

Since the mass exodus of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh beginning in 2016, some camp residents have begun building an emergent civil society. As they develop networks, lead community service activities, liaise with Bangladeshi and international communities, and participate in advocacy on behalf of refugees, members of the new community-based organisations (CBOs) navigate challenges and questions around legitimacy, acceptance, strategy, and capacity.



CBO MEMBERS SEW MASKS FOR COVID-19 PREVENTION

CPJ's Approach






CPJ is an academic institution within Brac University working to build peace and promote justice across Bangladesh. CPJ has worked in the Rohingya refugee camps and host communities of Cox's Bazar since 2017. Working as a knowledge partner with NGOs and UN agencies, CPJ promotes community engagement, social cohesion and peace building through research, training, advocacy and program support.

About the Study

Centre for Justice (CPJ), Brac University conducted a study in February and March 2020 analysing emergent Rohingya CBOs in Cox's Bazar and potential scope, opportunities and challenges to strengthen Rohingya voice and humanitarian outcomes. The study aimed to explore and analyse CBOs' emergence, members' views about their groups, and host community and camp authorities' perspectives towards these CBOs in order to identify potential areas of collaboration. Four areas of investigation:

- i) Governance and representation
- ii) Inter and intra-communal dynamics
- iii) Impact of restrictive policies
- iv) Culture and community

Key Findings

-  **Civil society iteration:** Shift from political focus in 2018-19 toward community development and service activities in 2020, precipitated by security measures after 25 August 2019. This shift is marked by a proliferation of groups building horizontal leadership through community organising.
-  **Coexisting spheres of influence and representation:** Rohingya civil society members including CBO members, religious leaders and schoolteachers fill a unique role in addressing the community needs in a landscape of influencers that also includes majhis, camp-level committees and humanitarian actors.
-  **Limited opportunities to develop legitimacy and broaden reach:** As non-elected voluntary participants, CBO members normally do not claim to exert a representative voice on behalf of the wider refugee population, but many would like greater visibility. Though some are already well-known within their communities, CBOs have few resources or means of communication to raise awareness about their work. This leads to limited awareness amongst the refugee population.
-  **Potential to bolster moderate voices and promote self-reliance:** Lacking direct relationships, some humanitarian decisionmakers are unaware of CBOs or misinterpret them as vying for political influence; this dissuades engagement. In contrast, CBO members maintain close ties with international media, human rights and diplomatic actors. CBOs generally support women's and youth's inclusion and express interest in promoting self-reliance amongst refugees.
-  **Limited interaction with authorities and host communities:** There is limited awareness and understanding of the CBOs amongst local actors, preventing CBOs from helping strengthen social cohesion with the host community and impeding their ability to get support and recognition from authorities.

"We know we need to really explain ourselves to the host community. They don't get why we had to come here to Bangladesh, and why we are still staying here. For example, the local media is negative about us. They don't understand our suffering. They just see us as a national security threat..."

We need many kinds of trainings. We need training on leadership and communication skills. Once or twice a month we should have a joint meeting or workshop with the host community. We know that local students are suffering so much here because of our Rohingya problem."

-Founder of a youth CBO

Activities of CBOs



Requests from humanitarian agencies:

- Inclusion of Rohingya in humanitarian planning
- Opportunities for meaningful participation
- Capacity building support
- In-kind materials and resources
- Recognition from camp authorities
- Support to work toward social cohesion with host community
- Access to phone and Internet

"Please don't make decisions about Rohingya without consulting Rohingya."
- CBO founding member

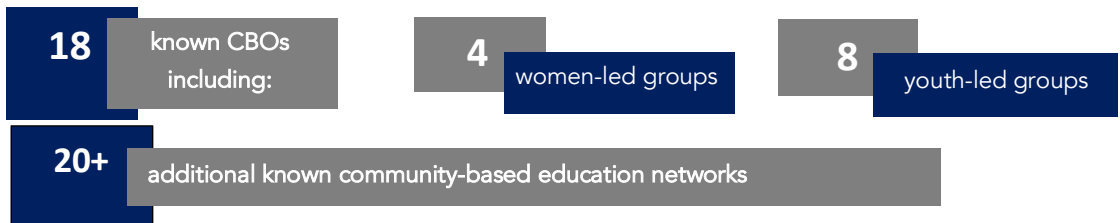


CBO MEMBERS ENGAGE IN A WORKSHOP ABOUT PERSONAL IDENTITIES LED BY CPJ VOLUNTEERS



FIGURE 1: TRADITIONAL SNACK-MAKING COMPETITION

By the numbers



"The growing number of groups is good for our community. There is not just one strong group... Things are spread around, so more people can get information. We can reach and train more people this way. There is new knowledge and more people's brains... Before, we thought we could go back to Myanmar soon... Now we see that it will take a long time, so we need to organize broadly. Women and youth need strong representation and their own groups. "

-Unaffiliated civil society member

Methodology: The analysis relied on the researchers' experiences and observations as well as primary qualitative data collection including key informant interviews with camp civil society members, host community stakeholders, and camp authorities, and focus group discussions with CBO representatives.

Contact CPJ

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Rapid analysis: Rohingya refugees CBOs' response to COVID-19

Activities of camp community-based organizations (CBOs) to address COVID-19

- Demonstrate practices for COVID-19 prevention by visiting camp households and community-run facilities
- Distribute COVID-19 prevention kits
- Produce short films, video and audio clips made on smartphones
- Clarify misconceptions with religious leaders, elders, influential persons
- Provide feedback to humanitarian agencies, camp management about community's views
- Use Internet to get news, update others on global COVID-19 developments
- Collect and share information on potential cases, community concerns, risks, challenges.

Recommendations to humanitarian agencies for engaging CBO members in COVID-19 response

- Provide accurate information and guidelines for dissemination to broader community
- Understand networks of trust between CBOs and broader community
- Empower members to serve as knowledge agents and points of contact
- Support CBOs to undertake contingency planning in case of a large outbreak that impedes humanitarian access and overwhelms facilities. (Tracing patients, shielding vulnerable groups, encouraging isolation and shelter-in-place, planning dignified burials)
- Encourage and utilise CBOs' records of incidents, needs, challenges
- Develop community-based support and communication systems to establish an effective and trusted response



Why is phone and Internet access critical?

Improved communication access is crucial to combat COVID-19:

- Provision of accessible, accurate, evidence-based information can help overcome panic, rumours, fake news
- Internet access will increase impact of Rohingya-language videos and audio clips
- Those showing symptoms can call health providers for advice without physical movement
- Those in isolation will be able to contact loved ones

Methodology

Information was collected from male and female Rohingya youth, emergent CBO leaders, camp management (CiC), NGO staff, and a local journalist. A total of twelve 30-minute phone interviews were conducted, mainly with residents of Camps 1E, 1W, 3, 5, 14, 15, and 24.

Objectives of the Rapid Assessment

- (a) Assess CBOs' state of awareness and preparedness
- (b) Gather information on CBOs' engagement in COVID-19 response
- (c) Learn CBOs' challenges and concerns in responding to COVID-19
- (d) Identify potential scope and role of Rohingya youth and CBOs to support the mainstream COVID-19 humanitarian response

How can humanitarian agencies and donors engage CBOs to address trust issues?

- Include CBOs in COVID-19 response planning and management
- Engage CBO members to raise awareness and share messages
- Use Rohingya language in campaigns and information dissemination
- Continue adequate distribution of food, hygiene, and other relief items