

Lessons Learnt on Assessments from the Rohingya Refugee Response

Background

The NPM Site Assessment (SA) is a regular data collection and reporting exercise documenting the living conditions and concerns of Rohingya population living in camps and in host communities in Cox's Bazar. NPM also undertakes regular Flow Monitoring to establish numbers and location of the Rohingya population. In Round 9, this was 898,312 and in Round 10, it was 914,678.

In October 2017, IOM's Needs and Population Monitoring unit and ACAPS entered into a partnership, establishing an Analysis Hub in Cox's Bazar to support decision making through the creation of products which contribute to a shared understanding of the Rohingya Crisis. The Analysis Hub has published thematic reports and supported key interagency including the Humanitarian Needs Overview. Additionally, the Analysis Hub provides technical assessment support to the NPM. This paper contains the key findings and lessons learned from a technical review of the NPM Site Assessment tool.

The aim of this paper is to outline challenges, findings and solutions on the SA's data collection and analysis for the humanitarian community, specifically, concerned actors in Cox's Bazar. This paper considers issues encountered in the analysis of NPM Round

The existence of a dedicated assessment team, regularly and consistently collecting data from 1,922 data provides an opportunity to improve decision making and inform the shared understanding of the Refugee Crisis. Without deeper reflection on the process and analytical output, there is a risk the SA is reduced to "tick-the-box" documentation

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to outline challenges, findings and solutions on the SA's data collection and analysis for the humanitarian community, specifically, concerned actors in Cox's Bazar. This paper references the more thorough *Issues Paper* as well as the proposed revisions to the questionnaire, both of which have already been jointly reviewed with IOM.

Sources

Benini. A and Ng. Y.W.S. (2018). *Building a Prioritization Index with NPM Bangladesh Site Assessment Round 9 Data*. Washington D.C.: ACAPS-NPM Analysis Hub.
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International Organization for Migration (2018). *NPM Site Assessment Round 10 Dataset (May 2018)*. Cox's Bazar: IOM.
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International Organization for Migration (2018). *NPM Site Assessment Round 8 Dataset (February 2018)*. Cox's Bazar: IOM.

Needs and Population Monitoring – the Rohingya Crisis

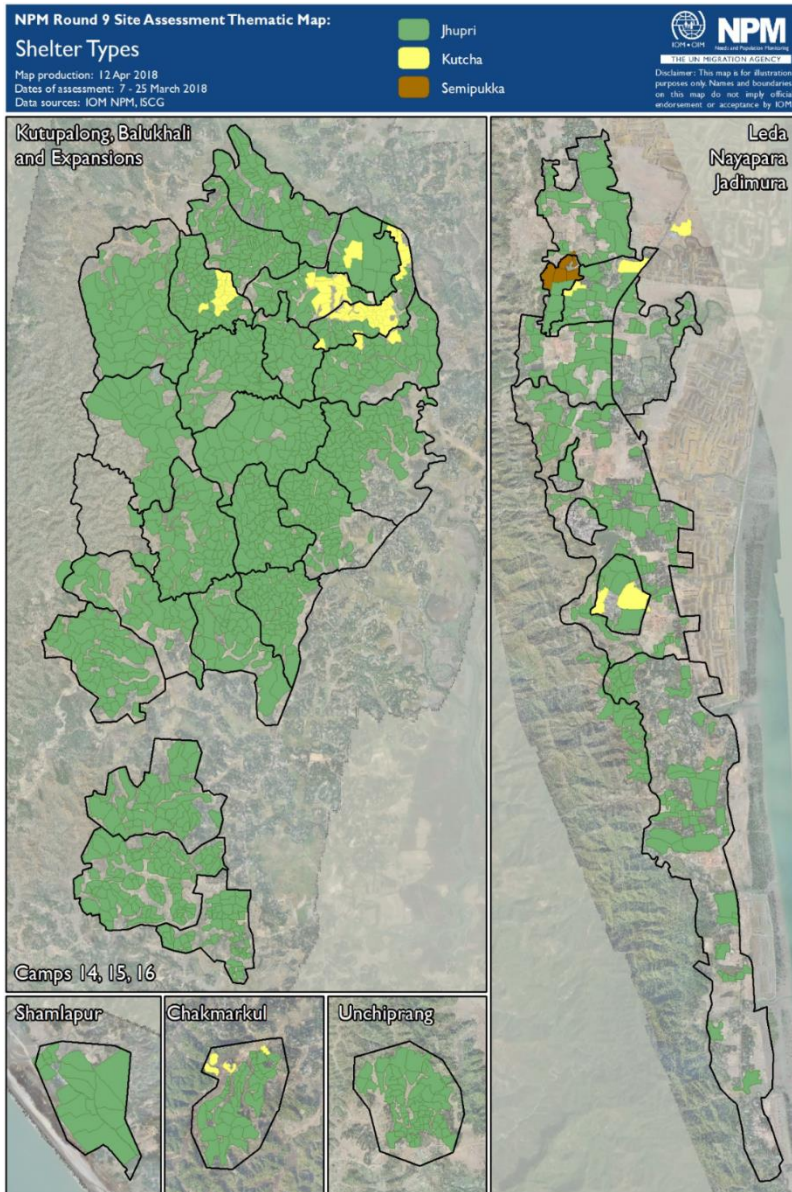
IOM Bangladesh Needs and Population Monitoring (NPM) is part of IOM's global Displacement Tracking Matrix programming. NPM Bangladesh conducts the Site Assessment as well as the Flow Monitoring, which documents changes and movements in displaced population. These components are designed to be complementary and provide complete coverage of population movements.

ACAPS

ACAPS provides high quality multisectoral analysis that enables crisis responders to better understand and address humanitarian needs. As independent specialists in Humanitarian Needs Analysis and Assessment, ACAPS is not affiliated with the UN or any other organisation, helping to guarantee objective and evidence-based analysis.

Precision and Sensitivity

The Rohingya population appears to be relatively homogenous, having come to Bangladesh without many of their possessions and then living in fairly similar settlements compressed into 20 square kilometres. In refugee crises in other parts of the world, differences in household and community severity stemmed much more from gaps in service delivery and commodity provision, as opposed to pre-existing vulnerability. This necessitates assessment design that can granulate the understanding enough to take into account the full range of variation in a population. One clear example of this can be seen from the map below on the types of Shelter that various refugees live in.



More than 90% of the population lives in Jhupri shelters, indicated by the blocks in green. The question on Shelter Types is insufficiently granular and precise for programming purposes: there has to be questions which uncover finer distinctions in the Rohingya population. This will correct overly vague and broad questions which yield little information.

In order to produce more useful information, such nonperforming questions should be broken up so that they become more sensitive to variations. For instance, the question on Shelter Type should be replaced with a set of three questions:

What is the main type of

1. Roofing/

2. Flooring/

3. Wall

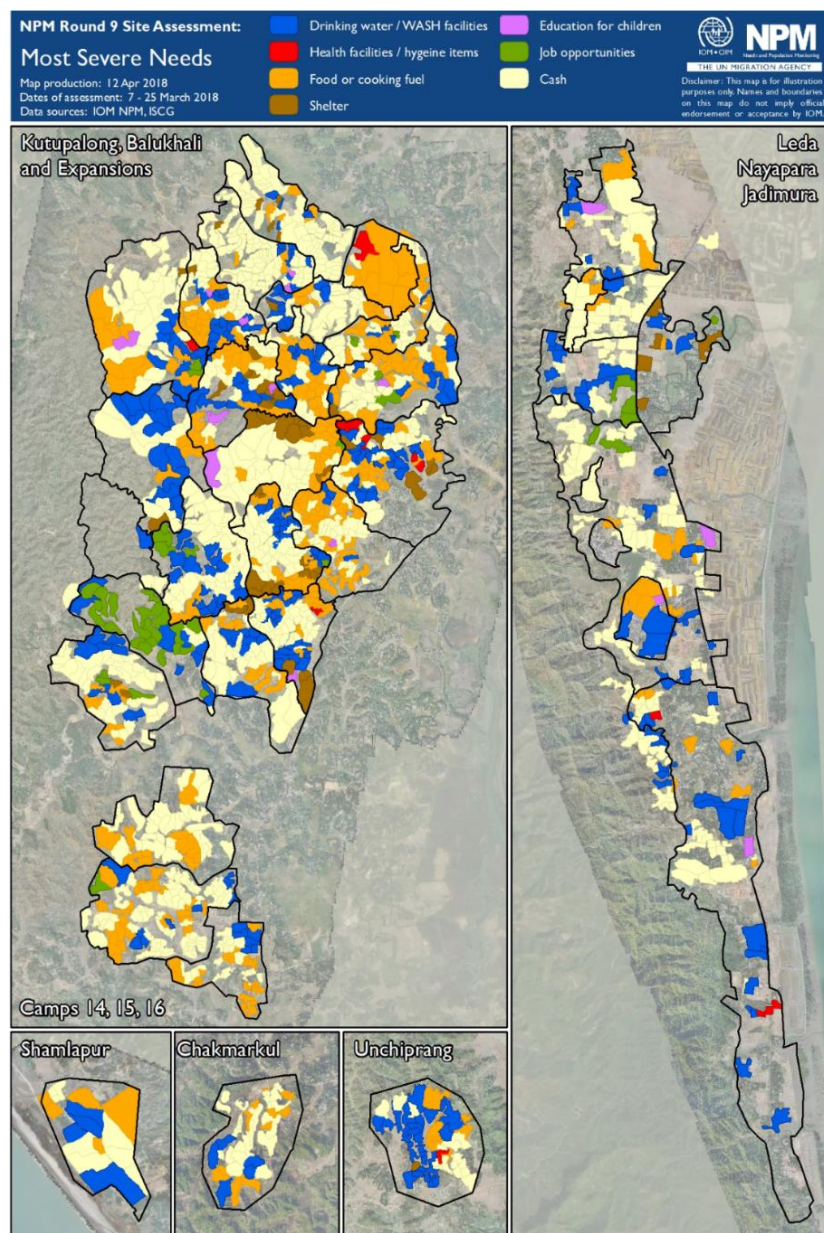
material in this block?

- Tarpaulin sheets
- Bamboo
- Dirt or Mud
- Brick
- Concrete
- CGI
- Thatch
- Other, specify:

Information collected from this set of replacement questions on housing materials – which are literally the component parts of a shelter – would be better at stratifying the population to uncover gaps and unmet need at the finest granularity possible.

Programmatic Oversight

Surveys are advised to begin and end with programmatic intent, meaning that not only is information collected on key issues, but it is translated and rendered down in a way that supports key humanitarian programming decisions.



Key Informants were asked about the most severe need in the block they served. Most of the possible responses were sector or commodity based. However, due to the inclusion of the option "Cash", a modality rather than a comparable need, a significant amount of the sectoral variation in needs is hidden over, as can be seen from the map on the left. In the analysis of priority needs, fuel and drinking water were the most prevalent after cash. However, the actual ranking of priority needs cannot be determined as the results have been compromised by the inclusion of "cash".

The Site Assessment is, on the whole, misaligned with sector information needs. NPM are not expected to be subject matter experts, but additional programmatic oversight is recommended.

Assessment coordination is essential, and in particular, communicating the purpose and methodology of the assessment to all relevant stakeholders. Some stakeholders were not aware that the Site Assessment was a Key Informant Survey. Others expected the NPM to support their MEAL requirements, and therefore mentioned that the questions submitted to NPM do not coincide with their core indicators and therefore could not be used for reporting.

Concerted efforts must be made towards better assessment coordination – sector indicators should be set in a logically-consistent fashion where they can each be traced back to response outcomes. A formal analytical framework should be established so that the entire Response can be consolidated under one single logframe, which articulates the expected outcomes and indicators to measure progress.

Error and fatigue in enumeration

Assessment designers should be conscious of survey length. In data collection for Round 9, enumerators and informants had to go through 128 questions. This could, however, be accomplished in less than an hour per informant – many of them were already familiar with the questions from earlier rounds and many options were glossed over and not read out. This distorted the results and muddled the methodology, blurring the line between unprompted and prompted questions.

On the left is a classic example of a fatiguing question. It has 18 options; enumeration team leaders have confirmed that in these types of questions, both they and the key informants lose track of all the possible responses. The options all compete with each other for memory and verbal resources; and the first few options are likely to be selected more frequently than those lower on the list because of question-order effects.

In Round 9 of the Site Assessment, much lower-than-expected correlations were found amongst the measured indicators, for instance, one would assume some correlation amongst safety concerns in one's shelter since problems such as exposure to landslide risk and structural instability should be correlated to some extent. But since only one option was allowed to be selected, these options were forced to compete with each other.

When the questionnaire is as long as Round 9 was, there is the inevitable tendency to cut corners where possible, leading to a lot of inconsistency in how the questionnaire is administered. One clear example with consistency in enumeration in the dataset is the question on Primary Water Sources – the percentage of blocks relying on piped water doubled from 4.4% in Round 8 to 9.2% in Round 9. In addition, the blocks without Secondary Water Sources grew from 48.8% in Round 8 to 80.4% in Round 9. Such a substantial change in the use of water sources is unlikely to have occurred after just one round of enumeration; it is far more likely that the differences are due to Enumeration Error and variances in what enumerators say to informants.

N3- How would households in your location like to be communicated with by aid organisations?

- ☐ Majhee
- ☐ Face to face (office/info desk)
- ☐ Television
- ☐ Newspaper
- ☐ Mobile phone - calls, SMS, WhatsApp
- ☐ Community or religious leaders
- ☐ Local government leaders
- ☐ NGO workers
- ☐ SW/FM Radio
- ☐ Community Radio
- ☐ Microphone or speaker announcements
- ☐ Sign boards
- ☐ Social media (incl. Facebook)
- ☐ Printed flyers
- ☐ Community meetings
- ☐ Tea stall sessions
- ☐ Cleaning Campaign
- ☐ Focus group discussions
- ☐ Home visits from volunteers/staff
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Word of mouth friends, family
- ☐ MEG_2017
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Don't Know
- ☐ Other

To avoid this, long lists of options should be converted into nested sub-menus so that informants do not have to hold so much information in their working memories and are able to give each option the proper consideration it deserves:

What Items are regularly available in nearby markets?

Food	Shelter Materials	Medicine	Hygiene Items	Clothing and Other Household Items	Fuel
<ul style="list-style-type: none">RiceLentils and PulsesEggsMeat (Chicken/Mutton/Beef)VegetablesFish (dried and fresh)Spices/Condiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">BambooTarpaulinSheetsCGIPlywoodRopeNailsTools				

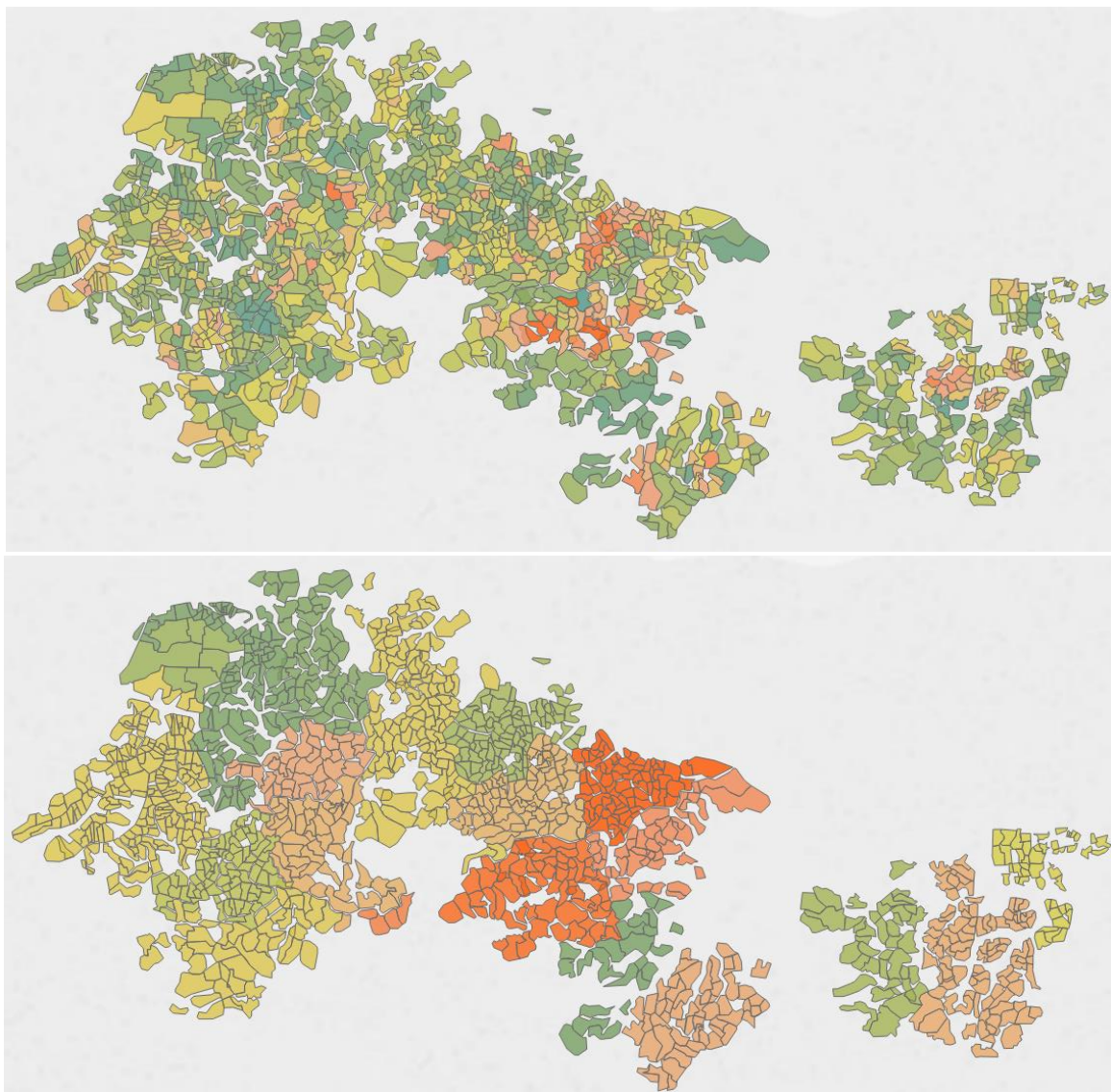
It is important to cull and revise the questions regularly. If questions or options are faulty, they must be corrected – it is more important to have useable data than to be able to perform trend analysis. A wide variety of opinions should be sought and the ground rules for removing and revising questions must be established; these must be technical and not political reasons. The number of options may also be reduced, especially if the percentage of Key Informants who answered positively sometimes form less than 1% of the population and can be consolidated under the option "Other". Furthermore, it is best practice to have a full script with prompts for enumerators to refer to. If no guidance is provided, the administration of the questionnaire will be inconsistent, resulting in similarly inconsistent results.

Aggregation

A Prioritisation Model has been developed as a tool for decision makers by the Analysis Hub. It was developed at the camp-point, or block, level. The formula considers indicators across 1. Shelter & NFIs, 2. Water and 3. Sanitation, 4. Health and 5. Food Sectors and combines them into a basic needs gap index. 31 Indicators from Round 9 were used. This is documented in the Rohingya Influx Overview and originates from the paper *Building a Prioritization Index with NPM Bangladesh Site Assessment Data – Round 9, March 2018*.

The prioritisation model identified 132 camp points or blocks which can be regarded as having “high gaps” based on the sector-focused sub-indices. However, these 132 high-gap blocks are spread throughout much larger camps: the 61,879 people living in these high-gap blocks are split across 23 camps and settlements. In these camps and settlements, persons who suffer from a lack of basic services and commodities form no more 32% of a camp's population; the mean is 10.5%. These high-gap blocks will be identified again for Round 10.

Furthermore, intra-camp variation is much greater than inter-camp variation. Below are the Prioritisation Index scores of areas within the Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion, with red being the most severe. They are first presented by block and below that, scores have been aggregated by camp:



Aggregating at too high a level – in this case, at the camp level – destroys data and provides a distorted image of the situation which might negatively impact targeting. It should also be mentioned that whilst the Prioritisation Index data displayed here illustrates the risks of aggregating data at the camp level, this is true as well for the rest of the information collected on the other sectors. Finer and more detailed planning and programme is called for – ideally, analysis should be pushed to the lowest possible level of granularity. Finally, whilst it is important to recognise that camps are the administrative unit of choice by the Army of Bangladesh, sampling should not occur at the camp level and neither should camps be used as framing devices for planning: the second of the two maps above shows just how much data loss is experienced when block-level data is aggregated upwards.

Data Sharing and Overlap

The UNHCR household survey and the NPM Site Assessment are the two main primary data collection tools providing information on the living conditions of the Rohingya population in Cox's Bazar. The WFP REVA is another key dataset which will be reviewed at a later date. The UNHCR household survey is a sampled, representative survey carried out at the camp level; the NPM Site Assessment is a Key Informant Survey administered at block level. The UNHCR data is currently not shared with NPM. The NPM data is open and available through multiple online channels and is updated monthly.

Typically, Key Informant Surveys work best when there is a high level of movement in the population and significant secondary displacement. Representative sampled surveys tend to produce more accurate results, especially when the enumerated populations are fairly stable. However, as mentioned above, a camp is too broad and diverse a unit to use for planning – intra-camp variation is far greater than inter-camp variation. By sampling at the camp level, the household survey is reduced in its usefulness.

The Household Survey and the Site Assessment represent two different methods of data collection, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. To make the most of this there should be complementarity and collaboration in questionnaire design. However, there is instead overlap. Below are some of the major indicators measured by the UNHCR Household Survey and their counterparts in the NPM dataset. However, to recall the lesson on Programmatic Oversight, the establishment of core sector indicators would greatly reduce uncertainty amongst the major survey teams in the Rohingya Refugee Response. Green indicates a match with an identical indicator in the Site Assessment; yellow, an imperfect match; and red, no match.

UNHCR Household Survey (every three months)	NPM Site Assessment (monthly)
Population - Individuals	Population - Individuals
Population - Families	Population - Families
Age and gender distribution	-
Families with Specific Needs	# of Vulnerable Household Members
Top 3 most urgently-needed items	3 most important modalities for Shelter Assistance
Main source of fuel	Main source of cooking fuel
% of families in bamboo & plastic sheeting shelters (Jhupri)	Shelter type - Jhupri, Kutcha, Semi-Pukka
% of families living in lockable shelters	Primary safety concern: No locks
% of families with access to food assistance	# of people who eat 1, 2 and 3 meals a day
Sources of Food Assistance	Two main Sources of
Food Coping Mechanisms	<i>in Round 8, removed in Round 9</i>
% of Families who Cook Indoors	Where do households Cook?
Access to BMS and supplementary feeding	Access to BMS and supplementary feeding
Concerns with Latrines	Problems with Latrines
% of families with access to bathing facilities	% of people with access to Bathing Facilities
% of families with access to soap	% of people who own soap
% of families with access to public latrines	% of people who have access to latrines
Access to NFE and Madrassas	Access to NFEs and Madrassas
Most-trusted Information Source	Preferred Communications channels
Priority Humanitarian Needs	Severity of Humanitarian Needs
Protection Concerns	<i>Various</i>

Despite the overlap, there is little agreement in results. For instance, fuel and firewood are consistently rated as the most urgent need in the NPM dataset, after cash. However, from UNHCR's camp-level reports, which do not include cash as a need, the most pressing need is access to food. As explained above, the inclusion of cash in the NPM has a strong distorting affect on the spread of needs across sectors, and could be one reason for the difference. Another reason could be sampling errors in the Household Survey. Discrepancies from two different surveys are not necessarily problematic, as they can reveal important differences or flaws in survey design. However, competing results must be reconciled or explained, otherwise it causes confusion for aid providers to deal with two competing datasets depicting different results.

Data sharing would help to resolve these issues – NPM does not know enough about UNHCR's methodology to draw any firm conclusions about the reasons for the differences. NPM's data is freely available and its methodology has been disseminated, but the actual field-level practices are not captured in this document.

Moreover, data sharing is feasible without compromising the anonymity guaranteed to the people from whom it was collected. It can certainly be argued that, in this context, impeding data sharing has reduced humanitarian protection by preventing the voices of the affected to be heard clearly, restricting decision making and limiting targeted interventions. To resolve these issues, a formal data-sharing agreement which would cover all aid providers is proposed. All agencies would benefit from the increased understanding that comes from ensuring that surveys complement each other instead of competing.

Representation and Protection

The mahjis are the main key informant of the Site Assessment. Majhis are not formal representatives of the Rohingya population; they are appointed by the Bangladeshi army and there are no established rules for the selection of a mahji (except for in registered refugee camps). They are almost exclusively male, tend to have received slightly more education, have owned businesses in Myanmar or had taken some form of leadership role during their displacement from Myanmar to Bangladesh. They have tended to be selected for their fluency in Bengali.

Whilst not representatives, they are part of the day-to-day governance and management of the Rohingya settlements in Bangladesh and do have more oversight of the services than the average camp resident. Mahjis are indispensable to the operations of most aid agencies. However, their perspective is still limited and there are significant concerns regarding abuses of power.

The Majhi system was abolished in 2007 in formal camps and a more democratic and accountable system was established. However, the majhis remained a dominant force in makeshift settlements. Since the latest Rohingya influx, the Majhi system has been reinstated by the army, who selects them informally and uses them as focal points for camp governance. Their main tasks are to support distribution efforts, handle small disputes, maintain security and be the main conduit of information to and from refugee communities. There have been some efforts from the Army and CiCs to limit corruption and abuse. However, this process is not formalised.

Although they may suitably answer questions related to infrastructure, housing conditions or access to commodities and services, the fact that mahjis are overwhelmingly male and hold significant amounts of power over extremely vulnerable refugees means that they are often inappropriate informants for sensitive issues and protection concerns such as menstrual hygiene, human trafficking and female seclusion. And though NPM asks its enumerators if the mahjis answers confirm what can be observed in the field, it is known that protection concerns are often private or hidden. Overall, whilst mahjis might prove knowledgeable of a host of issues related to the populations they serve, it is best practice to supplement such a survey with Focus Group Discussions and other Open-ended Discussions.

Documentation and Transparency

It is important to document all issues with questionnaires and enumeration processes. The tools themselves, especially after 9 rounds of enumeration and revision, are full of rules and exceptions that cannot be understood from just referring to old versions of the questionnaire. It is imperative to document the knowledge from the staff working in the NPM Unit so that it is not lost when there is turnover.

High turnover is a feature of the humanitarian system and short contracts the norm. This means that changes to the Site Assessment and their reasons must be documented. It can not be expected that all stakeholders will have time to interview people and go to the field to observe processes and dynamics. Without documentation, the ability of stakeholders to influence NPM and engage with it are much reduced. Closed systems are not recommended for rapidly-evolving contexts, such as humanitarian crises. Feedback is necessary for all agencies to grow and change in line with the needs of the communities they serve; useful, gainful feedback can only be provided when procedural aspects of each assessment are thoroughly documented and disseminated.

Common forms of documentation include:

- Developing a Codebook, where indicator definitions, transformations and manipulations of the data and any other caveats and explanations may be recorded. This is important to ensure the datasets we share are interpretable. The Codebook should be developed at the indicator/variable level, not at the question level.
- Maintaining an Issues Tracker, which records major turning points, changes and decisions as well as the underlying logic behind those choices. This is particularly for future programme managers as they will be able to understand which aspects of the programme can be changed and which cannot.

Documentation is an investment. Codifying and formalising one's methodology makes it more understandable and accessible to others. It is also a precursor to good analysis.

Translation

Rohingya is not a written language; Chittagonian, its close relative, does not have a script either. Questionnaires are currently developed in English and translated into Bengali and read out in Chittagonian. In order to ensure accuracy in the administration of assessments, it is recommended to conduct a blind translation where the questionnaire is translated into Bengali and then back-translated into English so that assessment designers can tweak the clarity of their questions. Furthermore, Rohingya does not completely align with Chittagonian; these differences have never been documented. Further accuracy may be achieved holding focus group discussions with Rohingya persons who have been in Bangladesh for many years and can better speak to the nuances between Rohingya and Chittagonian. Attaining good translations of assessment tools is a continuous process that requires consistent attention.