People accessing the internet on the Buthidaung-Ah Ngu Maw Road.

| September 2020 |

CASS

Community Analysis Support System

ROHINGYA RESILIENCIES

Contents

Introduction

This paper briefly explores the experiences of Rohingya communities displaced to Bangladesh as well as those remaining in northern Rakhine. Though conditions in both locations remain dire, Rohingya communities are finding creative ways to navigate the challenges they face. This paper seeks to understand these resiliencies as a means of identifying opportunities for supporting community-led action and building on existing momentum. Specifically, it focuses on three themes: 1) freedom of movement; 2) access to information; and 3) informal dispute resolution mechanisms.

Methodology

Primary research for this paper was conducted via phone. A total of 12 qualitative interviews were conducted with community members between June 26 and July 3, 2020. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to identify and select participants. The sampling criteria emphasised geographic diversity, but also ensured balance in age and gender. The participants were aged between 24 to 48 years and lived in rural and urban parts of Buthidaung Township and Maungdaw Township, Myanmar as well as refugee camps in Kutupalong and Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Given that dynamics in Sittwe Township, Myanmar are better known to response actors active in Rakhine State, the research does not include participants from camps or villages in that township.

Limitations

Access, security concerns, and language barriers were limitations to the research and had a particularly acute impact on the participation of women. Overall, the sample size is small, but the data gathered has been complemented by regular check-ins with communities as part of CASS's ongoing context monitoring. Further limitations should also be noted.

Language barriers:
Interviews were conducted in Burmese. Though all participants could speak Burmese, their pronunciation was at times difficult for the interviewer to understand, particularly over the phone. In order to address this limitation, the interviewer gave interviewees additional time to express themselves and discuss their experiences. However, women are less likely to speak Burmese than men, and as such, involving them in the research was particularly challenging.

Trust Building:
Remote research is not as effective a means of building trust as in-person interviewing. Many participants find it traumatic to speak to outsiders, and given the extreme restrictions they face, safety concerns are also front of mind. Snowball sampling was used to minimise this effect, enabling the CASS team to make introductions via trusted contacts.

Internet Access:
Due to ongoing internet restrictions, it remains difficult to contact participants in Buthidaung Township and the Bangladesh camps. The government's decision to lift the internet ban in Maungdaw Township has made it somewhat easier to conduct remote interviews there.

Background

Since an escalation in 2012, Rohingya communities across Rakhine State have been subject to conflict and state-sponsored violence. In addition to the Myanmar military's (Tatmadaw) large scale clearance operations, which forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh for safety, those who remain are denied freedom of movement through a mixture of formal laws, local orders and regulations, and informal intercommunal policing. Despite having held many different forms of state-recognised identity documents[1] in the past, in recent decades Rohingya have been effectively denied citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Law.[2] As a result, the Rohingya have been politically disenfranchised, but

[1]   For more on the many different forms of identification provided for Rohingya by the Government of Myanmar, see Verena Hölzl, "Identity and belonging in a card: How tattered Rohingya IDs trace a trail toward statelessness", The New Humanitarian, 1 March 2018, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2018/03/01/identity-and-belonging-card-how-tattered-rohingya-ids-trace-trail-toward (accessed 8 September 2020).

[2]   Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Burma Citizenship Law (1982) http://un-act.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/myanmar-citizenship-law.pdf (accessed 8 September 2020).

also stripped of their access to basic services, including education and healthcare.

In 2012, a series of state-sponsored attacks on the Rohingya community coupled with intercommunal conflicts in Rakhine state, and accompanied by growing anti-Muslim sentiment, displaced an estimated 140,000 Rohingya. Many of those affected relocated or were forced into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps – ostensibly for their own safety. Those that remained in their villages during the unrest became reliant on state security forces, most notably the Tatmadaw, for protection. As conditions normalised, Rohingya communities found themselves unable to return to their places of origin and, in the case of those who remained, prevented from travelling freely. From 2012 to 2016, these conditions continued to worsen.

Between 2016 and 2017, skirmishes between a newly emergent Rohingya 'insurgency', the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), and the Tatmadaw once again destabilize the region. The Tatmadaw's euphemistically named 'clearance operations', designed to terrorise communities into giving up embedded combatants, included widespread and open targeting of civilians by state security forces. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights the Tatmadaw committed numerous human rights violations including mass killing, systematic sexual violence, and torture.[3] Consequently, an estimated 730,000 people – the majority of them Rohingya – fled across the border to Bangladesh seeking safety.[4]

Although the Tatmadaw has turned its attention to a new enemy, **the Arakan Army**, since an escalation of conflict since late 2018, Rohingya communities – both those remaining in Rakhine State and those displaced to Bangladesh – remain confined, their freedoms and quality of life radically curtailed. Despite international pressure, both Myanmar and Bangladesh continue to deny the Rohingya any genuine path to citizenship. Though the challenges Rohingya communities face as a result of this lack of legal recognition are multitudinous, access to information and freedom of movement have emerged as two of the most pressing and interrelated concerns.

Within Myanmar, a government imposed internet shutdown forced telecom companies to cut mobile internet in eight townships across Rakhine and Chin States in June 2019.[5] The government has justified the shutdown as a means of protecting the public interest and ensuring security in the face of an increasingly emboldened Arakan Army.[6] In reality, the shutdown puts communities at greater risk. Not only is it difficult to track and respond to changes in conflict dynamics, particularly planned troop movements, but with the emergence of COVID-19 communities in the affected areas are unable to seek out life-saving information.[7] At the time of writing, 14 Rohingya have tested positive for COVID-19 after returning from Bangladesh.[8] According to the Development Media Group, 80 others who attempted to return informally during the pandemic have been arrested by local authorities in Maungdaw Township. Among them, 36 people were charged under the Immigration Law section 13(1) and 13(5) and sentenced to six months in jail with hard labour.[9] According to the communications published by the Maungdaw District Immigration Department, action is currently being taken against the remaining 14 people who returned from Bangladesh. Similarly, the Bangladesh government's continued restriction on internet and mobile phone access has almost certainly contributed to a growing COVID-19[10] outbreak in the refugee camps.[11] Freedom of movement restrictions in both locations make it difficult, and in some cases impossible, for communities to seek out and receive adequate treatment.

[3]   BBC, "Rohingya crisis: UN sees 'ethnic cleansing' in Myanmar", 11 September 2017, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-41224108 (accessed 8 September 2020).

[4]   Human Rights Watch, World Report 2019: Myanmar, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/myanmar-burma (accessed 8 September 2020).

[5]   Human Rights Watch, "Myanmar: End World's Longest Internet Shutdown", news release, 19 June 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/19/myanmar-end-worlds-longest-internet-shutdown (accessed 8 September 2020).

[6]   The intensification of the Arakan Army and Tatmadaw conflict has also had a deleterious effect on the Rakhine Buddhist community. The decision to classify the Arakan Army as a 'terrorist organisation' has made movement restrictions even more severe for both Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya living in affected areas.

[7]   For more information on the impact of the internet shutdown, please see, CASS, Information ecosystems in Northern Rakhine State, August 2020, https://cass-mm.org/paper-3-information-ecosystems-in-northern-rakhine-state/ (accessed 8 September 2020).

[8]   COVID-19 Myanmar Surveillance Dashboard, https://bit.ly/2WIVHmA (accessed 8 September 2020).

[9]   DMG News, "Six Muslims who arrived illegally were fined and imprisoned", 22 July 2020, https://www.facebook.com/dmgnewsagency/posts/1760137467471990 (accessed 8 September 2020).

[10] Devex, "As COVID-19 deaths rise in Cox's Bazar, is increased testing enough?", 10 June 2020, https://www.devex.com/news/as-covid-19-deaths-rise-in-cox-s-bazar-is-increased-testing-enough-97412 (accessed 8 September 2020).

[11] BBC, "Coronavirus: Two Rohingya test positive in refugee camp", 14 May 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-52669299 (accessed 8 September 2020).

Freedom of Movement

The continued restrictions on movement are systematic and multivalent. There are two formal modes by which the restrictions have been issued. This section will look both at the implementation of these restrictions as well as at their impacts and means by which Rohingya navigate them.

Modes of Restriction

In Myanmar, Rohingya freedom of movement is curtailed legally via Section 144 of the colonial-era Criminal Procedure Code, which limits the size of gatherings and institutes a curfew. Township administration officers announced curfews in Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Sittwe townships in 2012; the curfew banned gatherings of five or more people in public places from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. After two years, the curfew was lifted in Sittwe Township but remained in place in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships. Following an escalation in the conflict between the Arakan Army and the Tatmadaw conflict in late 2018, the Rakhine state government

> *Although the Myanmar government argues that the NVC is the first step toward citizenship verification, in reality it classifies the Rohingya as 'foreigners' and requires that they later subject themselves to a process of 'citizenship scrutiny'.*

extended the curfew to an additional five townships,[12] including Ponnaygun, Rathedaung, Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, and Minbya. The extended curfew also expanded the hours of coverage from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. The exact timing of the curfew not only shortened market hours – markets in Rakhine State open as early as 4 a.m. – but also prevented fishing during the moonrise and evening high tide, roughly 7:30 p.m. to 9:30pm. It also forced communities to abandon plans to celebrate religious festivals, such as Eid, and prevented other religious ceremonies.

Travel permissions have been another modality through which control has been exerted over the movement of Rohingya. Travel permits (*thauk kan sar*) are required for any travel – whether within the township, between neighbouring townships, or travel outside the state. Formally, permission can be granted by the township or state immigration office; and according to policy permits can only be given if the individual needs to seek healthcare. Movement for the sake of education or livelihoods is not considered necessary under the current restrictions. Applying for a travel permit is costly, time consuming, and the exchange is often marred by corruption.

Given that Rohingya generally lack currently recognised official documentation, authorities regularly deny petitions for travel permits. Rather than address the root causes of the issue – namely, the Government of Myanmar's historic and ongoing denial of citizenship for the Rohingya – the government continues to push National Verification Cards (NVCs) as a solution. Rohingya can generally travel within a township in Rakhine State if they have an NVC or a receipt showing that they previously possessed a national ID or verification card issued before the 2010 elections. The government's strategy effectively forces Rohingya to accept NVCs in exchange for movement, thereby undermining the Rohingya's claim to citizenship. Indeed, some Rohingya have been forced to accept the NVC for their survival. Still, others have continued to refuse the NVC on the basis of its denial of their right to citizenship and requirement to declare their 'race' as Bengali.

Although the Myanmar government argues that the NVC is the first step toward citizenship verification, in reality it classifies the Rohingya as 'foreigners' and requires that they later subject themselves to a process of 'citizenship scrutiny'. This process, which involves examining whether or not the applicant can prove family history in Myanmar that precedes the British occupation, is one hardly any contemporary rural family, Rohingya or otherwise, could satisfy. Though NVCs can *theoretically* extend freedoms to those Rohingya who accept them, given the numerous informal means by which movement restrictions are enforced at the community level, in reality NVCs do not guarantee freedom of movement. Armed only with NVCs, Rohingya would still be forced to contend with the network of checkpoints that mark out

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[12] Moe Myint, "Curfew Imposed in 5 Townships in Northern Rakhine", The Irrawaddy, 2 April 2019,
https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/curfew-imposed-5-Townships-northern-rakhine.html (accessed 8 September 2020).
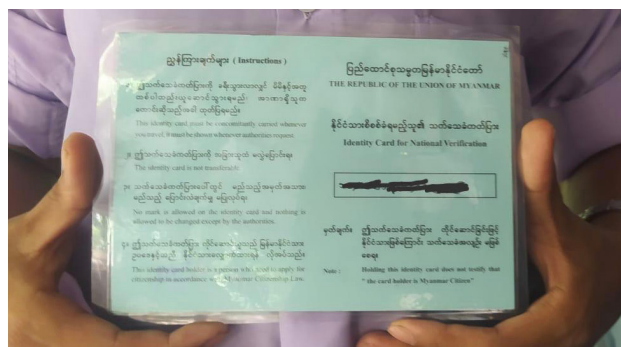
A Rohingya man shows his NVC card.

village tract and township boundaries, many of which operate a system of extortion that precludes all but the wealthiest Rohingya from crossing regularly.

Some of these informal restrictions are enforced by Rohingya communities themselves. According to CASS interviews, a lack of trust and fear causes Rohingya participants to avoid the Rakhine community, even preventing them from visiting former friends. One woman in Buthidaung Township told CASS that after the 2017 attacks she avoided going to Rakhine-owned shops even when she needed to buy food and other goods. She mentioned that both communities are afraid of each other and that a relaxation of formal restrictions might not be enough to change the situation. One male participant in Maungdaw Township noted that although the situation had been fairly calm since 2019, they remained fearful of going to Rakhine villages as they believed police officers to be biased against Rohingya and unlikely to protect them in the event of an altercation or harassment.

After 2017, in many cases authorities began to insist on the possession of an NVC to get travel permission for movement beyond one's own village. Local authorities generally deny travel permission to Sittwe Township, but occasionally allow travel to Yangon for medical treatment. In order to apply for travel permission for healthcare, the petitioner must show a recommendation from their village administrator, a doctor's recommendation, their NVC, and a completed 'Form 4' from the township or state immigration department. The whole process takes anywhere from two to five months as the application is sent to at least 22 departments, including the Yangon immigration offices if the request is for travel to Yangon.[13] The costs increase exponentially with the travel distance; movement within the township may cost 10,000 to 15,000 Myanmar Kyat (MMK), whereas travel outside the township could be anywhere from 5 to 15 Lakh MMK (approximately $1,092 USD). As the money exchanging hands is a bribe, all such costs are unofficial.

Means of Movement

As a result of the time and cost associated with applying for a travel permit, Rohingya turn to brokers to help facilitate the process. As one participant put it:

> To get a travel permit depends on the brokers, some brokers don't have enough money to bribe immigration officers, so it takes too long to get. Most of the brokers are Rakhine and Maramagyi[14] who can speak the Rohingya language. We can apply on our own but it is so difficult to get and takes so much time.
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> **- Rohingya man, 24, Ka Kya Bet Kyan Pyin village, Buthidaung Township**

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[13] Form 4 is a temporary travel permit issued by the Myanmar Immigration Department. Travelers need to fill out their personal details and include where they will go, and for what purpose. They need to submit Form 4 and additional forms such as an original copy of a family list, temporary registration card or NVC, and provide two guarantors. The Township or state immigration department allows people to travel for no more than 14 days.

[14] It is not uncommon in Rakhine State for Hindu and Maramagyi communities to be conflated. In this case, the CASS team followed up with the participant for clarity and he answered that the brokers in his area are indeed Maramagyi (Borua) but added that in other areas Hindus, Rakhine Buddhists, and other Rohingya also work as brokers.

Another man remarked:

> We need to plan one month ahead to get travel permission to Yangon. It is a very long administrative process. If I go to Yangon, I need to apply for travel permission from my township immigration department to Maungdaw, Sittwe, and Yangon immigration office and I need to inform Yangon GAD (General Administration Department) and my Township GAD too. I need to show where I will stay and a detailed plan of my trip. Most of the time if we want to go to Yangon we need to spend at least 10 Lakh (approximately $730 USD). You can see this is why only a few people can go to Yangon. Most people ask brokers to help them and brokers have a very good relationship with immigration offices. Most of them are Rakhine and Rohingya."

- Rohingya man, 37, Buthidaung city, Buthidaung Township

The restrictions on movement clearly represent an enormous and oppressive imposition of the state into the lives of Rohingya. However, engaging a broker – in the cases noted above, a Rakhine, Hindu, or Maramargyi – who has the linguistic skills, relationships, and abilities to navigate both Rohingya social spaces and the systems of the GAD/Tatmadaw to secure travel permissions demonstrates significant agency by which Rohingya work within the system whilst simultaneously contesting its boundaries. There is no doubt that there exists some self-interest and rent-seeking motivation for the brokers and government staff most active in these networks of brokerage, but their participation also reflects a form of resistance to the state and legal status quo. Many ethnic

communities in Rakhine are highly incentivized to act in ways which undermine the central state's authority.[15] Those who engage in these small acts of refusal may be emboldened by the rise of the Arakan Army – one unintended consequence of the group's expansion and rising Rakhine nationalism may be a shift in the willingness of others to act on behalf of the Rohingya if and when such actions are seen as weakening the central state's authority.

Access to Education

Rohingya have extremely limited access to education; even in mixed villages the facilities available are segregated and under resourced. This section will explore how Rohingya communities work around these limitations.

After the 2012 attacks, the GAD physically separated Rakhine and Rohingya communities, citing security concerns. All classrooms in urban schools were divided into two groups: Rakhine students study in classrooms A through C, and Rohingya students study in classrooms D through F. As a result of this policy, there are fewer opportunities for students to engage with their peers from different backgrounds. This lack of interaction poses an enormous challenge to reconciliation, to say nothing of social cohesion. Although teachers from the Ministry of Education receive a salary from the government to provide teaching to these schools, in reality, they only travel to schools outside of Sittwe Township during exam times, citing concerns for their personal safety.

Opportunities for Learning, But Not For All

Rohingya children in rural areas are largely able to access primary education only by attending their own village school or, prior to 2017, local madrassas. Religious education is one means by which Rohingya families have in recent years overcome the restrictions on children's formal education. According to one 2016 GAD report cited by the Irrawaddy, there were an estimated 836 Muslim religious buildings in Maungdaw Township, 442 Muslim religious buildings in Buthidaung Township, and 87 in Rathedaung Township.[16] It is not clear if these figures include both madrassas and mosques, but the numbers nevertheless hint at existing education infrastructure – mosques sometimes double as makeshift schools where needed, and vice versa.[17] According to the GAD's own figures, the combined Rohingya population

[15] For more on these techniques, see, James C. Scott, The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia, Yale University Press, 2009.

[16] Moe Myint, "Ninety Percent of Rohingya Population Ejected from Rakhine", The Irrawaddy, 23 February 2018, https://www.irrawaddy.com/specials/ninety-percent-rohingya-population-ejected-rakhine.html (accessed 8 September 2020).

[17] Ibid.

of Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung townships was approximately 767,038 in 2016. If these estimates are accurate, then each religious building would have been expected to support (on average) 562 persons.[18]

After the 2012 and 2017 conflict most of the buildings were destroyed. Currently eight madrassas are running partially but it is illegal. Children can learn basic Quran and Urdu there. The authority does not allow it to open but they didn't take any action against it.

**- Rohingya man, 25,
Buthidaung Township**

The very basic Islamic schools located inside the mosque compounds teach the Quran and Urdu to both boys and girls. However, once a girl reaches adolescence, she is no longer allowed to attend. Madrassas offer advanced study of religious literature and teach children to memorise and recite the Quran. Key Muslim religious leaders (_Moulvi_) in Rakhine State hold close relationships with the Islamic Religious Affairs Council (IRAC) through which they receive some funding from diaspora and other Myanmar Muslim communities. Critically, however, Madrasas in Rakhine State prohibit women from enrolling.

Most of the Rohingya village schools are run by a local teacher (_ywar khant sayar_) who is appointed by the villagers. These teachers are generally those who have passed the matriculation exam or university students, and rarely trained educators. They use the government curriculum, in combination with their own material. Villagers save money or rice to support these local teachers. As part of the government's response to the ARSA attacks of 2016 and 2017, community prayers were banned and madrassa schools shut down. More recently, in some villages, Rohingya have begun to gather again for prayers and some limited teaching has resumed, but mostly informally. By building relationships with local administrators, Rohingya communities and religious leaders have been able to renew these activities

without harassment, but fear of retaliation from hostile elements among Rakhine communities or from the government remains.

Until recently, Rohingya children living in the camps in Bangladesh have been allowed to receive only nursery-style education provided by non-governmental organisations. Rohingya communities had attempted to provide their own teaching to youth, despite restrictions.[19] For instance, in Kutupalong camp refugees organized a training program for adolescents. The training covered groups aged 15 and older and included both boys and girls. The class is designed by Rohingya, for Rohingya, and supports basic literacy in Burmese and English, as well as maths. An additional class provided counseling training to support refugee mental health. The classes were run by Rohingya volunteers who had completed higher education in Myanmar.[20]

Rohingya volunteers play a crucial role for refugee children, particularly in preparing them for repatriation to Myanmar. They ensure access to the Myanmar curriculum, working to keep students on par with their Myanmar peers. However, there are many challenges for volunteer teachers and refugee students. In addition to a chronic lack of funding and limited physical resources, such as desks and books, a lack of teacher training suppresses compensation[21] and thus teacher enthusiasm. Conservative social norms and strict interpretations of religious teachings mean that girls face many restrictions on movement and education once they reach adolescence (15+). According to these norms, older girls are automatically excluded from seeking further education. Even when they are able to attend, most of the classes are very crowded, and although in many cases there are rows for boys and girls, female students are forced to sit more closely together with male students than is generally considered appropriate.

Until now, Rohingya children aged five to 14 have been allowed to study in learning centers hosted by humanitarian response actors, home-based classes, private centers run by individual teachers in their shelters, and madrassa education within the camps. There are approximately 3,000 learning centers for nearly 400,000 school-age Rohingya children. As a result, only an estimated 55 percent of school age children have been able

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[18] Ibid.

[19] For more on informal education in the Cox's Bazar refugee camps, see, Peace Research Institute Oslo, We Must Prevent a Lost Generation: Community-led education in Rohingya refugee camps, 2019, https://www.prio.org/utility/DownloadFile.ashx?id=1838&type=publicationfile (accessed 8 September 2020).

[20] Classes have currently been paused due to COVID-19.

[21] Compensation is often pegged to experience and training; without opportunities for training, Rohingya teachers have fewer opportunities to request raises.

to attend.[22] The learning center curriculum – known as the Learning Competency Framework Approach (LCFA) – is based on the Myanmar government school curriculum but developed with inputs from Rohingya community members and Unicef. Teaching is done in tandem, with one Rohingya and one Bangladeshi educator working in every class. Each session lasts three hours. Because of language barriers, most Bengali teachers cannot communicate clearly with their students; according to CASS interviews, however, these teachers still receive a higher salary than their Rohingya counterparts.

As one volunteer educator in the camps commented:

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Our children are facing challenges to access education, especially women. Most of them cannot speak the Burmese language, and they didn't get a chance to learn Rakhine or Burmese language in school. Now we are teaching our students the Burmese language for our repatriation process. But it is minimal.

- Rohingya woman, 30, Kutupalong Refugee camp

In early 2020, the Bangladesh government announced they would allow Rohingya children greater access to formal education curriculums.[23] According to the government's plans, Rohingya refugee children will get school education up to the age of 14, through the provision of the Myanmar curriculum; host community children will learn Bangladesh's national curriculum separately. The first pilot project was expected to start in April 2020 and targeted 10,000 Rohingya students in grades six to nine in the first phase. Children over 14 who are excluded from formal education will receive vocational skills training.[24]

Access to secondary school remains limited for both refugees and those Rohingya who have remained in Rakhine. Within Rakhine, secondary schools tend to serve several villages at once. As such, the lack of facilities combined with constraints on freedom of movement prevents many Rohingya youth from attending secondary school.

Of three universities in Rakhine, two colleges, two institutes, only Sittwe University has accepted Rohingya. However, enrollment at Sittwe University has not been available to Rohingya students since 2012.

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Our children are losing their right to access higher education and authorities are forcing us to accept the NVC. If people want to apply for a job in an NGO, they need to show NVC – if not they can't get a job in NGOs or UN organisations. I did not travel anywhere since 2017 as I don't want to accept an NVC. I am not an illegal migrant, and all my family have had national identification cards since 1990.

- Rohingya woman, 48, Maungdaw Township

Last year, Myanmar Minister of Education Dr. Myo Thein Gyi announced that Rohingya students could study distance learning in Maungdaw Township as part of Yangon Distance Education in 2018 - 2019 academic year but limited the allowed subjects to Myanmar Literature and History. Students will not be allowed to take Bachelor of Science degrees or major in English.[25]

One NGO worker explained his experience as follows

[22] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Bangladesh Refugee Emergency: Population Factsheet (as of 31 May 2019), 9 June 2019, https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/bangladesh-refugee-emergency-population-factsheet-31-may-2019 (accessed 8 September 2020).

[23] Karen Reidy, "Expanding education for Rohingya refugee children in Bangladesh", UNICEF, 10 February 2020, https://www.unicef.org/rosa/stories/expanding-education-rohingya-refugee-children-bangladesh (accessed 8 September 2020).

[24] Amnesty International, "Bangladesh: Rohingya children get access to education", news release, 28 January 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/01/bangladesh-rohingya-children-get-access-to-education/ (accessed 8 September 2020).

[25] Moe Myint, "Rakhine State to Open University of Distance Education Branch in Maungdaw", The Irrawaddy, 18 July 2018, https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/rakhine-state-open-university-distance-education-branch-maungdaw.html (accessed 8 September 2020).

Last year when I went to Yangon I learned about GCED online class. GCED Online Campus is an e-learning platform on Global Citizenship Education and now I am taking "Becoming Global Citizens for a Sustainable Society", 66 weeks online class. The internet is very low to join online classes but I want to improve myself. I take courses that can improve my skills and which are related to my job. I also share with my colleagues and sometimes I suggest suitable online courses for them.

**- Rohingya man, 30,
Maungdaw Township**

Despite the challenges, Rohingya youth have found savvy work arounds. Some use mobile phones to self-teach, seeking out learning tools to improve their skills. In interviews, participants were most likely to mention using internet-based learning to improve their English skills. Specifically, they download PDF books, poems, and English lessons or share existing resources with friends via the apps Zapya and Xender. Some Rohingya are learning the Quran and Urdu.

Vocational training, provided by international NGOs, has been allowed in parts of Maungdaw Township. These programmes have limited space and tend to focus on urban areas. As a result, the impact of these programmes has been limited and favour urban youth, who are often relatively privileged in comparison to their rural peers. Non-formal and vocational training, sponsored by international and national NGOs, is offered in subjects such as computing, English, automotive mechanics, and driving (for taxis, trucks, or NGO vehicles). However, spaces are very limited.

In Rakhine villages, local CSOs have been active in supporting the Rakhine community with additional training; the restrictions on movement and gathering have prevented Rohingya from organising similar initiatives. The GAD asked them to show identification in order to register their organizations, which further prevents Rohingya from starting their training programmes. A small number of Rohingya youth groups have formed to work in the funeral sector, but their fear of the local authority has prevented them from engaging in other livelihoods activities.

Women and girls are doubly disadvantaged due to Rohingya cultural and religious norms. The Islamic inheritance laws recognised by the Myanmar government allow family patriarchs to discriminate against their female offspring, limiting Rohingya women's economic independence. Many Rohingya women are further prevented from participating in local market activities, expected to hold a limited number of roles and responsibilities within the community, and disallowed from contributing to decision-making at all levels. Women in the Rohingya community face numerous social restrictions that prevent them from participating in secular or religious education, and also skills training.

It is thus notable that in the Kutupalong Refugee camp, Rohingya women who work for international NGOs and UN organizations have pooled a small amount of funding via monthly contributions of 500 Takas [$5.90 USD] from their salary to support Rohingya women's life skills training. The community fund supports tailoring and small-scale bakery training. These training sessions are led by 10 trainers and eight assistants. UNHCR has provided further in-kind support, in the form of books, but the group otherwise lacks the support it needs to sustain the training programme.

Access to Healthcare

Most Rohingya are living under conditions of extreme poverty; as a result, poor health and nutrition is common. In rural areas, lack of access to public health centres, coupled with the high cost and time delay associated with seeking travel permissions create further barriers to accessing proper healthcare.

There are two formal systems of healthcare in Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships. Essential health services have been historically underfunded in Rakhine State and the government-provided hospitals and clinics, located in the township capital cities, have limited facilities and inadequate services. Even when treatment is possible, Rohingya patients report discrimination by nurses and doctors. Private clinics, generally found in larger cities, can at times be accessible from village areas, but come with a steep price tag. The time-consuming process to get travel permission outside of the township renders otherwise manageable conditions deadly.

Rohingya participants in this research reported that there have been no facilities for prenatal care, delivery, or postnatal care, and no vaccines for infants since 2012. Though highly valued as a source of medical care and health information, most midwives live in urban centres. Whilst they may circulate through Rakhine areas, they rarely travel to Rohingya villages. Birth certificates can be

provided to Rohingya parents by the midwife appointed for their village. However, to obtain these Rohingya must pay between 10,000 to 15,000 MMK. Most Rohingya villagers have no means of acquiring these necessary official documents.

In Bangladesh, although healthcare centres are provided by camp management, Rohingya still face challenges related to communication and overstretched services. In Kutupalong camp, many refugees suffer from waterborne illnesses along with Hepatitis B and C but lack proper treatment. On March 24, the first COVID-19 case was identified in Cox's Bazar. The Cox's Bazar local administration locked down the entire district on April 8, and NGO staff and local authorities provided prevention awareness through Burmese and Rohingya language activities. Although emergency healthcare plans are set up by the Bangladesh government across Cox's Bazar, the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in the camps make it difficult to follow self isolation/social distancing guidelines. Water points and markets are particularly likely vectors.

> We need to wait in long queues for treatment, but all the time the health staff give us Paracetamol and Amoxicillin for every disease. We were disappointed that they didn't take any serious action and they didn't care about us. So most people don't want to go to the healthcare centre.
>
> **- Rohingya man, 34,
> Kutupalong Refugee camp**

Local Responses

For most rural Rohingya, and many poor city dwellers, the only available healthcare is provided by a self-taught healer. These figures may employ a mix of western and traditional medicine, and many also operate small scale pharmacies. Though the primary point of care for many Rohingya, these healers rarely receive any formal training.

Self-taught healers represent a home-ground resiliency among Rohingya communities in the face of little access to formal healthcare. Healers often take on the responsibility of health work because they have the financial resources and access to information unavailable to others. Many have Burmese or English language skills, and they use these to study the functions of

particular drugs and medicines online. Such resources are unavailable to others as a result of illiteracy and a deficit of Rohingya-language medical resources. Despite rarely having any formal training, healers are regularly consulted by villagers and take on patients with a variety of ailments from common colds, dengue and malaria to wounds and other injuries in need of disinfecting or treatment. Since 2019, the internet shutdown has limited healers' access to the information they rely on, but many have found other ways to access knowledge. For example, one healer reports regularly reaching out by phone to contacts in Sittwe or Yangon to ask them to search online for which medicine is required for patients showing particular symptoms.

A majority of Rohingya women deliver their children with the help of traditional birth attendants (TBA). There are two types of TBAs: the first learn their trade by observing deliveries and may have limited technical knowledge, while the second have at some time received training from response actors. Most TBAs in Rohingya villages are themselves Rohingya women. The number of TBAs in an area depends on the size of the village; in larger villages there may be as many as three women who the community calls on to help deliver children. Most TBAs are at least 40 years old, though some are much older. Whilst some TBAs have accepted NVCs and can as such move around the area, most cannot travel beyond their villages. Prior to 2017, response actors supported TBAs with medical kits, including reproductive health care materials, and other supplies necessary for delivering children. TBAs report that this support is no longer available but is desperately needed.

> Some INGOs supported a small amount of money for pregnant women to deliver a child in the hospital, but all funding went through the village's head, and they cut off half of the money. People are afraid to complain about it and most iNGOs didn't follow up on the situation.
>
> **- Rohingya man, 31,
> Maungdaw Township**

Livelihoods

All communities in Rakhine face challenges related to livelihoods, particularly given the scale of the recent and ongoing conflicts. Government actors have done little to manage the economic burden.

The majority of Rohingya are engaged in hard labour, farming, and fishing. In 2017, however, Border Guard Police (BGP) refused to allow Rohingya in some areas to engage in either fishing or farming. As a result, many Rohingya lost their primary source of income and have remained jobless. According to interviews, some villagers are able to work on their farmlands, but they need to pay tax to the Land Revenue and Settlement Department.[26] According to CASS interviews, rumours that the BGP planted landmines and unexploded ordnance in Rohingya farms and near the sea have made people afraid to tend to their lands or resume fishing despite a relaxation in security policy in some areas. Those who live in more urban areas can sell their products in the market – one of few remaining places where people from different ethnic and religious communities can gather and meet.

Rohingya life in the refugee camps in Bangladesh is precarious. Rohingya are not permitted to work outside or take permanent jobs inside the camps. When Rohingya first arrived, the camp police did not restrict this outside work. Some of the earliest refugees thus took up jobs in the agricultural sector or in the local shops. According to CASS interviews, even then refugees received only half the wages paid to their local counterparts for the same work. Still, local day labourers viewed the Rohingya as a threat to their income, seeing their willingness to work for lower wages as driving down the market rate. In 2019, many host communities protested refugees working outside of the camp, claiming their wages had decreased because of an oversupply of labour. Since the 2019 protest, the government and camp police have not allowed them to work outside of the camp.

Workarounds

Within Rakhine, some wealthy Rohingya support poorer communities through Zakat.[27] Apart from the Zakat, Rohingya community leaders, especially elderly people, religious leaders, and former teachers, raise funds within their community to support people affected by conflicts or who need money for medical treatment. One participant mentioned that during the monsoon season, people who live in big villages collect materials and money from Rohingya donors to support people who live in remote areas. Sometimes villagers offer accommodation to people who are in trouble due to flooding. In Maungdaw Township, Rohingya can take loans from Rakhine money lenders, but they need to pay gold as a down payment as well as interest on the loan.

Educated refugees in Bangladesh are working with response actors as volunteers and teachers. Most response actors recruit refugees in manual jobs such as construction, cleaning, and other daily labor. Some Rohingya shopkeepers sell hot meals, tea and snacks, betel nuts, and basic items inside the camps.

Access to Information

The government first imposed restrictions on mobile internet in Rakhine and Chin states on 20 June 2019. The government has continued to claim that the shutdown is a matter of security and public safety. The nine townships affected by the initial shutdown included Buthidaung, Kyauktaw, Maungdaw, Minbya, Mrauk-U, Myebon, Ponnagyun, and Rathedaung townships in Rakhine State and Paletwa Township in neighbouring southern Chin State. Each of these areas has been affected by the ongoing Arakan Army and Tatmadaw conflict. The government temporarily lifted restrictions in five Townships (Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Myebon, Paletwa, Rathedaung) from September 2019 before reinstating it in February 2020. In May 2020, the authorities once again lifted the restrictions on Maungdaw Township but left the other eight townships without access. Additionally, the Ministry of Transport and Communications ordered a block on 2,147 websites citing Section 77 of the Telecommunications Law.[28] Numerous news agencies reporting on Rakhine State were among those affected.[29]

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[26] The tax ranges from 300 to 1,000 MMK and depends on the number of areas owned. None of the research participants reported that double taxation by the Arakan Army was a concern.

[27] Zakat is a mandatory process for Muslims and an obligation that an individual has to donate a certain proportion of wealth each year to charitable causes.

[28] Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, The Telecommunications Law (The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Law No. 31, 2013) https://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/2013-10-08-Telecommunications_Law-en.pdf (accessed 8 September 2020).

[29] Article 19, "Myanmar: Immediately lift ban on ethnic news websites", news release, 1 April 2020, https://www.article19.org/resources/myanmar-immediately-lift-ban-on-ethnic-news-websites/ (accessed 8 September 2020).

The lack of internet access has had a significant impact on communities across Rakhine state in that it has limited access to critical information related to COVID-19 and the ongoing conflict. Not only are communities unable to find information on virus mitigation and prevention techniques, the shutdown prevents vulnerable communities from following developments in the conflict. Without access to news and civilian reporting via social media, the Rohingya, who often lack access to the personal networks that are otherwise used to transmit information about troop movements and likely skirmishes, are as such unable to arrange emergency plans.

Even wealthy Rohingya have very low digital literacy. As a result, rumors and misinformation abound. According to CASS interviews, rumours that Rohingya are the primary carriers of COVID-19 are known to the community, but in some Rohingya villages, people are not aware of the virus at all. Owing to this lack of access to information, most Rohingya have limited or no information about locations of quarantine centres and how they should inform/engage with local authorities if they suffer COVID-19 symptoms. As a result, those who do experience symptoms are more likely to hide their condition than to seek treatment or report to the quarantine centres.

Without Burmese language skills, local newspapers and radio are of little benefit. In some towns like Maungdaw, although the government has lifted internet restrictions, there are still limitations placed on freedom of information. Only a handful of people, many of them older, understand Burmese and listen to broadcasts from BBC, Voice of America (VoA) and Radio Free Asia (RFA). Though these community members generally share updates and news with others when congregating at betel shops and markets, they may still act as gatekeepers. Prior to the internet shut down, those who only speak the Rohingya language could access information from resources such as Rohingya Vision (Rvision), which is based in Malaysia. Without access to these resources, those without Burmese language skills are even more cut off from the outside world than before. Women, in particular, are vulnerable to this exclusion, which makes them especially reliant on their husbands and male family members.

Internet access has been denied to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, too. There, the local government has shut down the internet in the camps and also confiscated mobile phones and SIM cards.[30]

People accessing the internet signal on the Buthidaung-Maungdaw Road, a common place to access the internet.

Information Sharing

To contend with the lack of access to information, Rohingya in northern Rakhine seek out friends who work for response actors, particularly those who can access the internet from their field offices. Those who can afford internet access information and share it via Facebook, IMO (a chat app that allows users to sign up without a phone number) and Whatsapp groups. One participant explained that before the 2012 conflict, most villagers could access high quality information from teachers and the government healthcare staff who were appointed in their village. Visits to the state education office and travel were opportunities to bring some information back to their villages. Under the restrictions, however, it is impossible to ensure that everyone is equally informed and existing inequalities play a magnifying role. For instance, women struggle to seek out information on their own due to safety concerns and cultural barriers. In Buthidaung Township, people can access a limited internet connection from places along the Buthidaung and Maungdaw road. These locations, however, are near to the military camp, and also popular with Rakhine. As a result, using the internet on these sites is high risk and women are actively discouraged from travelling to them.

Indeed, whilst the lack of information is itself dangerous, so too are popular work arounds:

[30] Ruma Paul, ''Bangladesh blocks internet services in Rohingya refugee camps'', Reuters, 3 September 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bangladesh-rohingya/bangladesh-blocks-internet-services-in-rohingya-refugee-camps-idUSKCN1VO1WQ (accessed 8 September 2020).

When we travel, we leave our phone at home, or we delete our Facebook application. At the checkpoints, the guards check our phones if they find a facebook application, they threaten that they can charge us under the telecommunication law and we have to pay the money.

**- Rohingya Man, 30,
Maungdaw Township**

In Buthidaung Township, more than 10 people were arrested for using Bangladesh SIM cards to access the internet. Of those arrested, six paid bribes to the BGP and were released but four were charged under the Telecommunication Act. The Myanmar government's new registration requirements for SIM cards have created difficulties for many Rohingya in northern Rakhine State, who have limited access to the internet and also lack the official identity documents needed for registration.[31] As a result, a vibrant sharing economy has emerged between Rohingya in internet shutdown areas of northern Rakhine and those with internet access in parts of central Rakhine. Multiple cards are registered to a single individual but used by many more. Though this provides a work around, the danger posed to those who provide these services to the community is considerable, and incidence of exclusionary gatekeeping (for instance, restricting women's access) and extortion are likely.

According to CASS interviews, many young Rohingya women can and do access social media from their mobile phones. However, they must use creative means to ensure their safety in doing so. For example, in Maungdaw Township, women joined social media groups on IMO, Facebook, and Whatsapp, but did so using fake names and photos. These same women noted that cyberbullying was a significant deterrent to their participation in these digital spaces, particularly image-based abuse. Some Rohingya elders believe that Facebook functions primarily as a dating app, leading some young women's families to police their use of the platform.

In some areas in Cox Bazar and Kutupalong camp specifically it is possible to access MPT (Myanma Posts and Telecommunications – a government-run communications operator) phone lines, but Border Guard Bangladesh has restricted individuals' use in order to control information flows. Near Kutupalong camp 6, and on a high hill near the Cox Bazar camp, internet can still be accessed, but only through a very limited network connection. As these places are far from most shelters, only men travel to them to access the internet or to call family and friends via WhatsApp or IMO.

The restrictions in the camps have made COVID-19 sensitization particularly high risk for response actors and healthcare workers. The only means by which information can be shared about the outbreak is via face-to-face sessions.

Dispute Resolution

Tensions between Rakhine Buddhist and Rohingya Muslim communities have been a concern since 2012. Yet few conflict prevention mechanisms have been put in place to help communities manage interpersonal disputes before they escalate. Under section 144, chapter 11 of the Myanmar Criminal Procedure Code entitled, "Temporary Orders in Urgent Cases of Nuisance or Apprehended Danger," no more than five people are allowed to gather without express permission.[32] This, and other barriers such as enforced (and voluntary)

segregation have limited opportunities for communities to interact.

Most Rohingya in Rakhine depend on formal, state-sanctioned channels to solve misunderstandings, rather than on traditional means of problem-solving. Still, participants in this research said that they would not report a dispute to the local police state or village administration office as they do not believe they would receive a fair solution, citing police and administrator bias.

[31] Thompson Chau, "Millions in Myanmar risk having mobile phones cut off after SIM registration deadline", The Myanmar Times, 29 April 2020, https://www.mmtimes.com/news/millions-myanmar-risk-having-mobile-phones-cut-after-sim-registration-deadline.html (accessed 8 September 2020).

[32] Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, The Code of Criminal Procedure, Section 144, Chapter 11, https://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/Code_of_Criminal_Procedure+schedules.pdf (accessed 8 September 2020).

> There is no local dispute mechanism or organisation after the 2012 conflict. If something happens between the communities we go to the police station or village administration office. Before the conflict, some village leaders negotiated amongst themselves, but now there is no mechanism or committee like that in Rohingya villages as people don't trust each other.

– Rohingya man, 24, Buthidaung Township

Across the border in Bangladesh, delays in the repatriation process of Rohingya back to Myanmar have led to growing frustration on the part of host communities. Tensions have increased between refugees and host communities following a spate of fake news stories related to the Rohingya, which some think have been promulgated by Bangladeshi extremist groups. These narratives have blamed the refugees for drug smuggling and trafficking, a problem that has increased in recent years in Cox Bazar.[33] Some response actors are running social cohesion projects to reduce tensions, but according to CASS interviews, these activities are perceived as ineffective in practice.

Alongside this, there are many online rumours, mostly circulating on Facebook, which suggest accepting refugees makes Bangladesh economically poorer. Most of these narratives highlight that Bangladeshi host communities are facing challenges such as hospital overcrowding, increased traffic, and a decreasing water level because of the booming Rohingya population in the refugee camps.

Localised Responses

Mistrust and misunderstanding increased between Rakhine Buddhist and Rohingya Muslim communities in the wake of the 2016 and 2017 attacks. An increase in hate speech was noted across Myanmar, and the influence of hardline community leaders and racially-charged legislative processes fueled these tensions. In 2012, the government allowed some response actors to implement projects promoting social cohesion. Since 2017, however, the GAD has strongly curtailed these types of activities in Rakhine State. Still, intercommunal relations are rumoured to have improved during the conflict between the Arakan Army and the Tatmadaw. Within Rohingya communities, a lack of consensus between youth and elders has stalled attempts at organizing informal mechanisms for dispute resolution. However, in late July 2020, the Rakhine Muslims Students Union donated three Lakh to support the mostly Rakhine IDPs displaced by Arakan Army and Tatmadaw fighting. This generated considerable goodwill online. A few days later, the Rakhine Students Union visited the Muslim camps in Sittwe where they completed a needs assessment and food distribution for Muslims IDPs. The two groups are planning further collaboration and are seeking support from external actors going forwards.

Key Findings & Recommendations

1. Unofficial movement restrictions on Rohingya, the requirement of official travel permits in order for them to move, and security checkpoints between numerous villages and townships make travel difficult and financially out-of-reach for most of the community. Given that local administration is weak, corruption is endemic.
   - Many brokers are likely to be motivated by profit, but still others may have more altruistic reasons for helping Rohingya to obtain travel documents. Response actors should consider the value of cau-

   tiously identifying these figures within communities and quietly exploring their motives in order to determine if they might be more productively involved in programming.
   - Those brokers with positive/benevolent attitudes toward the Rohingya community might benefit from training on the legal code or from being provided access to legal aid enabling them to more safely carry out this service on behalf of the Rohingya community.

[33] United Nations Development Programme, "Integration of humanitarian efforts into longer-term development essential for Cox's Bazar", 27 July 2019, https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/impacts-rohingya-refugee-influx-host-communities (accessed 8 September 2020).

2. Limited access to education threatens to impoverish an entire generation of Rohingya youth.
   - There may be opportunities to expand the curriculum of madrassas that are quietly reopening in northern and central Rakhine to include some of the content that has been taught in these settings in the Bangladesh refugee camps (i.e. Burmese, English, Maths, etc.). However, this alone is likely to result in the further exclusion of women and does little to help with social cohesion and sense of belonging. As such, though response actors should consider opportunities to support madrasa teaching, this should always be accompanied by plans to provide equal opportunities to Rohingya girls and young women.
   - Response actors should consider opportunities to provide under-educated youth with support in developing micro-businesses: agricultural start-up grants and skills training would both be welcome.
   - The continuing education of volunteer teachers should be prioritised. The production of pedagogical training materials for offline file sharing is one means by which this may be facilitated.
3. Rohingya face a double burden in accessing care because of movement restrictions and inadequate emergency referral procedures.
   - Response actors with medical specialisation should explore medical consultations by phone or mobile applications in areas where the internet is available. Response actors can also consider creating contact lists of healers and traditional birth attendants, who are likely to remain among displaced and non-displaced communities. They may serve as effective communicators for health information and will also limit the risks of excluding women from response networks.
   - Many rural communities also have little information about accessing support from international and national humanitarian medical responders and would benefit from awareness raising sessions. Each organisation's system of referrals and support provision is disparate, and information sharing and coordination between agencies would take this burden off communities.

   - TBAs need further training to become qualified not only in delivering children but also in sexual reproductive health and gender-based violence.
4. Lack of sustainable livelihoods remain one of the most difficult challenges for Rohingya to overcome.
   - Given the ways in which Zakat is already being used, response actors might consider opportunities to enable information sharing between Rohingya communities around the subject of Islamic village banking. Case studies of community experiences in locations such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Bangladesh could be discussed. Actors considering this should keep in mind that local sensitivities will apply and must be handled respectfully.
5. Lack of access to information increases the prevalence of rumours, but also shrinks the civic space in communities whilst increasing levels of mistrust and fear.
   - Information sharing via social media is being facilitated using temperamental access and offline file sharing apps. These spaces, however, are often hostile to women. There is significant value in producing shareable 'edutainment' that focuses on improving digital literacy and also addresses online abuse, particularly of women.
   - Local-language radio programmes can only ever be successful if they are facilitated by distributions of hand-powered radios, otherwise similar gatekeeping patterns are likely to reemerge.
6. Formal justice systems in Rakhine state are often corrupt and discriminatory. Community-based conflict prevention mechanisms and practices for resolving disputes are needed to manage inter-communal tensions.
   - Response actors should explore opportunities for expanding anonymous complaint mechanisms which enable Rohingya to report particularly abusive government actors.
   - Youth are clearly leading on dispute resolution and this suggests elders may be taking a more conservative approach, one which relies on self-segregation thereby keeping communities apart. This is an excellent time to support youth-led mechanisms.

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