

STRENGTHENING ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN FAITH LEADERS AND HUMANITARIAN ACTORS



A case study from Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh



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Cover photo: Road in Camp 4 Extension, Kutupalong camp in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh.

Photo credit: UNHCR/Vincent Tremeau

Project objective: To improve protection for refugees by building cooperation between humanitarian actors and faith leaders.

Dates: May 2019 - ongoing

Population groups: Refugees

Partners: Rohingya faith-based leaders, BBC Media Action, Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC), Action Aid Bangladesh and Technical Assistance Incorporated (TAI).

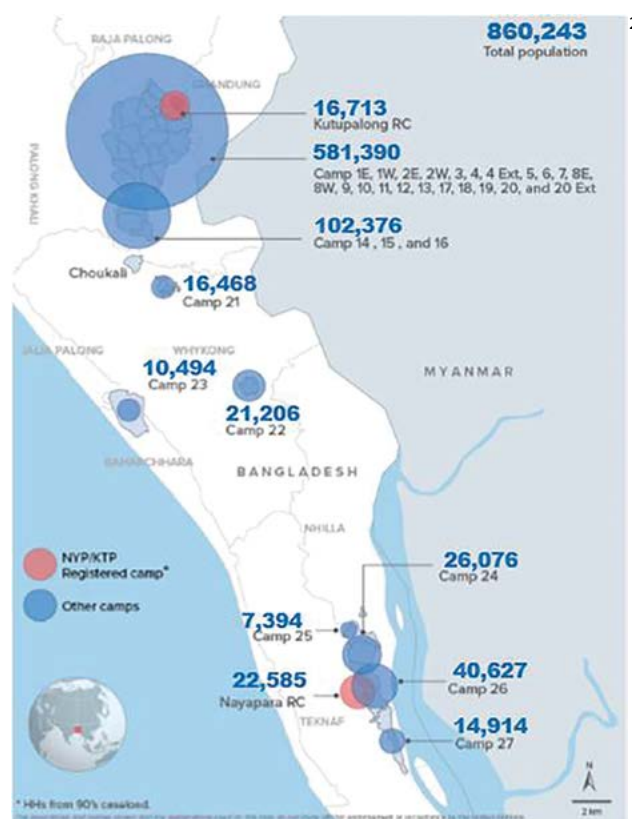
PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 2019, UNHCR and partners strengthened engagement with imams in Rohingya refugee communities in Cox's Bazaar. Through dialogue and capacity building, the gap between faith leaders and humanitarian actors was reduced, and the leadership of imams was supported and drawn upon to raise awareness of, and address, protection issues in camps.

CONTEXT

Bangladesh continues, generously, to host Rohingya refugees fleeing persecution and statelessness in Myanmar. As of May 2020, there were 860,243¹ Rohingya refugees residing in south-eastern Bangladesh, where they had spontaneously settled in and around existing refugee communities in Kutupalong and Nayapara settlements in Cox's Bazaar. Around 51 per cent of them are under 18 years old, 52 per cent are female and 4.6 per cent of households include at least one person with a specific protection need.

The rapid nature of this displacement has severely overstretched the already limited services and resources in one of the most disaster-prone countries in the region, where heavy monsoon rains, cyclones and devastating landslides and floods are common. Against this backdrop, overcrowding, challenges in accessing services due to poor infrastructure, and high rates of communicable diseases, continue to disproportionately affect young women and girls, older persons, pregnant women and persons with disabilities. As a result, the physical safety, security, psychosocial wellbeing and health of these groups has been severely compromised. Restrictions on freedom of movement and limited livelihood opportunities exacerbate their risk of exposure to child labour, gender-based violence (GBV), human trafficking and other protection concerns, while also significantly impacting upon peaceful coexistence with the host community.



Map of Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh, indicating the location and size of the different camps in the area.

¹ UNHCR Bangladesh Statistics, May 2020 https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar_refugees

² UNHCR Bangladesh Statistics, May 2020 https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar_refugees

The UNHCR approach to community-based protection is to support the refugee's inherent capacities and promote their resilience in the face of these challenges. The majority of Rohingya refugees identify as Muslim and belong to communities in which imams, through their influence, play an active role in meeting the basic

needs of displaced persons while at the same time exercising moral authority over their faith communities. The limited engagement between humanitarian actors and faith leaders signals a need to build on trust and set the stage for potential.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Faith leaders play an important role in shaping and moderating issues in Rohingya communities, with the potential to promote and sustain positive changes, including influencing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. Through interaction with Rohingya refugees, UNHCR observed that they frequently consult community elders and imams as important and trusted protection actors on significant issues affecting their daily lives. Imams play an intrinsic role, re-interpreting, authenticating, and guiding their congregations according to Islamic belief. Consequently, activities supported by imams and faith-based institutions have the potential to promote and sustain positive change in their communities. There is a need to close the gap between faith leaders and humanitarian actors.

In May 2019, UNHCR selected nine camps to engage faith leaders in community-based protection initiatives. Through partnership with Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC), Action Aid Bangladesh and Technical Assistance Incorporated (TAI) and BBC Media Action, some specific objectives of this project were:

- To understand the role(s) and influence of faith leaders and faith-based organizations in the Rohingya refugee communities;
- To identify opportunities for engagement to close the gap between faith leaders and humanitarian actors and to address the protection concerns of Rohingya refugees.

PROCESS AND ACTIVITIES



1. MAPPING

UNHCR collected demographic data on faith leaders and faith-based organizations in camps through field visits to implementing partners, imams, and madrasa teachers. The exercise helped to build trust between UNHCR and imams, while seeking to better understand the dynamics of faith-based institutions, including the relationships between imams, mosques, and madrasahs.



2. ENGAGEMENT MEETINGS

UNHCR held meetings with 554 imams in camps 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 21 and 22 to understand their influence in their respective communities and identify opportunities for engagement in community-based protection. The meetings allowed imams to understand the work of humanitarians and express concerns regarding the services provided in camps. It also helped UNHCR to understand imams' roles and responsibilities, their perceptions and attitudes to community issues. UNHCR staff led theological reflection by examining scriptures and religious

knowledge, which allowed for insight into imams' views on sensitive issues, including women's roles in the public sphere, and identified entry points for UNHCR and partner collaboration. Following this, 66 imam focal points were identified in each camp, to represent other imams in their respective camp blocs. These initial engagements paved the way for dialogue sessions with imams on specific protection issues as a way of positively influencing behavioural norms in their communities.



Photo credit: Azmina Karim, Protection Associate, UNHCR

First meeting with faith actors in Camp 22.



3. ACTION PLANS

Inclusive action plans were developed with imams on community protection issues that they identified as requiring support and community-led interventions.



4. DIALOGUE SESSIONS

Dialogue sessions held with the 66 imam focal points in each camp explored problems faced by their communities and their role in addressing them. Imams were introduced to key messaging on various protection issues, including child trafficking, child education, domestic violence, landslides, personal and environmental hygiene, marital issues, social cohesion and conflict mitigation. Protection principles and activities of humanitarian actors involved in the response were also shared

with imams in a manner that encouraged two-way communication as a way of ensuring that information was not perceived as being imposed by 'outsiders'. Imams were provided with audio recordings of key messages, which they were encouraged to share in meetings with other imams, madrasa teachers and refugee community members. This was a successful intervention as congregations began to request that imams continue to share important protection messaging in these spaces regularly.



5. CAPACITY BUILDING

UNHCR and BBC Media Action organized two one-day trainings for 90 imams in camps 13, 14, 15, 16, 21 and 22 on effective communication, focusing on their facilitation skills and feedback from their communities. The trainings aimed to enhance

imams' understanding of their roles as protection actors in their communities and to support their communication skills through roleplay sessions to deliver protection messaging.



Photo credit: Mohammed Shahareyat, Field Coordinator, TAI

First meeting with imams in Camp 13.

▶ LESSONS LEARNED

- 💡 Staff with unique religious knowledge, language skills and experience working with faith leaders may facilitate this type of collaboration. This expertise can help to facilitate contact with them and identify entry points to building positive working relationships between faith leaders and humanitarian actors.
- 💡 It is important to follow up with faith leaders on a regular basis to build trust and confidence among them. Feedback from faith leaders should actively be sought throughout the processes to ensure two-way communication.
- 💡 Make sure that it is clear that while UNHCR is a secular organization, it also values the support that can be leveraged for persons of concern through partnerships with faith leaders.
- 💡 Imams shared awareness-raising messaging in large religious gatherings that did not always include women. Separate women-only events and other such approaches are needed to ensure that messaging reaches them.
- 💡 Standardized protection and COVID-19 messaging packages were produced in coordination with the Communication with Communities (CwC) working group to ensure consistency and disseminated through WhatsApp groups and partners at community centres.
- 💡 Systematically establish community information and feedback mechanisms in collaboration with faith leaders by having them collect information such as community perceptions, knowledge, attitudes and practice relating to COVID-19.

ANNEX 1

DISTINCTION TABLE

Below you will find the categorization table for field practices. The practice above from Bangladesh has been defined as a case study based on the criteria below:

	Case Study	Emerging Practice	Promising Practice
Rationale	<p>Capture practices to provide information on process, insights and lessons that are of interest (topics, themes etc.), but there is no requirement to evidence the study.</p> <p>The purpose of case studies is to capture successful and/or unsuccessful attempts to implement a project. These are considered valuable for learning and improving.</p> <p>There is a requirement that the study was designed to meet minimum criteria in <u>design</u>.</p>	<p>Identify and track practices which may have not yet produced sufficient results but there are indications that it could. The practice should not have been documented elsewhere with an exception of programme evaluations. There is a requirement to ensure that it meets the minimum criteria in <u>design and results</u>.</p>	<p>Document and share practices that are promising. The practice should not have been documented elsewhere with an exception of programme evaluations. There is a requirement to ensure that it meets the minimum criteria in <u>design and results</u>.</p>
Definition	<p>Descriptive and explanatory overview of a practice, or part of a practice, without requirement for provision of evidence or any judgement as to its value or sustainability. It can provide insights and lessons learned into future programming.</p>	<p>Practice that shows early indications of producing positive results to transform lives of individuals or communities.</p>	<p>Practice that is proven to work well and produce sustainable results, and has a protective and/or transformative potential for individuals or communities, as demonstrated by quality and reliable evidence. It can serve as a model to be replicated and scaled up.</p>
Results (evidence level)	<p>No results are required.</p> <p>It is a plain explanation of the process that does not have any results or may have very limited results such as quotes about the process.</p>	<p>The availability of indications can be 'showing signs of some aspects' to 'consider producing positive results along the way'.</p> <p>Indications can be assessment (qualitative or quantitative) or monitoring results that do not have a comparison with a baseline. An emerging practice should be something that has the potential to become a promising practice</p>	<p>There should be some existing results of effectiveness of the practice demonstrated as positive changes that the practice is making. Baseline and midline or endline data (qualitative or quantitative) should be available as well as documented results before and after the practice is carried out.</p> <p>When results are not documented, the practice can be still considered if staff members or partners can provide a detailed account on observable changes.</p>

¹A demonstration of attempted adherence refers to those practices that attempted to apply the criteria and did not succeed for various reasons such as context/operational environment etc. It is recognised that all practice implementation must strive toward adhering to and achieving the criteria. It is acknowledged that there are lessons to be learned from challenges faced and unsuccessful attempts.

	Case Study	Emerging Practice	Promising Practice
Inclusion	Can be a study that is inclusive of all groups or that is targeted.	Can be a practice that is inclusive of all groups or that is targeted.	Can be a practice that is inclusive of all groups or that is targeted.
Criteria *optional ®Should only be indication that these were considered in the design phase in order to allow for capturing all types of case studies.	Relevance® Participation® Age® Gender® Diversity® Do no harm® Innovation*	Relevance Participation Age Gender Diversity Do no harm Innovation* Results (indicated outputs/ outcomes/impacts)	Relevance Participation Age Gender Diversity Do no harm Innovation* Results (outputs/outcomes/ impacts) Sustainability Replicability Scalability
Timeline	No minimum requirement for implementation duration. Can be on-going or recently completed.	No minimum requirement for implementation duration. Should be on-going.	Implemented within the past 3 years, can be concluded or ongoing.
Submission	All submissions, regardless of a category, will be submitted using a common template to describe the practice briefly (not more than three pages) applying a self-rating tool		
Process *clearance is only needed for documents for external publication	Self-rating by the field operation Review by HQ to confirm self-rating Completion of documentation by field team Review of documentation by HQ + editing Publish on intranet	Self-rating by the field operation Review by HQ to confirm self-rating Completion of documentation by field team Review of documentation by HQ + editing Approval and clearance (for external publications) at field level (+Bureau) Clearance at HQ and publish	Self-rating by the field operation Review by HQ to confirm self-rating Completion of documentation by field team Review of documentation by HQ + editing Approval and clearance (for external publications) at field level (+Bureau) Clearance at HQ and publish
How it will be used	Can be hosted online (intranet) Incorporated into learning tools and materials Can be offered as examples in various reports	Can be hosted online (intranet) Can be published in print or online for external audiences Incorporated into learning tools and materials Can be offered as examples in various reports	Can be hosted online (intranet) Can be published in print or online for external audiences Incorporated into learning tools and materials Can be offered as examples in various reports

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