

"LIKE BIRDS IN CAGES"

*COMMUNITY DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS OF
HOME, RIGHTS, JUSTICE, AND CITIZENSHIP IN ROHINGYA CAMPS*

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A report compiled by community researchers in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, for the Political Settlements Research Program (PSRP) at the University of Edinburgh



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Executive Summary

A participatory action research project was undertaken from November 2020 to February 2021 in which three Rohingya researchers asked 33 of their fellow Rohingya refugees living in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh camps to share their own definitions and concepts regarding four terms: home, justice, rights, and citizenship. Out of the 33 respondents, 21 of the project respondents were youth aged 18-29; one third (11) were female and two were elders.

This report is the third in a three-part series that uses 'participatory action research' to uncover how displaced communities in Cox's Bazar camps have experienced the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown. As with the past reports, the emphasis is on Rohingya youth perspectives, targeting the viewpoints of those aged 18-29 years old. The overall aim of this round of research was to better understand Rohingya conceptualisations of terms that are often used in programming delivered by the international community that is intended to benefit Rohingya. An appreciation for different interpretations amongst Rohingya community members--and between Rohingya and those engaged in international humanitarian response efforts--is crucial for ensuring that service delivery is appropriate and is informed by what displaced people living in Cox's Bazar want for themselves and their families now and in the future. The project explored questions such as 'What is home' at a time where ideas of home were fluctuating for Rohingya. Not only have fires devastated parts of the Cox's Bazar camps and caused many to lose their houses, but as the research project was coming to a close the February 2021 coup in Myanmar cast hopes of returning 'home' in a new light.

Key Findings

Home: Respondents described home as a concept where peace, love, and safety are felt and where one can sleep peacefully. In the physical sense, 'home' is the site or village where one's ancestors lived; this familial and historical association means there is no replacement or alternative place to reconstruct a sense of home. For many displaced Rohingya, 'repatriation' inherently suggests the ability to go back to one's original, ancestral village, rather than to a specific physical structure.

Justice: Respondents shared diverse concepts of justice including formal, informal, international and local types. Concepts of legal as well as social justice were discussed, and justice was described conceptually as a condition in which fairness and equality are present. Justice was seen by many as a process entailing not only accountability for perpetrators of injustices against the Rohingya, but also as a means to other ends - as a precursor to other things that could be achieved, such as restoration of Rohingya citizenship and people's ability to repatriate. Divergent views were expressed in regard to the potential for international justice to lead to solutions that had a meaningful impact on the lives of displaced Rohingya communities.

Rights: Respondents conceptualized 'rights' as liberties that are conducive to a peaceful and stable living environment, with many pointing out that Rohingya want the same rights enjoyed by other groups in Myanmar and by people around the world. Their notions of rights also pertain to security, dignity, and political representation, and to freedom of expression. Many people emphasized the need for the legal right to self-identify in Myanmar as Rohingya, and to have basic rights as refugees in Bangladesh while displaced. Respondents tended to focus on the need for collective rights for Rohingya, though the need for individual liberties was also discussed.

Citizenship: In Myanmar, citizenship is granted to members of certain ethnic groups and is thus deeply entwined with group identity. For respondents, the legal recognition of the Rohingya ethnicity is an urgent and essential need. Nearly all respondents described citizenship as a precursor to repatriation and other types of rights. Some said they would not return to Myanmar or accept citizenship unless the Rohingya name were to be listed by the Government of Myanmar as one of the recognized *taing yin thar* (national races).

Policy Implications

1. Awareness of unique definitions and terms

It is important for supporters and interlocutors advocating and working toward solutions to the Rohingya crisis to understand the displaced community's own concepts and definitions of key terms. Rohingya advocates often voice their needs and demands for justice and rights, but these must be unpacked to understand specific expectations. Myanmar's unique (and problematic) treatment of ethnicity, identity and belonging lies at the heart of its conflicts. The fact that these concepts do not match easily with standard Western and international norms is cause for inquiry as well as caution - especially to avoid making assumptions about what people's political demands entail. For example, inclusion of "Rohingya" on the Government's list of 'national races' may not seem as imperative to outsiders as it is to Rohingya.

2. Need for nuanced analysis

The definitions articulated by respondents in this study vary widely, indicating the need for representative data and quantitative analysis to distil differences and identify commonly held conceptualizations. Given the complexity of the Rohingya crisis, it is unlikely that all individuals will be satisfied with eventual solutions around repatriation etc. Ongoing research will be needed to understand differences and diversity of views, demands, and needs within the population.

3. Accessibility of information for learning about civic concepts

Access to foundational civic educational resources could be valuable for camp residents interested in learning about the four concepts examined here from an academic and legal perspective. International civil society actors working on human rights and justice issues should make materials, workshops, and training available to refugees in a manner that supports them to compare Rohingya definitions and concepts with those applied in other contexts. At the same time, interlocutors, humanitarians and others aiming to work in solidarity with Rohingya should be diligent in understanding and validating Rohingya people's own framing of these concepts.

Introduction

During the early 1990s, the average length of displacement was nine years. Today, the average length is roughly two decades.¹ In Bangladesh, what started off as an acute humanitarian emergency has now progressed to a protracted crisis.

As the crisis enters its fourth year, nearly 1 million refugees from Myanmar remain stateless, cut off from the formal economy. Almost 400,000 Rohingya children do not have access to education. Incarceration rates are high, indebtedness even higher.² Over the past year, as the coronavirus encircled the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh, our report, *Community Views on the Impact of Covid-19 in the Rohingya Camps*, traced the pandemic's effect on livelihoods, family relationships and trust in institutions, and also attended to the gendered nature of vulnerabilities.

The present study comes at a time of severe uncertainty for the Rohingya in Bangladesh. In Cox's Bazar, a steady attenuation of humanitarian space has inhibited response at a time of heightened need. The relocation of refugees to Bhasan Char— a precarious silt island, the construction of a barbed wire fence around the camp perimeter, and the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar have exacerbated uncertainty.³ On the ground, the reality remains grim: in the past year, camp safety has deteriorated sharply, and multiple fires have destroyed shelters and displaced families yet again. Even as the final interviews for this study were being conducted, a massive fire ripped through the area of the camps known as Balukhali, displacing 48,000 refugees and killing at least 15.⁴ One of the camp-based researchers at the helm of this project lost his own shelter.

The questions that propelled this research project raise issues that are integral to the present and the future of the Rohingya. The local team set themselves the challenge of investigating, broadly, how Rohingya youth—and their families and wider community— understand and approach issues of justice and security in Cox's Bazar. What is important to them, in everyday life and in the bigger picture? What are the requests or demands they would like to make of actors who can help to shape their lives?

1. A World Bank study cites length of time closer to 12 years, although UNHCR still often cites 26 years. For more, compare Milner, James, and Gil Loescher (2011) with Devictor, Xavier, and Quy-Toan Do (2016).

2. The Asia Foundation and Centre for Peace and Justice, Brac University (2020). *Navigating at the margins: Family, mobility and livelihoods amongst Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh*. San Francisco: The Asia Foundation and Dhaka: Centre for Peace and Justice

3. Islam. 2021. Bhasan char: An inflection point in the Rohingya refugee crisis? Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/bhasan-char-an-inflection-point-in-the-rohingya-refugee-crisis/>

4. Reuters. (2021). 'Devastating' fire at Rohingya camp in Bangladesh kills 15, leaves 400 missing. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bangladesh-rohingya-fire-un/devastating-fire-at-rohingya-camp-in-bangladesh-kills-15-leaves-400-missing-un-idUSKBN2BF15G>

One of the core aims of the present study has been to canvas community perspectives on, and interpretations of, the “buzz words” so often elevated as cornerstones of a durable solution for refugees - namely, rights, justice, repatriation and citizenship. Readers should note that these interviews do not directly address the coup and ensuing turmoil that began in Myanmar in early 2021. Most of the interviews were conducted prior to that development.

The community-based research team compiled a variety of views from Rohingya community members regarding their understanding of, and desires for: home, justice, rights and citizenship. The findings presented here point to the heterogeneity of views amongst diverse community members and highlight the importance of avoiding generalizations, though key trends have been identified where appropriate. At two points in the report, we make recommendations for key stakeholders in the area of capacity building.

Definitions of 'Home'

*'Home is first for me'.
— 21-year-old Rohingya woman*

Many Rohingya interviewed for the study referred to home as a source of comfort and peace, and a place of refuge. A 22-year old female reported that she was happy to hear the word home. For her, home means safety and independence—a place where there is peace, security, and 'freedom of ownership'. One 43-year old male put it this way: 'Home is like a nest and if anyone does not have a home they do not have protection - that is my feeling'. A 60-year-old man reported feeling glad when he thought of the idea of home, sharing that for him, home means 'to sleep peacefully with family members, in secure conditions without fear'. For a 21-year-old female, home was nothing less than 'my safety and future'. Without home, she proposed, 'we can do nothing. Home is first for me'.

For many Rohingya, home—the physical site of decades of oppression culminating in genocide— was laced with a pervasive feeling of sadness and anguish. The 43-year-old male who thought of home as a 'nest' also shared that thinking of home brought with it physical strain— an increase in blood pressure, a headache, and sadness. At first glance, some of the above perspectives seem to leave open the possibility that one might find 'home' not solely in one's original house or even in one's country of origin, but also in another place where one can be safe with one's family.

When pressed, however, respondents often specified that a home such as this could only be found back in Myanmar. The 60-year-old cited above, who thought of home as a place to 'sleep peacefully' refined his response to clarify that upon repatriation to Myanmar, it was his original property—the very same one he had left behind when fleeing violence—that he wanted to go to. In his words, 'I don't want to stay in a different place after going back to Myanmar'. A young woman specified that she, too, was referring to her original home when she talked about the concept of 'home'. She acknowledged that getting back to her actual property in Myanmar might be difficult because of the demolition of some areas and villages, noting: 'I want to go back to my original home. I have to rebuild my house as it was burnt down. It is the only place I want to be and there is no other place. This is where my parents and my grandparents lived— it is where I would also like to live'.

These sentiments of home as specific, permanent, and the epicenter of hope and belonging was echoed by most respondents, including a 18-year-old female respondent: 'I will go back to only my village. I do not want to be internally displaced'. For Rohingya and interlocutors aiming to craft sustainable solutions that enable future repatriation, it is important to distinguish these nuances, as some people – perhaps even a majority – may be unwilling to return at all unless able to go back to their ancestral villages. None of the people interviewed for this study said they would be willing to go back to an unfamiliar place in Myanmar, which is suggestive of a cultural view that home is a singular, original place. The burning and razing of Rohingya homes, properties and entire villages that preceded the 2017 displacement of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to Cox's Bazar was thus experienced as an unrecoverable, existential loss.

These findings further underscore the need for advocacy around safe, just and voluntary repatriation to be specific about the community's intent to return to their original villages - not just to northern Rakhine State. Some respondents voiced fears, based on previous situations endured by others, about harm that could occur without such a guarantee. The primary fears are of forcible and long-term relocation to a transit camp or camp for internally displaced persons (such as those in central Rakhine State where thousands of Rohingya have been forced to live since 2012), or of arbitrary arrest and detention upon return.

As described by the respondent above, along with the pull of home comes the fear that the root causes of conflict remain unaddressed. This leads him to fear 'arbitrary arrest by the authorities' if he were to return prematurely. Another respondent, a 28-year-old male, said he is 'scared the government will keep us in detention without reason, and that we will not get equal rights like other ethnic communities'. The respondent harbored hope that the Rohingya could live peacefully in their land if community leaders across Myanmar's ethnic groups took up the responsibility of reconciliation. Without improved social relations, he was concerned that there could still be problems due to cultural differences between Muslims and Buddhists, which could make return difficult. Not only political solutions are needed to enable return; social reconciliation is also needed.

Today, nearly four years after displacement, the prospect of repatriation in the near or distant future remains suspended in uncertainty. From the start, refugees themselves have advocated for *safe* return, with specific guarantees of non-recurrence rooted in the next three themes of this report: justice, rights, and citizenship.

Definitions of 'Justice'

'If I got justice my life would change from being a refugee to a normal person.'
— 72-year-old Rohingya man

Respondents' perspectives on their justice needs were complex and multifaceted. In order to understand an individual's own concept of justice, general questions were posed that invited respondents to speak about justice in their own terms. Some people focused on justice needs at the international and regional levels, while others discussed justice at the community or local level. Both informal and formal justice were considered. Some people described justice as a guarantee of non-recurrence (of harm, of violence), and many saw it as a precondition for peace. Many respondents discussed individual and communal concepts of justice, in tandem with social justice and legal justice needs.

When asked about the definition of justice, responses highlighted justice as both an ethical principle and a legal imperative. Rohingya words for fairness and equality were used to describe the inherent value of justice, but people also spoke of the need for practical application of these values, such as the restoration of their legal rights, and a guarantee to exercise those rights. As a 22-year-old female respondent put it: 'Justice means restoring our citizenship through the Myanmar government. To be able to relocate to our original home, to be able to exercise ownership and freedom of movement; to have the opportunity to work for the government, or the armed forces if we want'.

Some approached legal justice as a 'blanket solution' — as accountability for past atrocities, and as guarantees against discrimination and oppression in the future. According to a 31-year-old Rohingya woman: 'Justice can prevent discrimination, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and genocide. With justice, we will not have to be a refugee again'. Also apparent was the conceptualization of justice as freedom from the risk of exposure to harm. As a 21-year-old female respondent put it, 'With justice, we will be freed from hate speech'.

Often, the topic of justice was also a point of tension, especially as it relates to repatriation. Here, in multiple instances, respondents explained that there are diverging notions amongst community members on *when* and *how* justice should be secured— e.g, whether before or after returning home. According to a 39-year-old male, 'Some of my fellow

Rohingya community members in the camp tell me that they will not return to Myanmar until the judgements of the ICC (International Criminal Court) and the ICJ (International Court of Justice). They really don't know how long those will take. They think it will take only a few months or a year. But [according to my knowledge,] these judgments have nothing to do with repatriation'. Others, including a 34-year-old female teacher, foregrounded justice as a precondition for a 'sustainable solution for the Rohingya'. According to another, a 33-year-old male, the Rohingya had waited too long for accountability to go back home without 'full citizenship, and full and equal rights'.

From where do Rohingya refugees hope to secure justice? For the respondent above, the pursuit and material outcomes of justice played out locally, and for that to occur it needed an 'independent and fair justice system without bias'. Others, including a 72-year-old Rohingya elder, thought international courts, specifically the International Court of Justice should arbitrate the conflict between the state of Myanmar and the Rohingya: 'International justice means the UN, ICJ, and other powerful international organizations should make a fair judgement regarding the arguments between the Myanmar government and our Rohingya community'.⁵

When respondents highlighted justice as local, they focused mainly on personal security, protection, and equal rights. Responses alluding to international justice were associated with more transformative effects including, but not limited to, pressures on the Myanmar government, and institutional accountability for past crimes.

Most, but not all, Rohingya refugees seem to locate notions of justice outside of the camps. One respondent, an 18-year-old female, spoke about navigating gender inequalities in the camps: 'My father is old, and it is difficult for me to run my family. As an 18-year old girl, I am happy to be sheltering in Bangladesh, but I sometimes feel uneasy living in my shelter. I fear many things, some of which I can't explain to you openly'. The lack of access to formal justice as well as informal dispute resolution mechanisms in Cox's Bazar has been widely reported, specifically with respect to the serious limitations of the existing informal systems – such as access to justice for women and girls facing sexual and gender-based violence.⁶

5.The ICJ only arbitrates cases between states, though many camp residents view the current ICJ case brought by The Gambia against Myanmar to be a case between Myanmar and the Rohingya. This highlights the information gap that limits refugees' access to accurate information about international justice.

6.For more, see "Community Perspective on Access to Civil Justice", accessible here: <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/community-perspectives-on-access-to-civil-justice-after-cross-border-displacement-the-needs-of-rohingya-refugees-in-bangladesh/>

Definitions of 'Rights'

**'We can acquire our rights by justice'.
— 22-year-old Rohingya woman**

Responses to the issue of rights encompassed a broad array of provisions, from notions of human security to dignity, political representation, freedom of expression, and liberty. The desire to be able to legally self-identify in Myanmar as Rohingya— a right long denied to the community— was also widely shared by respondents, along with the importance of having refugee rights in Bangladesh 'until we can go home'.

What could the provision of rights lead to, in a practical sense? According to a 41-year-old male, being able to exercise basic rights would enable the community to 'create a peaceful environment ... change people's attitudes and behavior,' facilitate 'dialogue between leaders of Rakhine, Shan, Kayah, and Bamar communities', and align 'Rohingya traditions, culture and religion' to ensure all are respected and have access to the same services and liberties as others in Myanmar, such as freedom of movement, formal employment, and the ability to obtain an education.

As a group, and as individuals, the Rohingya were denied rights for decades. As a 24-year-old male put it: 'When I was in Myanmar, I couldn't move without an administrator's permission, or without a permission slip issued by authorities. I lived like a prisoner'. Now displaced, the community continues to endure deprivations, which some respondents attributed to the absence of legal refugee status: 'I would like Bangladesh to recognize me as a refugee. I want to enjoy all the rights a refugee deserves ... formal education and jobs. We are human beings too. I feel like the Rohingya have become an outcast community all over the world. We are confined behind the barbed wire fences not only in Myanmar but also in Bangladesh. We feel we are treated as subhumans'.

According to UNICEF, there are almost half a million Rohingya children in the camps who are at risk of being left behind as a 'lost generation', deprived of education adhering to a formal curriculum.⁷ Covid-19 has further impeded the few education programs that were in operation, and UNICEF was forced to postpone a pilot program that was set to provide formal instruction to youth from Grades 6 to 9.⁸ Over the course of interviews, the issue of education for Rohingya children came up time and again. 'Rohingya children', one

7. UNICEF warns of 'lost generation' of Rohingya youth, one year after Myanmar exodus. More: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/08/1017632>

6. For more, see "Community Perspective on Access to Civil Justice", accessible here: <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/community-perspectives-on-access-to-civil-justice-after-cross-border-displacement-the-needs-of-rohingya-refugees-in-bangladesh/>

8. More: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/bangladesh-announces-new-myanmar-curriculum-program-for-rohingya-refugee-children/>

respondent surmised, 'need formal education and refugees need jobs for their livelihoods'. Another urged the Bangladesh government to allow Rohingya refugees access to education in the camps using a Myanmar curriculum.

Interestingly, community perspectives around rights surfaced a conceptual contradiction, with divergent views expressed on whether everyone within the community deserves the same rights. The majority of respondents said that everyone in the community has the same right to have rights. A few respondents recognized inequity amongst community members in practice, pointing out how certain rights were inaccessible to women and girls. According to a 39-year-old Rohingya male:

"Women and girls are not treated equally. They are discriminated against everywhere. Most parents don't want their daughters to be educated like their sons. And women and girls are not allowed to go out and work outdoors. Parents need to pay dowry for their daughters. Women face gender-based violence, domestic violence and other kinds of abuses and discrimination. Most girls don't have the right to choose their own partner by themselves. They must accept the decisions made by their parents and elders. Love marriages and females who go outside the home to undertake paid work are heavily criticized by the community."

The respondent also commented on the lack of rights for children: 'Children don't have children's rights. The worst is that they can't access formal education yet. Their future is really bleak. I can't think about the next generation of Rohingya'. In other instances, respondents expressed the view that men and women are entitled to different rights from one another. When asked whether different individuals should have different rights, one male respondent answered: 'Women cannot do the same things as men. According to religion and education, some people are more respectable than others'. Another stated: 'According to my opinion, females can't go outside after becoming grown up.' These statements raise questions about which individuals in the community would attain greater freedoms, and who might not, if group rights were won for Rohingya in the future.

Other respondents remarked on the disparity between Rohingya men's and women's rights but did so vaguely, without sharing their perspective on whether this was fair or morally just. One respondent simply remarked: 'Men have more job opportunities than women.'

Definitions of 'Citizenship'

‘If we go back without citizenship it will be like relocating to another camp’.
— 26-year-old Rohingya man

What does citizenship mean to a people who have been systematically denied its promise and assurance, and who are living outside of their home country? Like the majority of Rohingya in Cox’s Bazar camps, most refugees interviewed for this report never held citizenship in Myanmar. Some elder refugees held it prior to the enactment of the 1982 Citizenship Law, which effectively excluded Rohingya, but most held only a ‘white card,’ which signified temporary resident status with curtailed rights for holders.⁹ Predominantly, Rohingya refugees interviewed for this study approached the right to citizenship as a cornerstone and a pathway to securing other rights and justice.

For many, the experience of being othered due to lack of citizenship first came while being blocked from services they were trying to access. As a 36-year old-respondent recounted: ‘In 2001, when I was applying to university, I realized for the first time that I could not apply to the major I preferred because I did not have a citizenship card. I was quite young then. I didn’t understand politics. But I saw my Buddhist friends going to Yangon to study the subjects they liked. It was the day I felt what it meant to be born as Rohingya’.

In Myanmar, one’s right to full citizenship is based on proving membership in one of 135 ethnic groups recognized as *taing yin tha*, or ‘national races’.^{10,11} All respondents wanted full citizenship from the state of Myanmar, with formal recognition of the Rohingya ethnicity. When probed on the link between citizenship and ethnicity, some respondents replied that they would not go back to Myanmar unless the country recognized them as Rohingya, and some said they would turn down citizenship if it were offered without this recognition. ‘If we go back now it will be the same as relocating to another camp’. Others said they were open to lobbying for ethnic recognition once they got back.

In particular, the research team wanted to identify, in a very practical sense, perspectives on the types of rights that people thought citizenship might allow the Rohingya to exercise.

9.For more on the white card and the history of statelessness of the Rohingya, see

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2018/03/01/identity-and-belonging-card-how-tattered-rohingya-ids-trace-trail-toward>

10. There are three categories of citizenship in Myanmar: full, associate, and naturalised. “Full” citizenship is accorded only to taing yin tha, while those from non-recognized racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds and their descendants only have access to associate and naturalized citizenship, categories which accord a lower tier of rights and less access to services and opportunities. For more, see <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Myanmar-Citizenship-law-reform-Advocacy-Analysis-Brief-2019-ENG.pdf>

11.For more, see Alam, J. (2018). The Rohingya of Myanmar: theoretical significance of the minority status. *Asian Ethnicity*, 19(2), 180-210.

According to one respondent, a 37-year-old male, 'Once I am awarded citizenship, I will be able to enjoy all of the rights and benefits of a natural-born citizen. The rights to vote and to receive government benefits, as well as the ability to work, own a home, and participate in the political process will become parts of my normal life'.

In several instances, respondents recognized that citizenship is not an all-encompassing solution and conceptualized it instead as a precursor to peace. As one 26-year-old male put it, 'I think we might still face a few problems even after getting citizenship, such as conflict due to religious differences, and arguments around culture and perception'.

Annex: Background of study

Topics of Inquiry

The purpose of the study was threefold.

First, the study provides new insights for understanding Rohingya refugees' political perspectives by exploring their own definitions of four commonly voiced demands: "home and repatriation," "justice," "rights," and "citizenship." Of special interest here is how the Rohingya refugees living in Cox's Bazar interpret and approach legal verbiage that— at least in theory— safeguards against violations, both in Bangladesh and in Myanmar. Embedded throughout the stories told here is the trauma of dispossession— from land, from home, from the right to live, love, and belong. As one respondent put it, 'we live like birds in a cage, fish out of water, animals in a trap'.

Second, the report relied on an iterative cycle of research, action and reflection through the participatory action model. Our aim was to encourage collective participation, and emphasize the agency and possibilities of Rohingya refugees involved in the project.

Third, in the spirit of the agenda set forth by UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, the report elevates the voices of youth in recognition of their role in peacebuilding in the largest refugee camp in the world. UNSCR 2250 identifies five key pillars for action: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships and disengagement and reintegration. The Resolution urges member states to give youth a greater voice in decision-making at the local, national, regional and international levels and to consider setting up mechanisms that would enable young people to participate meaningfully in peace processes. While the first two reports in this three-part series were executed by a youth-led research team, this final report is delivered by adults; it nonetheless retains the focus on gathering youth perspectives, as researchers made it a priority to canvas the views of male and female youth aged 18-29.

International humanitarian agencies, human rights organizations and government actors often acknowledge publicly that displaced Rohingya are seeking justice, rights, citizenship, and to return home safely. These concepts might seem obvious or uncontroversial on the surface, but insufficient research has been conducted to discover what Rohingya actually mean when they say they wish to pursue justice, or to return home. It is crucial that Rohingya understandings of these terms be addressed in detail, especially because this will help with gauging expectations of, for example, what returning home to Myanmar might actually look like. The overall aim of this round of research was to dig deeper into these important themes, all of which had been indirectly relevant to previous rounds of the project but had not yet received concerted attention. The research team in Cox's Bazar identified topics and concepts that felt important to them, anticipating that it would be valuable to canvass community views on what these concepts mean and how Rohingya think about them in connection with their own lives. The final themes selected for study in this concept-focused report, and the specific questions that were explored in connection with these themes, are as follows:

1. Home and Repatriation:

- What do you think of when you hear the word 'home'? What does it mean to you?
- If you return to Myanmar/repatriate, would you need to go to your original home, or could you live in a different place in Myanmar?
- Do you have any concerns or fears about going back home? What are they?

2. Justice:

- Is justice important to you, and to your community?
- What does justice mean to you, at the local level?
- What does international justice mean to you?
- How would your life be different if international justice was achieved? What would justice allow you to do, in a practical sense?

3. Rights:

- What does 'rights' mean to you?
- What kinds of rights do you need - in Bangladesh, in Myanmar?
- What kinds of rights do you need as an individual? What kinds of rights do Rohingya need as a group?
- Do different people in your community (men, women, girls, elders, people with disabilities) have different rights? How so?

4. Citizenship:

- Did you previously hold citizenship in Myanmar?
- Tell me about a typical day in your life back in Myanmar. How was it affected by (not) having citizenship?
- Do you think your life would change if you got citizenship? Do you think you would still face any problems?

Methodology

In keeping with the two previous Rohingya community-led reports produced through this project, the present study was developed through a community-driven project based on 'participatory action research' (PAR) methods. Three Rohingya researchers living in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh scoped the project, conducted preliminary assessments, developed questions and conducted interviews. International researchers helped brainstorm methodology, guiding the research remotely, assisting when the research process faced challenges, and editing this report. In the interests of security, the identities of all respondents who were interviewed have been anonymized.

The study adopts an emancipatory approach that centres the agency of people directly affected by conflict and draws on best practices in PAR. Rather than serve as local enumerators for an international project, the researchers developed the research questions themselves, and built the project in accordance with their own vision for their community with support from practitioners and independent consultants.

This participatory research project empowers young people and adults residing in Cox's Bazar to formulate their own questions and to interview youth, adults and elders in their community. The model builds on Dr. Rebecca Sutton's visit to Cox's Bazar in July 2019, where she delivered intensive training to members of the 'Rohingya Youth for Legal Action' (RYLA) organization, focusing on skills for conducting PAR. For more information on that training exercise, see 'Field Note: Knowledge Exchange in Rohingya Camps in Cox's Bazar'.¹²

12. Available at: <https://www.law.ed.ac.uk/research/impact-and-engagement/field-note-from-the-rohingya-camps>.

Participants in the Project

Researchers

Three dedicated community-based researchers supported the project, two of whom were engaged in the previous rounds of research and one of whom was new to the project. The primary researcher guided two junior researchers to engage in community-based research and in Cox's Bazar. The three reported to, and were supported by, a small team of three international research coaches who used a coaching approach to guide the local team through the project and help them to realise their vision for the research. Through weekly check-ins, the remote support team assisted the main researchers to identify appropriate participants and to develop selection criteria for community interviews. All research activity took place within the Cox's Bazar camps in Bangladesh. The research coaching team comprised Imrul Islam, a graduate of Georgetown University and the Advocacy Manager for the Norwegian Refugee Council in Bangladesh; Jessica Olney, Visiting Researcher at Centre for Peace and Justice, Brac University; and Niamh Gibbons, from Harvard University. Dr. Rebecca Sutton, a Canadian lawyer and Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at Edinburgh Law School, is the Project Lead and serves as the main contact for the project.

Respondents

A total of 33 interviews were conducted for this phase of the project, taking place between November 2020 and March 2021. Of the 33 respondents for this round of the project, 21 were youth aged 18-29; 11 were female; 2 were elders.

Safety considerations

Due to the security issues Rohingya face and the Covid-19 pandemic, safety considerations of researchers, respondents, and the larger camp community were the highest priority for the project. Most interviews were conducted virtually or over the phone. Where in-person interactions occurred, they adhered to strict social distancing guidelines. When the local research team gathered in person to discuss findings, they remained socially distanced, wore masks, and practiced frequent handwashing. We allowed the project to take approximately an extra month of time than originally planned, in order to lower the pressure on the local team and to allow ample time for the research to be conducted.

Research ethics

The researchers navigated the sensitive topics of home, justice, citizenship, and rights with respondents carefully, aware of the potentially retraumatizing effect that could arise as people shared distressing personal experiences. In the absence of adequate psychosocial support services in the camps, the researchers exercised caution by framing questions in a conceptual manner, avoiding asking them in ways that would prompt people to share personal experiences. The researchers also shared information about the purpose (and limitations) of the study in order to ensure that respondents were equipped to give meaningful and informed consent prior to participating. Respondents were invited to share their opinions and told that the purpose of the report was to give a platform for their voices, especially so that their views and opinions could be circulated to service providers and other interlocutors working in the camps.

In some cases, respondents felt upset while discussing the four concepts, particularly the questions about home. The researchers responded by pausing the interview, encouraging the respondent, providing water, and breathing deeply together. The researchers were able to provide comfort in these moments of distress by reminding respondents that they, too, were Rohingya and experiencing the same feelings and persecution. They also explained to respondents how to use coping techniques to calm themselves anytime they felt upset.

