

Language considerations for repatriation

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WHAT MATTERS?

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Language considerations for repatriation

While repatriation plans will reportedly not proceed until 2019, recent events have increased questions and concerns about these plans and related arrangements in the Rohingya community. Rohingya people have clearly said that they need information to make decisions for themselves and their families. They also want to be meaningfully consulted and engaged in these processes. When dealing with such a sensitive and emotional subject, it will be helpful for the humanitarian community to know some key terms.

Repatriation complications

There is no single word for 'repatriation' in the Rohingya language, and few Rohingya speakers understand the Bangla word *protiyabashon*, which is the word Chittagonians use as well. Instead, Rohingya people use the phrase *Burmat wafis fatai don*, which means 'to be returned to Myanmar.' Through this expression and

other phrases, it's noticeable that anything related to repatriation is 'done to' people. That is, the phrases used suggest that people lack agency or are not at the centre of these decisions.

The term 'voluntary repatriation' is difficult to explain in Rohingya. The phrase *nizor kushi-kushi Burmat wafis loizon*, meaning 'to agreeably bring back to Myanmar', is used by Rohingya speakers. Furthermore, Rohingya people typically associate the English word 'voluntary,' with 'volunteer,' which is often used by Chittagonian and Bangla speakers in the camps. The Rohingya community in Bangladesh has absorbed 'volunteer' into their language to refer specifically to Rohingya aid workers (they pronounce it '*bolontiyar*'). This word association may lead to confusion amongst the Rohingya community, some thinking that volunteers are returning to Myanmar. As many of the technical terms associated with repatriation do not exist in the Rohingya

language, it's important to explain the concepts using simple terminology. For example *nizor issa* or *kushi-kushi* for 'own choice' and *wafis* for 'return'.

Transit camps are usually called *gãat*¹, from the Bangla word *ghat*, meaning 'river jetty.' This is because the transit camps are usually along the Naf River near these jetties.

Repatriation expectations

The Rohingya community have to manage multiple cards with various functions and sometimes this creates confusion or false expectations. These include nutrition cards, vaccination cards, and of course the MOHA (Bangladesh Ministry of Home Affairs) cards, which Rohingya people call the *gonta* card (which literally means 'pendant card' since they sometimes wear it around the neck like a necklace). The introduction of the

1 The tilde (~) above a letter denotes nasal pronunciation.

UNHCR biometric card has added to misperceptions and expectations and has led to many rumours (though some efforts have been made to address these concerns). There are fears among Rohingya people that these cards give away their identity (*foriso*) and may enlist them for forced repatriation. Several agencies working in camps have seen that some members of the community now avoid showing their nutrition or vaccination cards for fear of being repatriated.

Though the community often perceives repatriation negatively, there is still an overwhelming desire in the Rohingya community to return one day to their homeland. Many Rohingya say that they will not volunteer to return unless their demands are met. For some of them, this includes receiving Burmese citizenship (*tairinsa*, borrowed from Burmese) and official recognition of their ethnicity (*zaat* or *qaum*).

Repatriation conversations

Several words that are not directly related to repatriation will also be necessary to have discussions with the community on this sensitive topic. The Rohingya community values the concept of honour and dignity (*izzot*). Addressing elders (*murobbi*), *mahjis*, and imams in formal, respectful language is therefore important, as these community members play key roles in information exchange and dissemination. Though many interpreters use the 'familiar formal' (*tūi*) and 'informal' (*tui*) with the Rohingya community, they should use the 'very formal' (*auney*) when speaking to community elders and leaders.

'Fear' (*dor*) is also an important term to know, as is 'rumour' (*urainna-hobor*). The words for 'consent' (*razi*) and 'privacy' (*gufoniya*) will also come in handy. And lastly, knowing such simple words as 'yes' (*oy'ze*), 'no' (*no'ze*), and 'don't know' (*no zani*) will be increasingly important during any discussion on repatriation.

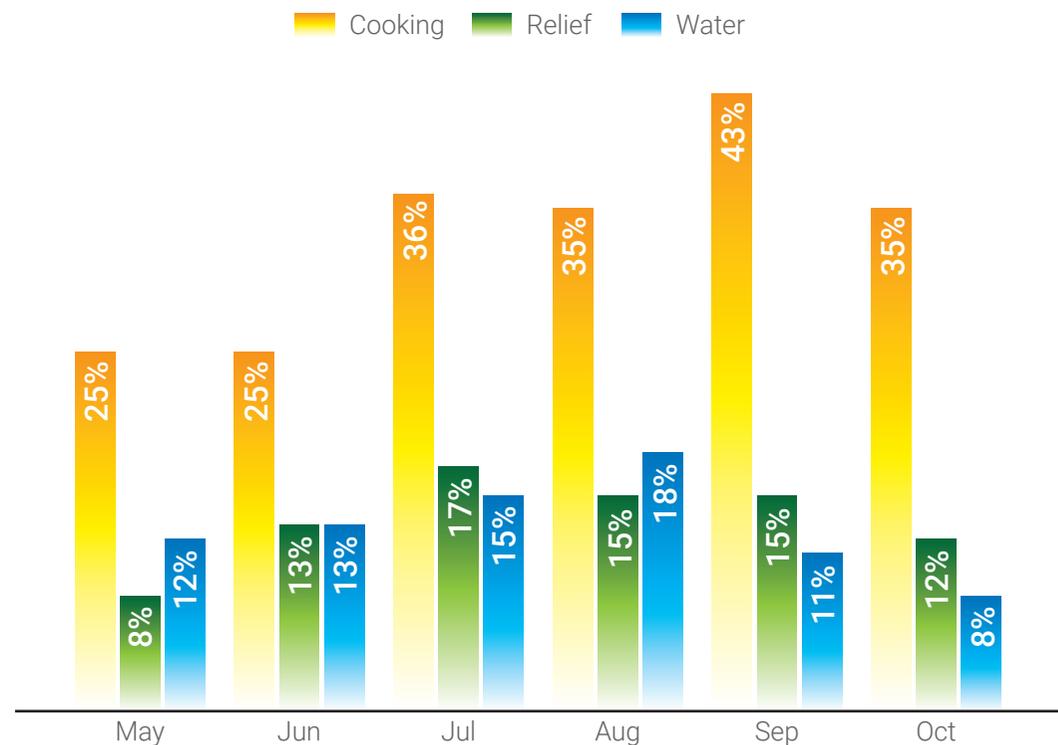
Lack of cooking fuel and equipment continues to be the biggest concern for the Rohingya community



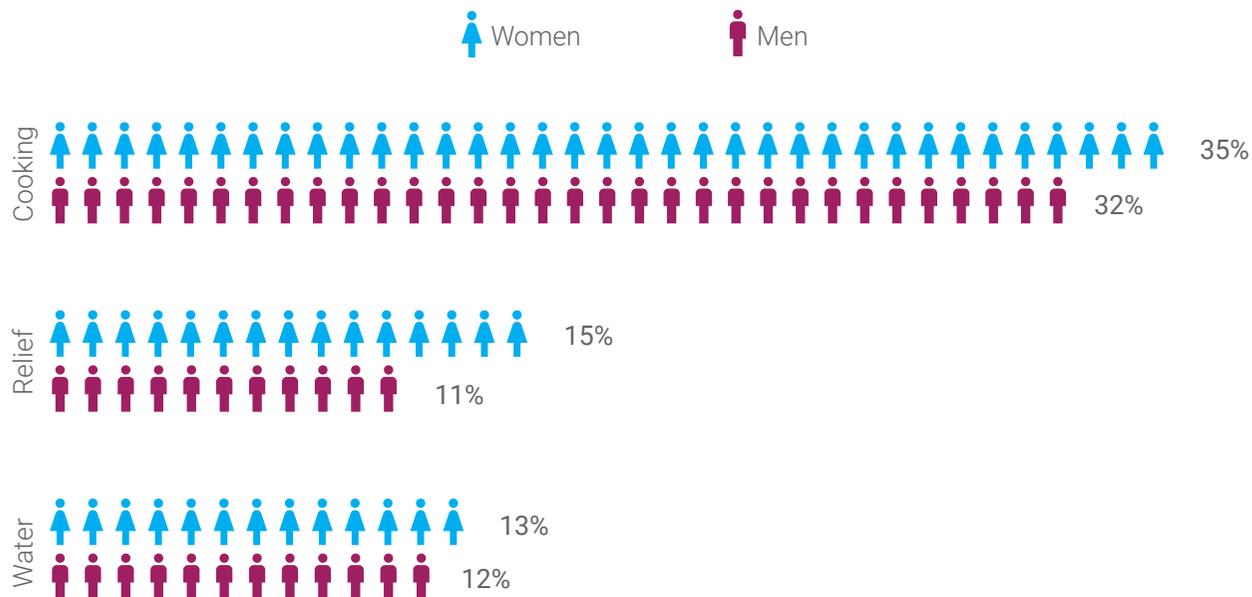
Source: This analysis is based on community feedback that has been collected from Camps 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 13, 14, 17, 19 and 22 (N= 2386) from May to October 2018 through ACF information hubs and qualitative data from follow-up focus group discussions in Camp 13 to help better understand the reasons behind the concerns.

Feedback data from the Rohingya community suggests that issues related to cooking continue to be a principal concern for the Rohingya community; and that these issues may even have been getting worse over the last six months. In the last four months (July to October), over a third of community feedback focused on these issues. Concerns about access to relief goods and safe water were consistently the next two frequently raised issues.

Top three concerns of Rohingya community across different months



Top three concerns showed in feedback from men and women



The data used for this analysis consists predominantly of feedback given by women¹. However, an analysis of the data shows that women are only 1.2 times more likely than men to mention cooking-related problems, suggesting that this issue is a key concern for both men and women. Analysis also shows that women are slightly more likely than men to raise issues related to water and relief items.

Lack of cooking fuel, pots and utensils is making life difficult for the Rohingya community

Rohingya families living in the camps do not get given firewood, kerosene or any kind of fuel as part of their relief packages. Focus group participants explained that they must spend BDT 100 to 150 to buy firewood, which only lasts them one or two days. To avoid this high cost, the male members of the family travel far from the camp to areas where they pay a lower rate of BDT 20 or exchange at least 1kg of rice with the host community

to be allowed to collect firewood from the forest. Sometimes families use paper, plastic, rags and sacks as cooking fuel – these items are collected by children from shops in the camps. However, participants explained that this is now becoming more challenging, as shop owners are shouting, scolding, beating and sometimes accusing Rohingya children of being thieves when they try to collect these materials. Furthermore, while collecting these items, some children have got lost or even been kidnapped from the camp, which is a matter of great concern for the parents.

“ One of our neighbouring sons from the camp went to the market. A man gave him five taka. After getting the money, the boy got into a tomtom (local three-wheeler) with the man. Some people noticed that and ran after the tomtom. When people were very near to that tomtom, the man panicked and threw the boy from the tomtom.”

– Female, camp 13

Focus group participants also explained that the smoke created from burning plastic, rags and bottles is harmful for their health. As they have no windows in their shelters, the smoke can't escape and this causes breathing problems. It also makes clothes and other household items sticky and dirty. They felt that having a gas stove could solve the problem.

People also explained that they didn't have enough cooking pots or utensils. People explained how the few pots they were able to bring with them from Myanmar were now unusable, since most of those pots now have holes or are broken. They also mentioned that they don't have enough plates to be able to eat together as a family.

¹ 80% of the dataset – this is because the majority of users of ACF information hubs are female, since these facilities are situated within nutrition centres.

Tube-wells and toilets are insufficient to accommodate the number of people living in the camps

Key concerns connected to water are the lack of tube-wells providing drinking water and insufficient toilet facilities. According to focus group participants, at least four or five tube-wells have been installed in each block, but only two of these provide water which is drinkable and usable for washing, cooking, and bathing. Because of excessive iron content, the water from the rest of the tube-wells is unsuitable even for washing clothes or taking a bath. Moreover, the tube-wells are situated in a crowded place, where men bathe. Women therefore feel uncomfortable collecting water there in the daytime. If there is an urgent need for water, they go to collect it wearing a burqa.

Rohingya women mentioned that they must wait in a long queue at the tube wells and that it takes nearly three hours to go, collect water and get back to their shelter. People also said that a lot of physical strength is needed to pump the tube well handle, because most of the camps are in hilly areas

and, due to the winter season, the water level is currently very low. Participants also explained that people don't have enough pots for storing water and that they sometimes use the dignity kit bucket for this purpose. Because of the scarcity of drinking water, women tend to use less water for drinking and cooking. As the tube wells need repairing frequently, participants explained they sell relief goods for money to buy the parts.

 We need to repair the tube well at two to three month intervals. Therefore, to buy the parts we need to sell our rice in the local shops."

– Male, camp 13

Focus group participants stated that they have insufficient toilets for defecation in the camps, and do not have separate toilets for males and females. Both genders said that they felt shy standing in the same toilet queue together. Rohingya women mentioned that men deliberately take longer if a woman knocks on the toilet door just to cause more misery.

Other issues raised about toilets included:

- Water is not available inside the toilets and must be brought from the shelter.
- The doors of the bathrooms are broken and people can easily see what's happening inside, which makes the women uncomfortable.
- Dirty water sometimes overflows from the slab of the toilet and makes it unusable.
- Women feel insecure to go to the toilet alone at night, fearing abduction or rape. Family members usually accompany them.

The detailed nature of concerns related to relief and relief related goods can be found in [What Matters? issue 12](#).

BBC Media Action, Internews, and Translators without Borders are working together to collect and collate feedback from communities affected by the Rohingya crisis. This summary aims to provide a snapshot of feedback received from Rohingya and host communities, to assist sectors to better plan and implement relief activities with communities' needs and preferences in mind.

The work is being delivered in partnership with IOM, the UN migration agency, and is funded by EU humanitarian aid and the UK Department for International Development.

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