errors and differences in how the questions were communicated.
- Language: Conducting interviews in Chittagonian instead of Rohingya increases the risk of misunderstandings and miscommunication. A recent study found that 36% of Rohingya interviewed had problems understanding a basic Chittagonian sentence (TWB 11/2018). As both surveys were conducted in Chittagonian, it is possible that misunderstandings influenced survey results.