ASSESSMENT LESSONS LEARNED
with a protection focus VS 1

This thematic report provides an overview of lessons learned from assessments involving the Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh. The objective is to help humanitarian actors undertake more context appropriate, protection sensitive, and efficient assessments in the Rohingya Bangladesh crisis. It provides tangible examples of how assessments in this context can be designed to avoid causing harm, encourage participation and empowerment, ensure accountability and inclusion of particularly vulnerable populations.

These findings are based on experiences of several organisations undertaking assessments in Cox's Bazar. The document does not intend to provide a comprehensive list of all the issues that should be taken into account while conducting an assessment, but rather provides a starting point for organisations planning an assessment involving Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. This document should be used in conjunction with global standards and guidance on assessment and analysis practices (see key resources at the end of this report). This is a living document and insights that could complement the report are very welcome, at TaxL@UNHCR.org.

ASSESSMENT DESIGN

Data collection techniques

- A large amount of data is continuously being collected by different actors across several sectors. To avoid assessment duplication, it is recommended to start with a review of **available secondary data** and the assessment registry, before deciding on the necessity, scope and scale of any primary data collection exercise.
- The majority of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh come from Maungdaw, followed by Buthidaung. A small proportion fled from Rathedaung and other areas. There is a strong sense of belonging towards respective townships and villages. To reach an understanding of community dynamics and analyse risks, ensure **representation from all the townships and villages** during data collection exercises, if possible.
- Recent assessments within this context have shown that it is **not difficult to set up a female focus group discussion or to find female key informants**. However, a lack of awareness and practice, cultural and religious restrictions might limit some women's participation.
- Due to cultural sensitivities and out of respect for elders, **younger participants** often do not speak up in focus group discussions (FGDs). Youth (between 15 to 24 years of age) should be encouraged to speak or given an opportunity to voice concerns in separate age and gender-based FGDs.

The population remains dynamic, which might complicate **sampling design**. The IOM Needs and Population Monitoring data and RRRC/UNHCR Family Counting exercises provide a relatively detailed and regularly updated sampling frame.

Information sources

The following type of key informants can provide specific insights into the conditions of the population:

- **Village administrators** (previously called "Ogatha", now referred as "Oshraymu"- both are Burmese terms for village administrator) and **Mahji** (men and women) are key informants regarding main issues of concern to the community, demography, geographic location, health, education, community and village infrastructure, cross border movements, information about specific events, key developments in Myanmar, as well as around specific needs.
- **Elders** ("Soddar" in Rohingya) are good sources of information regarding culture, history, wellbeing of the villagers, charity, people in need of assistance, people who receive zakat (annual Islamic donation from the rich to the poor in the community), and social and religious issues (including marriage, divorce, SGBV, etc.)
- **Mullahs, Imams and Mulvis**, working through the local mosque and madrassa, can provide insights into social and religious issues, mosques and madrasas, number of mullahs in specific village or area, students in religious schools, etc.

- **Midwifes** provide information regarding pregnancy, cultural practices on pregnancy and deliveries, women and girls at risk or with specific needs in the community, health condition of newborns and new mothers.
- **Former INGO and NGO staff, school teachers, government employees and unofficial health workers** (who are not technical) may be good sources of geographic, event-specific, political, and development information, as well as on main concerns and specific needs on site.
- **Traditional healers** ("boiddau" – Rohingya term) may be good source of information regarding health concerns and treatment methods in the sites.
- **Frontline workers**, specifically Bangali staff who speak the Chittagonion dialect, have a wealth of knowledge on the situation and are a good source of information on main concerns expressed by the population, trend analysis and operational constraints.
- **Army personnel and CiC focal points,** present in almost all sites, are a good source of information on availability and quality of infrastructure, community dynamics, population movements and numbers.

Data collection staff code of conduct

- Some key **do's and don'ts** for the assessment teams, that are specifically relevant within this context include:

DO'S	DON'TS
Greet with "Salam"	Interview during prayer time
Keep silent during call to prayer	Publicly or even among family members discuss topics related to family planning and SGBV
Interview women privately, by female interviewers	Ask about non-marital romantic relationships
Place elders in the front during group discussions with mixed age groups.	Take pictures without consent
Wear long clothing and take off your shoes when entering a site/home	Show soles of shoes when sitting down

- A list of important do's and don'ts relevant to all contexts can be found in Annex A
- Ensure enumerators and note-takers are of the **same gender as the respondent**. The space of the female respondent should always be respected and enumerators should be observant of her interest or reluctance to participate in the survey. Ensure enumerators working with children are trained in **child friendly assessment** practices.
- **University students** have been successfully recruited to undertake different types of assessments. This is also a common method to attract female assessment staff.
- Field staff frequently encounter complaints and protection risks and should be aware of how and where to **refer (urgent) cases.**
- As **knowledge about available services** and aid is limited among the refugee population, enumerators should have basic knowledge on the available assistance, how to access it and how it is distributed prior to the assessment. This information can be collected from relevant sectors and ISCG.

Participant selection and identification

- Carefully consider the influence of the Mahjis on the respondents when involving the **Mahjis, and the traditional leadership**, in participant selection, in order to minimize bias. While this is an effective way to identify participants, it can skew the representativeness of the selected group and influence their responses or the issues they raise (especially in their presence).
- Due to the hilly terrain, it will be difficult to gather those with **limited physical mobility** into one location for a discussion. Consider whether household visits are more appropriate to capture the perspectives of these and other groups with specific needs.
- It is not always clear to assessment teams who is a **recent arrival, part of the pre-influx' refugee community, or a member of the host community**. All have significant but varying needs and vulnerabilities, and should be analysed separately. Some might claim to have arrived recently with the intention of accessing (additional) support. Assessment teams should have geographical and historical knowledge of Rakhine State to cross examine the groups being assessed. Carrying copies of maps of Rakhine with Rakhine and Rohingya village names is recommended. This is much less likely in registered camps, where there is a close-knit community.
- **Unaccompanied and Separated Children** often identify neighbours as immediate or extended family members to avoid separation. In rare occasions, such cases involve trafficking and forced labour elements. Data collection teams and facilitators should pay attention to the child's demeanour and take appropriate measures to mitigate the risk of trafficking or child labour. This issue should be specifically addressed during assessment trainings.

Logistics

- Before starting any data collection or assessment activity, **discuss** the objective and scope of the assessment with the Mahjis, army personnel present and on-site coordination structures.

- **Navigation** within the sites can be extremely difficult and enumerator teams often get lost. Provide offline mapping software to support movement and to pinpoint geographic locations of data points.

- The administrative boundaries and names of sites are often changing so **geotagging** the information collected is essential.

- Sites may impose (temporary) **curfews**, whereby outsiders such as assessment team members are not allowed to stay beyond a certain time, usually 5 p.m.

- There is mobile phone, and often internet (data) coverage, in all sites except for the border regions. This facilitates **mobile data collection**, which has been successfully used as an assessment tool by multiple actors within this context. It is however recommended to use data collection platforms with offline capacity such as Kobo.

- Due to the highly congested context, it can be difficult to find the appropriate **physical space** to conduct interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews conducted in public spaces, including mosques, attract large groups of onlookers. In the absence of appropriate infrastructure, families can be asked to provide a refugee shelter for the duration of the interview. However, please note that female family members and children will most likely remain in the shelter during interviews, as they will have limited alternatives.

- Consider limiting focus and community group discussions to **one hour**, as the lack of space and heat could limit the attention span of respondents.

DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS

Recall questions

- Due to trauma caused by the atrocities and low literacy and awareness, some respondents **may not be able to specify precise times and dates**. In such situations, a reference point for the current influx could be the most recent Eid-Al-Adha (which took place on 2 September 2017).

- Lack of both education and systematic birth registration means many Rohingya **do not keep track of age and birth dates**. To avoid confusion about age, surveyors should be familiar with recent historical events (e.g. 2012 violence, 1988 democracy movement, 1982 citizenship law, 1948 independence etc.) so that respondents can say how many years they were born before or after such events.

Language and Definitions

- Enumerators should be fluent in Bangla (Chittagonian) and **knowledgeable of the sometimes subtle but important differences between Chittagonian and Rohingya dialects**. Rohingya speakers estimate that there is around a 70% similarity between Chittagonian and Rohingya.

- Most enumerators will not be fluent in English and a tested **translation of the tools** is recommended to make sure all concepts are fully understood.

- When asked about their place of origin, people often give the **village tract instead of the village name**, which complicates analysis. Having respondents point out locations on a map might address this issue.

- When **describing security forces** in Myanmar, Rohingya interchangeably use 'military', 'loonting', 'nasaka' and 'BGP' even though each refer to different personnel. Surveyors may consider showing pictures of each uniform to obtain accurate answers.

- A list with **translations of key concepts** is currently being developed by the Communication With Communities (CWC) Working Group.

- Most **sector working groups** are in the process of standardising indicators, questions and translations. To ensure harmonisation of data collection tools, contact the relevant sector IM or focal point. (contacts available here).

Specific Needs and Sensitivities

- Issues related to **family planning/contraception, SGBV and trafficking** should be approached with sensitivity and discussed privately and only upon establishing a safe environment, by a qualified practitioner. Any direct question may offend the interviewee due to the cultural, religious and social taboo associated with these topics.
- **Do not collect information from refugees on highly sensitive topics such as reasons for displacement and exposure to SGBV unless the capacity is in place to follow up on and refer individual cases.** Ensure protection actors are present when conducting assessments likely to generate information on such topics.
- Although **return to Myanmar** is a sensitive topic, communities have been very open to discussing prospects and will mention return during discussions about the future without being asked.
- Female respondents may feel uncomfortable to say their **husbands' names** in front of other family members, as it can be considered disrespectful. This can be avoided by asking the name of the male family member from other family members if possible.
- Some information that is key to understanding the needs involves collecting data on activities that **refugees are not able to pursue legally**, such as accessing employment, or that could **result in host community tensions**, such as collection of firewood. Carefully consider how this information is collected and (publicly) presented, as results might put refugees at risk.

Annex A – Enumerator do's and don'ts

DO'S	DON'TS
Explain objectives and reasons for participation to respondents	Shout, publicly blame, make assumptions or pass judgement
Obtain informed consent from respondents (see Annex B)	Make promises or infer that the assessment or participation in it will result in direct assistance being provided
Avoid leading statements and questions	Facilitate or interview while eating and drinking, without providing the same to others in the group
Organize the meeting in a safe and comfortable environment.	Rush the interview or group discussion. Allow for time after the questionnaires for persons to ask follow-up questions or to raise an issue of concern to them. Be aware of procedures for response and referral pathways
Encourage participation of people with a diverse range of backgrounds, including people of differing age, gender and socio-economic background	
Ensure anonymity (identity of the respondent is unknown) or confidentiality (the identity of the respondent is known – or can be known – but the use of this information is restricted to certain individuals) of respondents is respected during data collection, processing and dissemination.	
Encourage respondents to be comfortable and feel they are at the same level – e.g. sit on the floor if they are	

Annex B – Informed Consent

All respondents should provide informed consent before participating in an assessment This means providing sufficient information about the assessment and ensuring that there is no explicit or implicit coercion, so that prospective participants can make an informed and free decision on their possible involvement. A discussion around informed consent includes the following messages:

- The objective of the assessment and how the data will be used
- Participation is voluntary and no one is obligated to respond to any questions if he or she does not wish. No one is obligated to share personal experiences if he or she does not wish
- Participants can leave the discussion at any time
- What the assessment may or may not lead to in terms of outcome.
- How participants will receive feedback

Annex C – Key Assessment Resources

- ACAPS, Assessment Resource Library, ongoing
- Child Protection Cluster, Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit, 2012
- Child Protection Cluster, Guidance on the integration of Child Protection Issues into multi-sectoral and other humanitarian assessments, 2015.
- GBV Assessment and Situation Analysis, 2012
- Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC), 2015, Multi-Sector Initial Rapid Assessment Guidance
- Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS), Profiling and Assessment Resource Kit (PARK), on-going
- ECB/ACAPS, The Good Enough Guide to Assessments, 2014
- Sphere Project, Sphere for Assessments, 2014
- UNHCR, Age, Gender and Diversity Policy, 2011
- UNHCR, Needs Assessment for Refugee Emergencies (NARE)
- UNHCR, Needs Assessment Handbook, 2017 and accompanying tools : http://needsassessment.unhcr.org/
- UNHCR, Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern, 2015