SUPPORTING HUMANITARIAN COMMUNICATION:

What role does a dedicated ‘common service’ play in community engagement and accountability?

A CASE STUDY FROM THE ROHINGYA RESPONSE, COX’S BAZAAR

EVALUATION REPORT  //  FEBRUARY 2021
Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the humanitarian practitioners and Rohingya community members who gave up their time to be interviewed for this study. Particular thanks go to the BBC Media Action research team in Cox’s Bazar, led by Head of Research Arif Al Mamun, who carried out the field work. Thanks also go to staff from all the consortium partners who contributed to the research design and gave valuable feedback on the report. This report is the evaluation of the third phase of the Common Service for Community Engagement and Accountability, led by BBC Media Action alongside Translators without Borders and Ground Truth Solutions from April 2019 to March 2020. It was funded by ECHO (with funds flowing through Action Against Hunger) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), with back-funding from the UK Department for International Development.
## Contents

Preface: What is a ‘common service’ and why is it important?  

Executive summary

1. Project and research overview

2. Evaluation findings

   1. Humanitarian practitioners and organisations
   2. Rohingya and host community members

3. Case studies

   Case 1: Cyclone preparedness training and communication materials
   Case 2: Rohingya language research and support
   Case 3: Setting up listener groups to share information
   Case 4: *What Matters?* raising awareness of issues in the camps
   Case 5: Accountability training and feedback campaign

4. Conclusions and recommendations

---

Cover image: Rohingya seen along the road at a market in Kutupalong camp (Paula Bronstein/Getty Images)
It has long been recognised that there is a power imbalance in humanitarian responses, where communities affected by crisis have no formal control or influence over the humanitarian agencies working to support them, and therefore that humanitarian agencies have a responsibility to be accountable to the communities they aim to serve.

There is also increasing recognition amongst humanitarian agencies that providing information for and communicating with people affected by crises are among the most important elements of emergency response. Without accurate, reliable information, people affected by crisis cannot make decisions to keep themselves and their families safe.

Two of the nine commitments set out in the global Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability specifically focus on community engagement and accountability. They make it clear that humanitarian agencies have a responsibility to ensure communities know their rights and entitlements, have access to information, participate in decisions that affect them, and have access to safe complaints mechanisms.

However, in order to meet these commitments to communities affected by crises, humanitarian agencies increasingly recognise that collaboration between different actors is required. Although individual agencies engage with their beneficiaries, without a coordinated approach, it is difficult to gauge what really matters to communities – what are their immediate needs and priorities and how are these changing over time? Information shared with communities can be inconsistent and confusing; and important information and local expertise about the most effective way to communicate can be overlooked.

To overcome some of these challenges, dedicated ‘common community engagement platforms’ have been set up in different humanitarian responses around the world, including following cyclones in the Philippines and earthquakes in Nepal and Haiti. Some have grown from pre-existing ‘communicating with communities’ working groups operating in the country, while others have been set up following a crisis. These platforms take different forms, operate at different scales, and are led by different actors depending on the context and capacity of national and international agencies. Platforms include different elements depending on need, capacity and funding available, but they all seek to ensure that communities affected by crisis have access to reliable, consistent information; and that community voice is elevated and taken into account in humanitarian agencies’ decision making.

Since October 2017, the Common Service for Community Engagement and Accountability (‘the Common Service’) has been funded as a dedicated project providing key services and support to help humanitarian organisations engage effectively with Rohingya communities and Bangladeshis living near Rohingya camps (host communities) in Cox’s Bazar. A sub-national working group on communicating with communities (CwC) already existed in Bangladesh and was activated in response to the Rohingya refugee crisis. The Common Service project operates alongside the working group carrying out a diverse range of activities including creating and sharing audio and visual content in the Rohingya language; supporting and...
training humanitarian agencies on language, communication, community engagement and accountability; and operating a collective feedback analysis service, collating and analysing community feedback and complaints data from different sources and producing a fortnightly bulletin – *What Matters?*

Aiming to contribute to the evidence base of the role a common service can have on effective engagement with communities in humanitarian responses, this evaluation generated five key impact case studies. These case studies emerged from qualitative research with humanitarian practitioners the Common Service has engaged with. These case studies were investigated in collaboration with an independent academic partner using process tracing (an evaluation methodology which examines causal claims of impact through robust hypothesis testing and evidence gathering). This was in order to test and generate understanding of the impact the Common Service can have at both practitioner, organisation and community levels. As such, this report provides valuable insights into the role such platforms can play in humanitarian responses to refugee crises.
Executive summary

Overall key findings
Across in-depth interviews conducted with humanitarian practitioners, consistent findings on what they valued and appreciated about how the Common Service supported them with community engagement and accountability emerged:

• The Common Service was valued by humanitarian practitioners for its high quality communication materials, support to develop mechanisms to distribute this content and development of specific communication campaigns. Across in-depth interviews, practitioners consistently felt the high quality communication products such as audio programmes to be used in listening groups and visual materials for communicating with communities were highly effective and that this was not content they could have produced themselves. The provision of consistent content especially on complex topics such as registration, repatriation, early marriage, vaccination campaigns, drug trafficking and cyclone preparedness were especially appreciated. Practitioners felt that this helped to ensure communication to communities was consistent across camps and agencies, and lessened the risk of misinformation being shared.

• Training provided by the Common Service on accountability and language helped humanitarian practitioners communicate more effectively and listen to the needs of the community. Humanitarian practitioners consistently mentioned that the language aspects of the Common Service’s community engagement training were most useful for their field staff. Staff felt that accountability training led to them being more sensitive and responsive to Rohingya communities' feedback, and feeling more empathy.

“Now, we see more and more staff understanding why we collect feedback at the household level – the training helped us bring in the human aspect and get staff to think, ‘If it was me – what would I want?’”

Humanitarian practitioner

• High quality research which comprehensively presented community members needs and information gaps helped practitioners understand communities better and take action. Through What Matters? the humanitarian feedback bulletin, practitioners felt the Common Service amplified community voice through a neutral platform, providing a regular source of evidence of community priorities and concerns, which helped agencies to take action. Practitioners reported that What Matters? was widely read and highlighted new issues that other camps were facing or that agencies had not identified through their own feedback mechanisms. They also cited changes they had made as a result of research and resources provided by the Common Service. These included changing project plans, testing and amending existing communication materials, translating written materials into Burmese for literate Rohingya community members, and working with religious leaders to share important information.
• Research with the Rohingya community indicates that access to information and knowledge on how to feedback is improving. At the community level, qualitative research conducted with Rohingya community members indicated that they appreciated and valued some of the specific communication products provided by the Common Service, such as the audio programme available in listening clubs. A population level survey conducted by Ground Truth Solutions\textsuperscript{vi} (GTS) in April 2019 and repeated in November 2019 found that access to information is improving. In the Rohingya community, 59% of respondents felt informed about the kind of aid or services available to them in November 2019 (up from 53% in April 2019). Knowledge of how to provide feedback is also improving. Over this project phase, there has been an increase in Rohingya communities, especially women, reporting that they know how to make complaints and give feedback, or report having no barriers to giving feedback on humanitarian support. For example, the GTS data indicates that 64% of Rohingya respondents reported knowing how to make suggestions or complaints about the aid they received in November 2019 (in contrast to 59% in April 2019).

• However, qualitative research found that Rohingya community members sometimes felt they could not complain about humanitarian support. Some said they felt frustrated at NGOs as they were often asking communities about their needs and priorities but did not communicate what services or aid they could offer, leading to unmet expectations and frustration. There are also clear differences in population level surveys in levels of satisfaction reported by host communities with respect to information provision and engagement with humanitarian agencies, all reporting much lower levels of satisfaction than Rohingya men and women.
Case studies
This report focuses on five case studies from five different humanitarian organisations working in the Rohingya response, which the Common Service has engaged with. Using process tracing, five case studies were examined closely to assess whether causal links could be proven, between changes attributed to the Common Service by practitioners, and impacts felt by community members in terms of community engagement and accountability. In some cases, the full causal chain was proved. In others, causal impact was not proven but there was strong evidence that the Common Service contributed to the outcome in question.

CASE STUDY 1
Common Service activities prompted Rohingya community members to take action in preparation for cyclone season
One practitioner reported a story of change that the Common Service had helped their agency to communicate more effectively as part of the Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP), leading to communities being more knowledgeable and taking action to protect themselves in cyclone season.
Result: Causal impact proven

CASE STUDY 2
Rohingya community members acted on information received through listening groups
One practitioner explained that their organisation would not have set up listener groups without the help of the Common Service and this enabled communities they serve to have access to information and take action. These listener groups led to communities receiving consistent, reliable, information, and taking action as a result of what they learned from the programmes.
Result: Causal impact proven

CASE STUDY 3
Common Service language training and support contributed to improved communication between humanitarian staff and Rohingya community members
One practitioner interviewed highlighted a story of change that by conducting research and providing language training, the Common Service raised awareness about characteristics of Rohingya language. This training resulted in local humanitarian practitioners being better able to communicate with Rohingya communities.
Result: The Common Service contributes to outcome

CASE STUDY 4
The Common Service contributes to humanitarian decision making
One practitioner stated their agency had read in What Matters? that Rohingya community members were increasingly concerned about safety in their camps, and that this resulted in the agency taking direct action by conducting safety audits in specific camps. What Matters? was found not to be the main information source which resulted in this action.
Result: The Common Service contributes to outcome

CASE STUDY 5
Common Service support contributes to improvements in humanitarian agencies accountability mechanisms
In one story of change, a practitioner reported that owing to the support the Common Service had provided (in the form of accountability training and an information campaign to encourage community members to provide feedback) this resulted in an increase in the level of feedback the agency received.
Result: The Common Service contributes to outcome
Overall contribution of case studies
As this is a small number of case studies, it is possible that these results are unrepresentative of the broader trends in the response. However, each case reflects the wider findings of the evaluation discussed above, especially some of the insights as to how practitioners valued the Common Service. Furthermore, the case studies investigated were generated against a backdrop of generally improving levels of community members’ access to information and engagement with humanitarian agencies, evidenced in population level trend data. These trends in wider population level data suggest that the examples presented through the case studies are not outliers and the causal processes which they document play out in other cases across the response.

These case studies also show that there is evidence the Common Service has direct impact on humanitarian organisations, practitioners and community members which would not have happened without the Common Service existing, and other examples where it plays an important contribution to improving communication and engagement between humanitarian organisations and communities.

Learning and recommendations
This evaluation contributes important learning about collaborative approaches to community engagement in humanitarian response, namely:

- There is value in common communication materials being used across a humanitarian response, when they are good quality, in the right language, and prepared in response to what communities’ say they need to know.
- It is not enough just to make the content: supporting agencies to share content (such as through listener groups) has resulted in information being heard and acted upon by Rohingya communities.
- There is value in having a neutral platform which is able to consolidate community feedback and amplify community voice across the response, providing an important source of evidence and highlighting issues individual agencies are not necessarily aware of.
- Conducting and publishing frequent research with communities about language and communication is important – this evidence helps agencies understand how and what to communicate.
- Causal evidence can be generated showing how support to humanitarian agencies translates into meaningful change at community level.
- A common service approach which can take a highly adaptive approach to programming is able to engage effectively with humanitarian organisations and support them in a timely and relevant way. This evaluation provides evidence that this collaboration results in communities being better informed and able to take action on issues important to their lives.
Introduction
Since late 2017, when an estimated 745,000 Rohingya refugees arrived in Bangladesh, the Common Service for Community Engagement and Accountability (the Common Service) has been providing key services to help humanitarian practitioners and organisations communicate effectively with Rohingya communities and Bangladeshis living near Rohingya camps (host communities). Almost 900,000 Rohingya refugees, (including families who have arrived since the late 1970s), now live in Teknaf and Ukhia upazilas in Cox’s Bazar. The majority live in 34 crowded camps spread across the area. Basic assistance is being provided and living conditions in the camps have improved but the needs and priorities of the Rohingya women, men, girls and boys living in the congested camps continue to evolve.

Project background and objectives
Since late 2017, BBC Media Action and Translators without Borders (TWB) have been working as a consortium to implement the Common Service for Community Engagement and Accountability (‘the Common Service’) in Bangladesh. The consortium also included Internews in the first and second phases of the project and Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) in the third phase. The Common Service has been funded by major donors as a dedicated project providing key services to help humanitarian organisations communicate and engage effectively with Rohingya communities and host communities in Cox’s Bazar. The Common Service consortium members provide a range of specialist, technical support services to nearly 100 humanitarian organisations working across 34 camps, as well as the Communicating with Communities Working Group (CwC) and other sectors, subgroups and taskforces. Humanitarian agencies operating in Cox’s Bazar each have their own methods of sharing information and engaging with Rohingya and host communities, and collecting and dealing with community feedback and complaints. The Common Service does not aim to replace agencies’ individual mechanisms, but it aims to support them to do this as effectively as possible. Therefore although the Common Service does not work directly with Rohingya and host communities, it aims to support and equip humanitarian partners and practitioners with the communications skills and services in order to ensure that:

• Individuals, families and communities have improved access to coordinated, timely and responsive two-way community engagement in their preferred language on critical lifesaving and life-enhancing actions that they can take.
• Systematic accountability is improved through common standards and principles for collecting and analysing feedback; and a collective mechanism for collating and analysing diverse sources of feedback to inform decision making processes at the sector and country levels.

Project activities
The Common Service includes a diverse range of activities. For example, in order to improve communities’ access to information, the Common Service has produced a significant number of Rohingya language tools and audio-visual communication content. It has also provided training to humanitarian and media agencies on communicating with communities, running listening groups, data management and Rohingya language and culture.
With the aim of increasing transparency and improving accountability, it has also been operating a collective feedback analysis service, collating and analysing community feedback and complaints data from different sources and producing a fortnightly bulletin – *What Matters*— which highlights communities’ current needs and priorities, and also includes summaries of its sociolinguistic research. By regularly publishing information on the Rohingya and host communities’ needs, concerns and priorities from a neutral platform, and disseminating this information to humanitarian practitioners, the Common Service aims to spur agencies to act on this information and adapt their programmes to better meet communities’ needs.

As of April 2020, there were over 500 individual subscribers to *What Matters*. From September to December 2019, almost 7000 individual users visited the Shongjog website which hosts all communication tools, products and research created by the Common Service and other actors. Between 2019 and 2020, the Common Service trained over 1,400 practitioners from 63 humanitarian agencies on different topics, aiming to improve the way these agencies engage with Rohingya and host communities in their work. For more details of the types of training provided by the Common Service in this phase of the project please see Appendix 1.

At the end of phase two of the project, data from response wide population surveys, as well as previous Common Service evaluations showed that some community members had less access to information and community engagement initiatives, such as those living in certain camps, women, older people and people with disabilities. The third phase of the project prioritised working with agencies who could help reach these underserved populations, either because they work in those specific camps or with vulnerable groups. The project offered these agencies bespoke support, based on needs assessments and developed in partnership with the agency. The Common Service also, by design, aims to ensure it can provide both proactive and reactive support to humanitarian agencies across the response, so it remained open to working with any agency who approached the consortium for support. For example, agencies may approach the Common Service to support them with a communication campaign, or to meet certain information needs, which the project can quickly react and respond to.
Evaluation methodology
Evaluations of previous phases of this project have included a community level survey to understand Rohingya and host communities’ access to information and communication, and in-depth interviews with practitioners working in the Rohingya response to understand whether and how they have been using Common Service tools and services. This third evaluation strives to understand how Common Service activities are influencing what agencies are doing on the ground, and what impact this has on communities themselves.

Research questions
The research questions for this evaluation aimed to deepen understanding of the Common Service’s role in community engagement and accountability. It aimed to answer:

1. To what extent are humanitarian agencies better able to communicate with Rohingya communities, and what role has the Common Service played in this?
2. To what extent are humanitarian agencies more accountable to Rohingya communities, especially in terms of adapting their programmes to meet communities’ needs, and what role has the Common Service played in this?
3. To what extent do Rohingya (and host) communities have better access to critical information, and what contribution has the Common Service made to this?
4. To what extent do Rohingya (and host) communities feel able to provide feedback to, and feel heard by, humanitarian agencies, and what role has the Common Service played in this?

Methodology
This evaluation sought to employ more complex evaluation methods and make extensive use of multiple data sources to build and test theories of how the Common Service has impact. As such, this evaluation incorporated:

1. In-depth interviews with humanitarian practitioners: An initial 12 in-depth interviews with practitioners working in organisations that had received support from the Common Service were conducted. These interviews aimed to identify any “stories of change” that practitioners felt had happened because of Common Service activities. These could be on any topic but participants were prompted on any changes they felt were attributable to the Common Service relating to the key project outcomes of community engagement and accountability.

2. Process tracing: This study employed process tracing to investigate whether Common Service activities led to outcomes via causal processes. This process tracing involved two phases. First was ‘theory building’: the researchers constructed likely causal processes using the stories of change put forward in the in-depth interviews with practitioners. The practitioner’s stories of change became causal chain pathways (which were laid out and explained in diagrams), which expressed hypothesised causal processes by which interventions led to outcomes. The second phase involved ‘theory-testing process tracing’ as defined by Beach and Pederson (2013). This tested whether indeed these hypothesised causal processes took place.

To do so, researchers identified rival causal processes (alternative hypotheses) of why the identified outcomes may have been reached. The researchers then designed further research which would test which hypothesis was most likely to be correct in these cases. This included:
• Follow-up interviews with the same practitioners and their colleagues to validate their stories of change
• Records, emails and other types of documentation being checked
• Analysis of monitoring data such as training feedback forms, trainer feedback reports, listening group feedback reports
• Review and analysis of multiple community-level datasets. The evaluation analysed several large scale population surveys. These surveys track the same indicators over time around Rohingya and host community members perceptions of their levels of access to information and their engagement with humanitarian organisations. Though the Common Service is not solely responsible for these indicators, they are useful for understanding overall trends and were used, where relevant, as additional data sources for the process tracing case studies.
• Focus group discussions (FGDs) with male and female Rohingya participants from two camps, camp 8E where agencies received bespoke support from the Common Service, and camp 3 where agencies did not receive such support. These were used to underpin the process tracing case studies but were also used to explore existing gaps and information needs community members were facing.

Each causal chain and the accompanying data were evaluated by an independent third party academic, Dr Dan Paget, Teaching Fellow at University College London, an expert in advanced qualitative methodologies including process tracing.

Figure 1: Process Tracing Pathway

Research limitations and mitigations
• The sampling frame for the in-depth interviews which formed the basis of the process tracing case studies was provided by project team members working within the Common Service. As such, these are more likely to be individuals who have strong relationships with the Common Service already i.e. they are aware of the Common Service, they have received support or training and/or value and recognise the importance of communication with communities. To balance the sample, interviews were also conducted with individuals who worked for agencies who had little engagement or exposure to the Common Service.
• These in-depth interviews were conducted mainly with agencies who were working with Rohingya communities across camps, rather than specifically with host communities. As a result, there is more of a focus in this evaluation on the community level impact amongst Rohingya communities, as opposed to host communities.
This section aims to summarise the data generated across the evaluation. Firstly, through presenting the common findings provided through the in-depth interviews with humanitarian practitioners about what they valued about the Common Service. Secondly, this section collates and summarises the data collected at the community level. Though the Common Service does not work directly with community members, some of its products and services directly reach community members through humanitarian organisations. Focus group discussions with community members provided feedback on these alongside a more in-depth understanding of their needs and views on humanitarian organisations. Population level surveys were also analysed to provide a wider understanding of community attitudes to humanitarian organisations and the services and information they provide.

1. Humanitarian practitioners and organisations

The Common Service provided high-quality, relevant, timely information and content in the right language, which is highly valued by agencies.

All humanitarian practitioners interviewed as part of the study who had engaged closely with the Common Service mentioned using the audio and visual communication materials produced by the Common Service and shared on Shongjog (the website which hosts various communication with communities materials and tools) for all to use. The support from the Common Service of provision of audio and visual communication products was particularly helpful for humanitarian agencies. These products included content such as a weekly audio podcast programme to be played in listener groups run by humanitarian agencies themselves and short public service announcements to be played in community spaces or through outreach activities. They felt this was invaluable to them as they often lacked the capacity to produce such content themselves.

Humanitarian practitioners explained that, over time, the issues that Rohingya communities have questions about have become more complex and sensitive, for example about repatriation back to Myanmar rather than how to access food. Practitioners felt that all agencies having access to the same audio and visual content, particularly on these sensitive issues, means that communities across all the camps are receiving the same information and there is less risk of staff communicating misinformation by accident. As well as improving the consistency and reliability of information across the refugee crisis response, this saves agencies time that they would otherwise need to spend in continuously training and updating field staff on specific issues.

“What is most invaluable to us is the Shongjog site and the radio audio clips posted on there for listening groups. If we tried to do that on our own, it would be impossible, we don’t have the capacity.”

Humanitarian practitioner
Humanitarian agencies have been inspired to improve how they share information and communicate with Rohingya communities.

For example, humanitarian agencies have been inspired and supported by the Common Service to set up or scale up camp listening groups to share information with communities. A number of practitioners explained they had heard about listening groups through different sector meetings, and had been inspired to set them up in the camps they manage, requesting training from the Common Service and using its audio materials and facilitator guides. Some agencies were already running listening groups, but receiving audio-visual communication material for their staff and volunteers to use meant they could scale these up to reach more people in the camps.

Humanitarian agencies have appreciated being able to call on the Common Service for technical support with specific communication campaigns.

Humanitarian practitioners mentioned a range of topics on which they received support from the Common Service in communicating with communities, including registration, repatriation, early marriage, vaccination campaigns, drug trafficking and cyclone preparedness. Practitioners explained that they would not have the technical capacity to design and develop communication campaigns and materials themselves or to co-ordinate with other actors, which is where the Common Service was really valuable to them.
By providing Rohingya language and culture support, resources and research, the Common Service raised awareness about differences in Rohingya language and culture, improving how humanitarian practitioners communicate with the Rohingya community.

Across organisations practitioners discussed how the Rohingya language guides have been particularly helpful and called for more topics to be covered. They also cited changes they had made as a result of research and resources provided by the Common Service. These included changing project plans, testing and amending existing communication materials, translating written materials into Burmese for literate Rohingya community members, and working with religious leaders to share important information. Practitioners also explained that the Common Service’s Rohingya terminology guides have been particularly useful, even if they are designed for a different sector to their own. Some requested terminology guides for other sectors, including site management and education (these are available, indicating practitioners may not have been aware of all the terminology guides available).

“I have a colleague who quotes the glossary every week. For example, there is no word for ‘rape’ in the Rohingya language. This was an ‘aha’ moment for us...”

Humanitarian practitioners valued the training provided by the Common Service, citing training in language as one of the most important areas.

Humanitarian practitioners consistently mentioned that the language aspects of the Common Service’s community engagement training were most useful for their field staff, making them more sensitive to ensuring they have been understood by Rohingya communities. This also came across in training evaluations, where practitioners mentioned the language sessions gave them confidence and a better understanding of language issues. The training content and language glossary helped them to enhance their Rohingya language skills and ensure effective communication.

“Training was an eye-opener for a lot of field staff, GBV [gender based violence] field staff as well as communication staff. It re-emphasised the need for respect, caution and language. Staff are more sensitive to these issues as a result of the training.”

Humanitarian practitioner
At a more basic level, they felt having a consortium such as the Common Service ready to
deliver training on community engagement and accountability was essential to ensuring that
training was actually completed, even in some cases where they could have trained staff
themselves. The consortium provided the encouragement and motivation to schedule and
complete the required training. They also said they would have struggled to train staff in
language issues and the more technical aspects of pretesting communication materials. Having
external facilitators helped staff to reflect in a way they would not have done on their own.

"We wanted to pre-test communication materials but we had no background or knowledge in how to do this. BBC Media Action came and did a training session on pretesting, it was really helpful for us."

*Humanitarian practitioner*

Accountability training led to staff being more sensitive and responsive to community feedback.

Practitioners from agencies who received bespoke accountability training from the Common Service felt that staff were more sensitive and responsive to Rohingya communities’ feedback than previously, as they felt more empathy towards the Rohingya community. Practitioners said they had started to implement initiatives such as mobile complaints desks and household volunteer visits, to ensure that harder-to-reach groups such as women and people with mobility issues were able to ask agencies questions and provide feedback. However, they attributed this change to the fact that ensuring the inclusion of harder-to-reach populations had become a mandatory donor requirement rather than as a result of the Common Service.

"Now, we see more and more staff understanding why we collect feedback at the household level – the training helped us bring in the human aspect and get staff to think, ‘If it was me – what would I want?’"

*Humanitarian practitioner*

Through the *What Matters?* humanitarian feedback bulletin, the Common Service amplified community voice through a neutral platform, providing a regular source of evidence of community priorities and concerns, which helped agencies to take action.

Practitioners reported that *What Matters?* was widely read and highlighted new issues that other camps were facing or that agencies had not identified through their own feedback mechanisms. Reflecting findings in previous evaluations of the Common Service, this evaluation found that practitioners used *What Matters?* to cross check issues that were raised through their agencies’ feedback mechanisms, and to provide additional evidence to support taking action.
2. Rohingya and host community members

Examination of community level data also reveals key insights as to how community members are experiencing information flows from humanitarian organisations and whether they feel listened to, and their needs taken into account by the agencies that aim to serve them.

Community level data indicates that access to information and engagement with humanitarian agencies is improving but gaps remain and host communities need more support.

The evaluation collated data from a range of sources in order to examine the broader picture of how well Rohingya and host communities feel informed, how well they feel listened to and how far they feel able to provide feedback to humanitarian actors. Consistent population level data (see Table 1) collected by Ground Truth Solutions over the course of 2019 found that:

- **Community members feel listened to**: Rohingya men and women reported feeling their opinions are taken into account as 80% felt this way in November 2019. Interestingly this increased for Rohingya women by 6% since April 2019. However, at the same time, there has been a decrease in host community members feeling that aid providers take their opinions into account, with 65% reporting this in April 2019 and 60% doing so in November.

- **Community members increasingly feel they know what they are entitled to**: Some 59% of Rohingya community members felt informed about the kind of aid or services available to them in November 2019 (up from 53% in April 2019). This increased substantially for women over the same period, from 47% to 59%. But this measure was lower for host communities – 53% reported feeling informed about the kind of aid/services available to them.

- **Barriers to giving feedback to humanitarian agencies is decreasing**: There has been an increase in Rohingya communities reporting that they know how to make complaints or give feedback to agencies, or report having no barriers to giving feedback. 64% of Rohingya respondents reported knowing how to make suggestions or complaints about the aid they received in November 2019 (up from 59% in April 2019). The data shows a higher increase in Rohingya women knowing how to provide feedback than Rohingya men (women reporting this increased from 54% in April to 64% in November 2019, compared with a small increase from 63% to 64% for men over the same period). Qualitative research amongst Rohingya communities suggested that one way women had received more information was through an increase in door to door volunteers. But, these findings are slightly lower for host communities – only 46% of host community respondents reported knowing how to give feedback in November 2019 (although this had increased from 37% in April).
Table 1: Community perceptions of information provision and engagement with humanitarian agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Apr 2019</th>
<th>Nov 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you feel aid providers take your opinion into account when providing aid services?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohingya community</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host community</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you feel informed about the kind of aid/services available to you?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohingya community</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host community</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you know how to make suggestions or complaints about the aid you receive?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohingya community</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host community</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ground Truth Solutions

---

**ROHINGYA RESPONSE | EVALUATION REPORT**
Some of the ways community members felt that information and communication flows had improved included an increase in door to door volunteers which especially helped reach more marginalised communities.

Previously mahjis were the main source of information, but qualitative research found that in the few months prior to this evaluation more volunteers were regularly sharing information in the camps. People still receive information from mahjis and imams, and through microphones set up in the camps or at mosques. For example, when urgent information about important issues such as cyclone preparedness needs to reach as many people as possible. The increase in door to door volunteers has been especially beneficial for women, whose movement outside the home is restricted and therefore they prefer to receive information and provide feedback through volunteers or mahjis.

Rohingya community members also felt that listening groups and audio content were helpful in providing information to keep their families safe.

They usually received this information from audio programmes developed by the Common Service, which they heard at listening groups. Women gave examples of sharing this information with their immediate family members and other relatives within the block. Some reported taking action, for example making a rehydration solution to treat diarrhoea, which they had learnt from the audio programmes. They also reported that language barriers between themselves and local humanitarian staff had also improved over time.
We shared health and hygiene related information with family members and people in the camp, especially with older people and children.

*Female FGD participant, camp 8E*

Some community members still felt frustrated by the lack of information about what the agencies are meant to provide.

Some male participants explained that many agencies operate in the camps, but they are not clear what their duties and responsibilities are. They expressed a need for more information about the agencies’ mandates, how they are funded and what they are supposed to deliver for Rohingya people. Although participants explained that they were grateful for the relief they received, they did not want to bother anyone or complain unless it was really necessary.

NGOs are working here for helping us, they are assigned to help us but only one agency is properly helping us, other NGOs are not. We want to know what is their duty or responsibility for us.

*Male FGD participant, camp 8E*
This section presents case studies which emerged from different practitioners’ stories of change in in-depth interviews, where they directly attributed an outcome back to the Common Service. In order to test the strength of these attributions, case studies were examined using the process tracing methodology. As discussed above, this process lays out these causal claims, alternative hypotheses to these claims and researchers conducted further data collection to gather evidence to assess these claims.

Five process tracing case studies were conducted and are presented below.

Case 1: Cyclone preparedness training and communication materials led to communities feeling prepared and taking action to strengthen their shelters

Agency was part of rollout of Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) in Rohingya camps with agreement from the government

Common Service offered and provided support with communication aspects of CPP (coordinating messaging, developing and translating communication materials)

Common Service led on communication aspects of CPP training with agency staff and volunteers

Agency staff and CPP volunteers trained in how to help communities prepare for cyclones

Before cyclone season, trained CPP volunteers visited communities with useful information about how to prepare

Qualitative research: Communities spontaneously mentioned cyclone preparedness information from CPP volunteers as most useful information

Communities felt prepared for cyclones and took action to strengthen shelters due to information being provided by CPP volunteers

Qualitative research: Photographic evidence of communities strengthening their shelters in line with communication materials developed by the Common Service

Quantitative data shows increase in cyclone information and preparedness

CPP communication aspects would have been as effective without Common Service support

Communities received information but did not take any action

Key: Causal process Alternative hypothesis Evidence sources
1. Hypothesis tested
As the role of the Common Service is to improve access to information for communities and community engagement with humanitarian agencies, agencies often request the consortium’s support to run large-scale communication campaigns in the camps. The Common Service offered support to the Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) to strengthen its campaign communication and co-ordination for monsoon season during 2019. It also provided staff and volunteers with communication materials that helped communities take action to prepare ahead of cyclone season. The causal chain tested in this case was that the Common Service provided communication support to an agency leading the CPP, which led to volunteers being effectively trained, helpful information being shared with communities and community members taking action in preparation for the cyclone.

2. Hypothesis evidence
The hypothesis that Common Service support offered to the CPP led to these outcomes was first expressed in an in-depth interview with a practitioner working in cyclone preparedness as part of the response. In that interview, this practitioner working for one specific agency (Practitioner 1) explained that the CPP is a nationwide risk reduction programme that has existed in Bangladesh since 1971, and the agency proposed replicating the early warning system in the camps and the government agreed. They described how the Common Service offered support with the communication aspects of the programme:

“Then the issue came: how will we disseminate these messages to this population? We realised we need to produce materials for volunteers to use. That was when the Common Service came to the front. They co-ordinated everyone, brought everyone together. They worked in the Communicating with Communities working group to construct messages... We all worked together to develop a field manual, with all the IEC materials included. This manual is used to train site management agencies, who then train all the Rohingya volunteers in the camps before each cyclone season.”

Practitioner 1

Common Service staff confirmed that they led on developing and adapting communication materials such as flash cards, audio-visual materials and the CPP Handbook, and helped develop the field manual for staff and volunteers. The communication and community engagement aspects of the CPP might have been as effective without the support of the Common Service. However, the following quote from Practitioner 1 provides evidence to discredit that alternative hypothesis:
The practitioner explained that after developing the field manual, their organisation and the Common Service partners conducted joint CPP trainings in March, April and October 2019 with camp management agency staff, who later trained CPP volunteers from the Rohingya community. Common Service training records confirm that training on community engagement around cyclone preparedness was conducted at these times. Practitioner 1 provided evidence that this volunteer training was successful:

“Without TwB [it] would have been very difficult to manage the language aspects. The effort BBC Media Action provided towards creating messages, and making them available to all in the camps, was amazing. CPP would have happened anyway, but it would have struggled without having such an organisation used to working in collaboration with others, observing the need and acting on it.”

Practitioner 1

They also confirmed that Rohingya communities’ knowledge about the early warning system improved:

“Both times there has been a cyclone risk, the people who received the CPP training raised the correct flags.”

Practitioner 1

We can see a clear link of how camp people who didn’t have any idea, now they know what [an] early warning system is, what the flags mean. We’ve seen a clear improvement of knowledge of people living in the camps. An MSNA [multi sector needs assessment] survey was done and it found that 87% of camp people mentioned they have received the cyclone preparedness messages. Among those 87%, 97% said they understood the messages.

Practitioner 1

Much of the analysis so far has relied upon the account of one practitioner so their account was cross-checked as part of this evaluation. The joint multi-sector needs assessment carried out in June 2019 indeed found that 87% households reported that they received messages on cyclone preparedness, and that 99% (not 97%) of them mentioned that the message was clear. Qualitative research carried out as part of this evaluation also found evidence to support the part of the causal chain that CPP volunteers shared information with communities that
helped them feel better prepared for cyclone season. When asked what information they had received had been most useful, both male and female research participants from the Rohingya community spontaneously mentioned cyclone preparedness information provided by CPP volunteers.

“There will be storms, cyclones and our house will be broken, we have to tie our house strongly with strong rope. Volunteers from NGOs informed us about how to do that and keep safe our documents like cards and IDs.”

*Female focus group participant, camp 8E*

Communities could have received information about cyclone preparedness but not acted as a result. However, the same research found evidence to disprove this alternative hypothesis. Community members showed researchers examples of actions they had taken to strengthen their shelters in preparation for cyclones, based on advice from volunteers (see images below). The solutions they had put in place mirror exactly the images provided in the materials in the field manual developed by the Common Service, providing strong evidence that these materials were used by CPP volunteers to help communities prepare for cyclones.

This example is only from one camp, but quantitative data collected across all the camps suggests that Rohingya communities felt better prepared for cyclones. Ground Truth Solutions data (which systematically surveys around 800 people across 30 camps) shows a higher proportion of people felt they had the information they needed and felt adequately prepared for the monsoon season in November 2019 than in April 2019. Their November survey found that 64% of respondents felt that they were prepared for the monsoon season, an improvement on 47% who felt prepared in April 2019. Respondents in November 2019 also felt more informed about staying safe during the cyclone season (59%) than they did previously (43%).

---

Image 1: How community can strengthen their shelter as preparation for cyclone using tie-down knots, as shown in CPP handbook

Image 2: Community members used the same tie-down knot as shown in the CPP handbooks to strengthen their shelter. Photo taken by researcher, Fariha Rahman during data collection in the camps.
3. Hypothesis conclusion
The causal chain posited that because of support provided by the Common Service this led to helpful information being conveyed to community members, which meant they took appropriate action in preparation for the cyclone and felt more prepared. This case provides strong evidence to support these hypotheses. It also provides sufficient evidence to disprove two alternative hypotheses:

• The communication aspects of the CPP would have been as effective without the support of the Common Service
• That communities received information but did not act as a result

Altogether, there is substantive evidence of a causal chain that connects the Common Service activities to NGO staff being trained, effective communication and support materials being provided by the Common Service which were engaging to community members, helped increase their knowledge and finally take action to prepare themselves for the cyclone season.
Case 2: Rohingya language research and support led to improved communication between agencies’ field staff and Rohingya communities

Local staff knew there was a language gap, Language Lesson report did not say anything new

Over time, staff have naturally got better at the Rohingya language, which would have happened regardless of the report and the Rohingya glossary, and the Rohingya community have got better at Bengali

Local staff were communicating in Chittagonian with Rohingya refugees, assuming they understood

Language used evolved over time, but Common Service contributes, language barriers have decreased

Language Lesson report provided factual evidence of gaps between Chittagonian & Rohingya languages

Field staff no longer assume communities understand them, more aware of need for translators & using glossary

Practitioner used the report to advocate with local staff about need for language support

Practitioner invited Common Service to raise awareness at different levels within agency, including community engagement and language training

Interview with Practitioner 2 suggested that using appropriate words is crucial while communicating with Rohingya communities

Training schedule shows agency requested bespoke training on community engagement & language, conducted 3rd Dec 2019

Training evaluation shows that trainees feel language barriers will be reduced.

Communities in qualitative research say language barriers have decreased

The Language Lesson report, published in Nov 2018

Interview with Practitioner 2

Interview with Practitioner 2

Training participant suggested that he is using more Rohingya words while communicating with Rohingya community

Communication between field staff and Rohingya communities is more effective, language barriers have decreased

Key:
- Causal process
- Alternative hypothesis
- Evidence sources
- Evaluation finding
1. Hypothesis tested
An integral part of the Common Service has been to support humanitarian agencies to better communicate with the Rohingya community in a language they understand. This work has involved conducting research, raising awareness and providing training, guidance and tools to help local staff communicate in the Rohingya language. The causal chain tested in this case was that Common Service research led to a service delivery agency operating across 34 camps requesting bespoke language and community engagement support from the Common Service. This, in turn, led to field staff communicating more effectively with Rohingya communities and language barriers decreasing between Rohingya community members and agency staff.

2. Hypothesis evidence
In an initial in-depth interview, the practitioner in this case (Practitioner 2) explained that local staff, who speak the Chittagonian dialect, were assuming they were being understood by the Rohingya community. As part of the Common Service, Translators without Borders published ‘The Language Lesson: What we’ve learned about communicating with Rohingya refugees’ in November 2018. The practitioner used this report to raise awareness amongst local staff that they may not be understood and encouraged them to use tools like the language glossary and guidance.

“One of the challenges we’ve had is communicating with the Rohingya community on every level is very difficult. The assumptions we saw in staff is that they speak Chittagonian, they expect they are communicating, without any questions asked... When Translators without Borders came out with that first report, we championed that to our staff and other agencies. We used it to convince our own staff of what they didn’t know.”

Practitioner 2

Figure 2: Listening comprehension rates by language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Comprehension Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rohingya</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chittagonian</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangla</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burmese</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The evidence in the report prompted Practitioner 2 to invite Common Service staff to conduct community engagement training with field staff. These trainings were linked to the glossary tool developed by the Common Service for this response. This allows people to use the correct term in the multiple languages and also, together with the training, helps to raise awareness about the importance of language more broadly within their organisation.

Practitioner 2 talked about one interpreter colleague in particular who became a champion within the organisation for using the Rohingya glossary and language guidance notes produced by the Common Service and would raise awareness and train local staff in using these tools. The training evaluations provide supporting evidence that staff knowledge of the Rohingya language increased because of the training.

"They [trainees] said now they will mitigate language barriers in their work as now they have got the proper knowledge and clarification of the Rohingya language."

-Trainer report

The qualitative research conducted as part of this evaluation with Rohingya community members in two camps (both of which this organisation works in), found that both Rohingya men and women feel language barriers have decreased. While they previously struggled to understand what agency staff and volunteers are saying, this is no longer a problem for them. Agency staff also reported using more relevant language with local Rohingya community members.

"We can easily understand the language of volunteers from NGOs as they are talking with us in our way. Previously it was not that much clear."

-Female focus group participant, camp 8E

"I have learned some Rohingya words from the language and community engagement training which helped me."

-Freelancer, humanitarian organisation

However, although the training was conducted and community members and staff on the ground reported that language barriers had decreased, data from the community indicated this was owing to different reasons including local staff having become more familiar with the Rohingya language over time; Rohingya people becoming more familiar with Bangla language; and agencies using more volunteers from the Rohingya community which also improves communication.

Furthermore, there was also evidence from follow-up interviews with staff from the organisation trained that if staff were native Chittagonian speakers they were more likely to be aware of the language gap without support of the Common Service research. However, for others it would not have been obvious and the report was a key catalyst to identification of a gap and training being requested.
3. Hypothesis conclusion

In this case, the full causal chain was not fully proven i.e. there were other factors at play in this casual chain and Common Service activities were not the only factor which improved language communication at the community level. There is however, evidence to support a more modest hypothesis, that Common Service activities were responsible for a significant proportion of the improvement of local staff capacity to communicate using Rohingya words, which has contributed to improved communication overall. This is because:

• Practitioner 2 said that because of the training local staff are more aware of the need to use language tools and interpreters when necessary.
• The training evaluations provide supporting evidence that staff knowledge of the Rohingya language increased because of the training.
• Further follow-up interviews with training participants who attended the training found that they had been using the glossary after the training and that it was helpful.
• Follow-up interviews with trainees found both the native and non-native Chittagonian speakers in the organisation said they found the glossary an effective tool of communication which helped them communicate with the community.
Women chat as they do their makeup in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. (Allison Joyce/Getty Images)
Case 3: The Common Service inspired and facilitated the setting up of listening groups, which enabled reliable information to be shared widely, and community members took action as a result.

**Agency would have set up listening groups without inspiration from Common Service**

Practitioner heard about listening groups at working group meeting, and reached out to the Common Service for support setting them up

Interview with Practitioner 3
Minutes confirm listening groups were discussed
Common Service staff confirm that practitioner reached out

**Agency would have shared consistent, reliable information with communities as widely and regularly without listening groups and audio programmes**

Practitioner and Common Service organised training for staff and Rohingya volunteers

Training schedule confirms training was held

**Practitioner 3 confirmed decision to scale up listening groups due to good feedback from communities and easy to implement**

Practitioner 3 confirmed listening groups were discussed

**Communities find programmes entertaining and informative**

Volunteers started running listening groups in Feb 2019 and scaled up due to positive feedback from communities

Practitioner 3 confirmed decision to scale up listening groups due to good feedback from communities and easy to implement

Number of listening groups verified by another practitioner

**Volunteers play audio programmes made by Common Service to communities on a weekly basis through 80 listening groups**

Volunteers across camps use audio programmes and facilitator guides

**Consistent, reliable information shared with communities across camps**

Communities take action based on what they learn at listening groups

**Community members attend listening groups but do not learn or take action**

Community feedback: Qualitative research with communities

**Agency saves time training and updating staff, and reduces risk of spreading misinformation**

Agency would have set up listening groups without inspiration from Common Service

Agency would have shared consistent, reliable information with communities as widely and regularly without listening groups and audio programmes

Community members attend listening groups but do not learn or take action

Consistent, reliable information shared with communities across camps

Agency saves time training and updating staff, and reduces risk of spreading misinformation
1. Hypothesis tested
As part of its role to ensure communities have access to useful, practical information, the Common Service creates a weekly audio programme in the Rohingya language, designed to meet their current information needs. The audio programme, along with other audio, video and pictorial content created by consortium partners, is available for anyone to download from the Shongjog website, along with a guide for facilitators to steer listening group discussions. As radio listenership is low in the camps, the Common Service has helped agencies to set up camp listening groups since October 2017 to ensure these programmes reach the Rohingya community. By the end of 2019 there were at least 1,700 listening groups operating in the camps.

A number of practitioners interviewed for this evaluation felt the audio content produced by the Common Service was its most valuable contribution to the Rohingya refugee crisis response. They felt it enables agencies to share consistent, reliable information widely with communities on a regular basis, without having to constantly update staff and worry about misinformation being shared. An initial interview with one site management practitioner (Practitioner 3) generated a hypothesis that agencies have been inspired and supported by the Common Service to set up listening groups in the camps. The audio programmes and facilitator guides provided by the Common Service have enabled agencies to share information with communities through these groups. This led to communities receiving consistent, reliable, information, and taking action as a result of what they learned from the programmes.

2. Hypothesis evidence
In the initial interview, Practitioner 3 explained that they heard about listening groups at a working group meeting:

“Listening groups weren’t happening before. We got the idea from a sub-group of the Communicating with Communities working group – the radio working group, which was run by [a Common Service staff member]. They were co-ordinating radio outputs from other agencies. We started learning here that listening groups would be a good idea.”

Practitioner 3 reached out and received support from the Common Service to set up listening groups:

“I contacted the co-ordinator of the radio working group, who introduced me one of the trainers from BBC Media Action. Then we started planning training together. They facilitated training on formation of groups, but also supported [us] throughout the pilot phase – providing coaching on the ground, recording feedback and organising regular meetings with facilitators.”
Although listening groups are not a new concept, other practitioners interviewed as part of this evaluation also said they first heard about listening groups at sector or working group meetings, and approached the Common Service for support in setting them up. This provides further evidence against the alternative hypothesis that the agency would have set up listening groups without inspiration and support from the Common Service.

Altogether, there is evidence that practitioners in this organisation had not been exposed to or were not considering the idea of listening groups until the Common Service propagated it. Furthermore, the active advocacy by the Common Service precipitated the adoption of listening groups. It is not possible to completely discount the possibility that, in the hypothetical absence of the Common Service, the idea of listening groups would have appeared from somewhere else later. However, even if it had, it is likely that time would have been lost and there would have been less uptake.

In this particular case, once training was completed, volunteers started running listening groups in February 2019, and received positive feedback from communities. Practitioner 3 explained:

“I decided to scale up [the listening groups] based on community consultation regularly conducted at our community centres, feedback from listening groups and the fact that it is really easy to implement this within our existing activities.”

At the time of the interview, the agency ran 80 listening groups in the camps, which was confirmed by another colleague during follow up interviews.

Practitioner 3 explained that if they had not set up listening groups:

“We still would have had information hubs, which started very early in the response, where refugees could come and ask questions. In addition, we were conducting general awareness sessions in groups [or] face to face, depending on the interest and needs of the community.”

This provides evidence in support of the alternative hypothesis that the agency would have found a way to share information with communities regardless of listening groups. However, the following quote provides evidence to suggest they would not have been able to share information as widely, consistently or regularly without the audio programmes and facilitator guides used in listener groups provided by the Common Service, thereby disproving the alternative hypothesis.
Before, we were giving information about food and hygiene but now topics are more complicated, for example registration and repatriation. It was getting more and more difficult for facilitators to memorise all the information to respond to the information needs of the community. Having radio content really helped us. It replaced a lot of the training we used to provide to staff, as the content would include expert knowledge, and be accompanied by guidelines for facilitators. It also means staff from different agencies are giving consistent information to communities across all the camps.

This sentiment was echoed by other practitioners interviewed in the study, further strengthening the evidence that the availability of Common Service audio programmes saved agencies time and money, and these programmes being played in listening groups resulted in consistent information being shared with communities across camps, reducing the risk of misinformation being shared.

Practitioner 3 summarised feedback from each listening group session:

“People say first [the audio content] is easy to understand, and second it is entertaining, which I found quite surprising. Maybe it’s because the content often includes music and animations for children.”

Analysis of the listening group feedback data reveals facilitators recording that listening group participants found the content useful and interesting. These listeners seemed to be engaged in the content, found it understandable and felt they learned as a result of listening to it.

Qualitative research conducted for this evaluation also found that Rohingya communities learned and shared information as a result of the listening groups. This indicates that the Rohingya language audio programmes mean that camp residents were better informed about key topics than they would have been otherwise. People may have received this information from other sources but the evidence makes clear that at least a substantial proportion of this information came via the Common Service programmes. This qualitative research shows that research participants knew specific information that was included in the audio programmes. Community members also identified listening groups as key sources of information and attributed them as their main information source about particular topics, notably health and hygiene.

“From the radio, we have learned how to take care of our children, how to clean their hands and wear sandals to keep them clean and send them to schools for maintaining cleanliness.” 

*Female focus group participant, camp 8E*
This qualitative research shows that Rohingya communities shared information specifically acquired from listening groups with their friends and relatives, making it very unlikely that camp members received this information from other sources. Therefore, this alternative hypothesis can be discounted. Directly or indirectly, a portion of this information originated with the Common Service audio programmes played in the listening groups.

Altogether, it remains possible that some proportion of information transmitted via listening groups would have travelled by other means in their absence. Nonetheless, the substantial evidence presented above suggests that a large proportion of that information would not have been conveyed, received or understood as well in the absence of listening groups.

People may have attended listening groups and received information without acting on it. However, evidence from the qualitative research among Rohingya communities suggests that the causal chain runs to this final step. The information relayed via listening groups led community members to take action, particularly on health and hygiene issues.

“After hearing information about diarrhoea, [I] applied technique of making Orsalline [rehydration solution] at home. We heard from radio that if we can’t find Orsalline then we can make it at home. For making Orsalline, we need little amount of salt, three tablespoons of sugar and water as needed.”

Female focus group participant, camp 3

This provides strong evidence which counts against the alternative hypothesis that community members attend listening groups but do not learn or take action.

Hypothesis conclusion

Altogether, there is substantive evidence that the Common Service’s advocacy of listening groups led to (at least) wider uptake and upscaling of this format earlier, and that this led to more information being conveyed and received and subsequent action being taken by Rohingya community members. Altogether, there is substantive evidence of a causal chain that connects the Common Service proposal of establishing listening groups, the formation and then scaling up of these groups, and Rohingya community members receiving information and subsequently taking action.
Case 4: *What Matters?* inspired the site management sector to carry out safety audits in the camps

Site management sector received this information from elsewhere

What Matters? issue 19 highlighted that people felt unsafe in the camps

Issue 19 of *What Matters?*

Interview with Practitioner 4

Site management sector practitioner was alerted to people feeling unsafe by *What Matters?*

Site management sector and child protection sub cluster initiated safety audits in camps

Copy of safety audit tool

Confirmation interview with Practitioner 4’s colleague

Decision to implement safety audits was influenced by something else

The decision was made to conduct safety audits in the camps

Follow up interview with Practitioner 4’s colleague

Safety audits completed in camps in January

Site management sector and child protection sub cluster initiated safety audits in camps

*What Matters?* was an information source, but was not the main reason behind decision to conduct safety audits

Key:

- Causal process
- Alternative hypothesis
- Evidence sources
- Evaluation finding
1. Hypothesis tested

*What Matters?* collates community feedback data from different agencies and weekly qualitative research undertaken in the camps to provide an up-to-date picture of the communities’ current concerns (both Rohingya and host communities’ concerns are included but Rohingya communities are more heavily featured). An initial interview with a site management practitioner generated the hypothesis that their organisation had used *What Matters?* information about people feeling unsafe in camps to decide to conduct safety audits in those camps.

2. Hypothesis evidence

In an in-depth interview, a site management practitioner (Practitioner 4) said that *What Matters?* often highlights issues that communities are facing, which do not come up through agencies’ own feedback mechanisms. They gave an example about safety:

“We found out from *What Matters?* that people were feeling unsafe. That wasn’t coming through in our own feedback mechanisms at all – people weren’t using [those] to report on any security issues, they tended to report more WASH or shelter concerns.”

Practitioner 4

Safety issues were raised in issue 19 of *What Matters?*, published on 6 February 2019. The practitioner felt the fact this issue was featured in *What Matters?* resulted in the site management and child protection sectors initiating safety audits in the camps, with the first round completed in January 2020. The practitioner shared a copy of their safety audit tool. An alternative hypothesis is that the decisive information that led to the implementation of safety audits came from elsewhere. The initial interview left open this possibility.

“We are now doing safety audits in the camps. This was initiated from the site management and child protection sectors, although I’m not sure what their data source was.”

Practitioner 4
As the decision to implement these safety audits was not taken by Practitioner 4, a follow-up interview was conducted with a colleague who had been involved in the decision-making process. This interview revealed that, although *What Matters?* was one of the information sources highlighting that people felt unsafe in the camps, it was not the source of information that directly resulted in the decision to start conducting safety audits.

“Lots of safety issues were being raised from different sources, including *What Matters?* What actually pushed us to make the decision to implement safety audits is the daily incident report, which tracks the number of incidents... This is a public document, and a weekly summary of this document gets sent to the government and to HQs of big agencies. At that time, we’d noticed an increase in the number of incidents of children getting injured.”

Follow-up interview with Practitioner 4’s colleague

The follow-up interview also revealed an additional source of information, and an additional reason, for the initiation of safety audits:

“Another thing which influenced us to start doing safety audits is, at the same time, the child protection cluster was working on an assessment to map out hazards for children. This captured physical hazards but also protection concerns – anywhere children don’t feel safe.”

3. Hypothesis conclusion
The evidence from this case does not support the hypothesis that *What Matters?* provided unique information that caused a change in the agency’s practice on its own. It nonetheless supports the more modest hypothesis that *What Matters?* provided supporting information. It is possible that safety audits would not have been introduced if *What Matters?* had not yielded a “second source” that affirmed the daily incident reports. At the very least, this case provides significant evidence that *What Matters?* contributed to practice change by a humanitarian agency. This was also the judgement of others interviewed as part of this evaluation and the previous evaluation of the Common Service. These sources found that *What Matters?* has often been used as a data source that is triangulated with others, leading to action being taken.
Case 5: Accountability training and feedback campaign increased community feedback

Agency was collecting community feedback but low levels of feedback
- Common Service staff said they approached the agency managing this camp as data was showing low levels of feedback being received.

Common Service suggested and supported with assessment to understand community barriers to giving feedback
- Email to the agency shows setting up field assessment, main findings from the assessment and organising training.

Assessment found communities did not know where to give feedback; and partners were not co-ordinated in feedback management
- At agency's request, Common Service supported communication campaign in Oct 2019 to encourage communities to give feedback.

Common Service initiated and conducted staff training on accountability and community engagement (Oct 2019)
- Community more aware of how to give feedback.

At agency's request, Common Service supported communication campaign in Oct 2019 to encourage communities to give feedback
- Communication campaign materials; training records.

Agency staff became more sensitive, tried to address comments
- No evidence of increased feedback.

Something else increased communities' knowledge and led to them providing feedback
- Increase in amount of feedback received since communication campaign.

Agency would have initiated field assessment anyway
- Agency would have trained staff and conducted communication campaign without Common Service support.

Training evaluation: agency staff learned how to encourage feedback, and enhanced the effectiveness of the feedback and response mechanism
- Feedback database does not show increase in feedback, but the field level practitioner said more people are visiting the info hub.

Key:
- Causal process
- Alternative hypothesis
- Evidence sources
- Evaluation finding
1. Hypothesis tested
As the Common Service aims to contribute to improved humanitarian accountability to Rohingya refugees across the response, it has offered bespoke support to agencies. This helps them to improve the way they collect, manage, and respond to community feedback, especially in camps where the data shows levels of community feedback have been low.

An in-depth interview conducted with a practitioner from one agency generated a hypothesis that the accountability support provided by the Common Service resulted in communities being more aware of how to provide feedback to agencies and therefore an increase in the amount of feedback received, and agency staff being better equipped to receive and manage community feedback.

2. Hypothesis evidence
In the initial interview, the practitioner (Practitioner 5) explained:

“We were collecting feedback in the camps but we found it wasn’t coming spontaneously from the community. BBC Media Action reached out and helped us conduct an assessment. They added value by initiating the assessment, helping us with the analysis and to see the bigger picture, and then helping us think through what could be done.”

An alternative hypothesis would be that the agency would have conducted an assessment of its own volition, regardless of the Common Service. However, Common Service staff confirmed that they approached this agency as the camp they operated in had been identified as a priority for support because of low levels of community feedback. An email from the time confirmed that Common Service staff proposed providing support to the agency and suggested carrying out an assessment, thereby discrediting the alternative hypothesis.

“We are providing support to agencies to strengthen their complaint and feedback mechanism under [the] current phase of [the] Common Service. Before we meet for planning, we prefer to go to the field and spend some time with the CFRM [Community Feedback Response Mechanism] staff members to understand their work better for effective planning.”

– Excerpt from email from Common Service staff member proposing support to the agency (July 2019)

A later email from a Common Service staff member to Practitioner 5, dated August 2019, provides evidence that the field assessment was carried out, and that it was used to inform plans for training staff from the site management agency as well as other actors operating in the camps.

“Based on the field visit and the meeting, please find the following action points as next steps that we have already discussed:
• **Alternatives for collecting complaints and feedback:** There are alternative areas where [agency] can collect complaint and feedback data. Existing listening groups can be used for CFM [Community Feedback Mechanism] data. Also, [agency] can set up some mobile points in sub-blocks to collect complaints and feedback for those who cannot come to the information centres (elderly people, pregnant women)

• **Actor’s orientation on CFRM:** One of the reasons identified in Camp [X] [that] CFRM [Community Feedback Response Mechanism] is comparatively less strong is implementing partners in camp are not on the same page when it comes to referral and closing the loop. So, one activity might be an actors’ orientation on CFRM process and things to do for referral.”

- Excerpt from an email from Common Service staff to a practitioner highlighting key points from the assessment (August 2019)

Once the assessment had been carried out, training records show that accountability to affected populations training was carried out with the site management agency in October 2019. Practitioner 5 felt the training resulted in staff being more receptive to, and more capable of, managing community feedback:

“Staff have been more sensitive since the training. They try to address people’s comments, and feel more comfortable sharing the feedback.”

A sceptic might query whether this training led to the intended learning outcomes. There is further evidence that it did. A paired-depth interview carried out with training participants supports this claim, as it found the training had taught participants how to make Rohingya communities feel comfortable sharing their feedback.

“From the training, [agency staff] learned that having a conversation and interaction with the community is also important as it helps people to be comfortable to give their feedback and talk about their needs.”

Extract from training evaluation report

As part of this evaluation, a follow-up interview was carried out with a practitioner who participated in the training. He stated that the training taught him how information and feedback centres are part of overall humanitarian accountability mechanisms. He added that the training clarified his understanding of how to handle sensitive feedback or complaints. The practitioner also mentioned that after the training, he shared his learning with the staff working as field level volunteers and made changes in the collection of community feedback. The training enhanced the agency’s practices of ensuring confidentiality, following up with community members and responding quickly to issues raised.

An interview with BBC Media Action’s own data entry assistant who collated the feedback provided by all agencies indicated that the quality of the data entry improved considerably.
from September 2019 (when the training took place). These testimonies support the hypothesis that training support from the Common Service led to humanitarian practitioners being better equipped to receive and manage community feedback. The field assessment also led the agency to run a campaign in the camps to encourage people to provide feedback.

"We decided to run a communication campaign and we worked together with BBC Media Action to design the campaign. They guided us and supported us to do drama and song at field level."

*Practitioner 5*

This was confirmed by Common Service staff, who shared copies of the communication materials that were developed and used during the campaign in October 2019:

"The campaign was audio based. The audio announcement helped to gather people in the feedback centres, then we played our GBV audio drama in the centres and used one audio message on [the] importance of feedback and complaints, along with an open discussion."

*Common Service staff member*

Analysis of IOM’s Needs and Population Monitoring data provides evidence to support the next part of the chain, that communities were more knowledgeable about how to provide feedback after the communication campaign. This shows that, around the time of this campaign, the camp in question had an above average increase in community leaders reporting that the majority of people had options to make a complaint or provide feedback about humanitarian services. This increased from 67% in July 2019 to 85% in January 2020 – an 18% increase compared with an average increase of 3% across all of the camps.

Practitioner 5 also claimed that the campaign led to an increase in community feedback:

"We have a clear indication the communication campaign worked, as there has been an increase in the amount of feedback received since the campaign."

As the Common Service database does not show an increase in the amount of feedback received since the communication campaign in this camp, a follow-up interview was conducted with Practitioner 5 to determine their data source when making this claim. The practitioner cited an increase in the ratio of action taken to feedback received and that, since the communication campaign, he had observed more people visiting the information centres to seek information.
3. Hypothesis conclusion

This case does not provide evidence to support the full causal chain that the Common Service’s accountability support to agencies resulted in an increase in feedback received. Instead, there is strong evidence that the work of the Common Service led to a review of the feedback mechanism and that this led to the initiation of training. There is indicative evidence that training was effective, that this improved practitioners’ ability to receive feedback and act upon it, and that they did so. There is further evidence to suggest that this improved ability became known in the community. The evidence does not conclusively demonstrate that more community members subsequently gave more feedback.
Conclusions

Against the backdrop of the evidence from a range of humanitarian practitioners and wider community level data, the case studies presented in this report provide robust evidence (causal in some cases) of the impact the Common Service in Cox’s Bazar has had at practitioner, agency and population levels in improving community engagement and accountability.

• There is strong evidence to suggest that community members have improved access to coordinated, timely and responsive two-way community engagement as a result of the Common Service. The evaluation has found causal evidence to suggest that support the Common Service has provided to the humanitarian sector, through provision of communication materials and training has led to humanitarian agencies being better equipped to communicate with communities and in turn community members having access to key, useful information which has prompted them to take action.

• There is also evidence to suggest that the Common Service has played a role in improving systematic accountability. The provision of research and community feedback by the Common Service has contributed to humanitarian agencies taking decisions to improve their own support to communities. Support to improve consolidation of data collected through feedback mechanisms has resulted in humanitarian practitioners being more sensitive to Rohingya community members needs and concerns.

• In complex humanitarian settings, it can be challenging to isolate the impact of a highly adaptive project such as the Common Service and the role it plays in supporting overall communication and enhancing community engagement. However, the use of process tracing as a methodology has helped to find evidence of causal links between the support and activities provided by the Common Service and outcomes at both practitioner and population level. This methodology is therefore highly recommended for assessing the impact of initiatives such as this, where the work is directly focused on humanitarian agencies but has an ultimate impact at the population level. In addition, triangulating process tracing results with analysis of additional data sources e.g. population surveys has proved highly effective.

• However, the evaluation has also highlighted some differences in how Rohingya and host communities experience information provision and services. For example, it is clear that host communities are falling behind Rohingya communities in terms of access to information, knowing how to provide feedback to agencies and feeling they are being listened to by aid organisations. Amongst Rohingya community members themselves, there remains a lack of information about some agencies’ mandates, roles and funding sources. This has led to frustration, especially when agencies ask communities what their needs are without clarifying what they can provide, as this leads to their needs not being met. This lack of information limits the extent to which communities can participate in agencies’ programmes, and their understanding of their rights and entitlements. As a result, these should be key areas of focus for the Common Service going forward.
Recommendations
This evaluation contributes important evidence and learning about collaborative approaches to community engagement in humanitarian responses. Key insights which are particularly relevant to the wider sector include:

- **Develop strong communication materials on specific areas that can be used across a response.** There is value in producing good quality common communication materials centrally that are informed by community feedback, carefully crafted and pre-tested to ensure relevance. Agencies appreciated common communication content which can provide information on complex topics and can ensure that communities receive consistent information and can prevent misinformation being spread. Therefore consistent communication materials on issues can be used across agencies to provide maximum impact.

- **Ensure communication is distributed effectively and is reinforced by strong outreach initiatives.** It is not enough just to create high quality communication content. To ensure that community members gain knowledge and take action, content needs to be coupled with supporting agencies to organise effective outreach activities and distribute communication through appropriate channels to ensure the content reaches the whole community.

- **The provision of a central neutral platform to support communication across the response is vital.** The evaluation has shown the value in having a neutral platform which is able to consolidate community feedback from multiple sources to amplify community voice across the response. This provides an important source of evidence for agencies to use and highlights issues individual agencies are not necessary aware of from their own work.

- **Deliver bespoke communication support for individual agencies.** Agencies have varying levels of engagement with the community. Recognising this is very important to shape support. Offering bespoke packages of support to include training, mentoring and content production has been key to success.

- **It is important that a common service approach is adaptive and flexible to changing needs.** A common service approach which responds to both the needs of the humanitarian organisations and the communities they are looking to serve is crucial to its success. Evidence from this evaluation provides data that the adaptive nature of this collaboration has enabled communities to be more informed on issues important to their lives and take action.

- **This evaluation has provided the sector with causal evidence that communication support in humanitarian responses can lead to change.** Through the use of process tracing, causal evidence has been generated which shows that media and communication training and support to the humanitarian sector translates into meaningful change at the population level, such as people taking action to prepare for cyclones or taking steps to improve their own, or their families health. This evidence can be used to advocate for the importance of communication support to engage communities and hold agencies to account as part of overall humanitarian responses.
## Appendix 1

Table 1: Types of training provided in phase 3 of the Common Service project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training title/description</th>
<th>Facilitating agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening group training</td>
<td>BBC Media Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio drama listening group training</td>
<td>BBC Media Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training of Trainers on listening group formation and facilitation</td>
<td>BBC Media Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective community engagement in Disaster Risk Reduction</td>
<td>BBC Media Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement around cyclone preparedness</td>
<td>BBC Media Action &amp; TWB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication for effective community engagement, accountability and language</td>
<td>BBC Media Action &amp; TWB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training of Trainers on communication for effective community engagement</td>
<td>BBC Media Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop on accountability to affected populations</td>
<td>BBC Media Action &amp; TWB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language barriers in information hub management</td>
<td>TWB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohingya language and cultural training for enumerators</td>
<td>TWB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health glossary training for field workers</td>
<td>TWB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health glossary training for doctors</td>
<td>TWB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health interpreter training</td>
<td>TWB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceutical pictogram training</td>
<td>TWB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for enumerators for KAP survey</td>
<td>TWB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring support on cascading community engagement and accountability</td>
<td>BBC Media Action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Young Rohingya refugees fly kites at the Hakimpara refugee camp in Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar district. (Dibyangshu Sarkar/AFP/Getty Images)
Endnotes


ii CHS Alliance, Group URD and Sphere Project (2014) The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability. Available at: https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard


vi Dr Dan Paget, Teaching Fellow at University College London, an expert in advanced qualitative methodologies including process tracing

vii This data is collected through surveys with 800-1000 Rohingya people living across 30 camps and around 500 Bangladeshis living close to the camps. The exact number of respondents varies by round.


ix The start-up phase of the project, from late 2017 until July 2018, was funded by IOM, with back-funding from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the US Government. The second phase of the project, from August 2018 until March 2019, was funded by both European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) and DFID (with the latter’s funds again flowing through IOM). The third phase of the project, from April 2019 to March 2020, was funded by ECHO (with funds flowing through Action Against Hunger) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), with back-funding from DFID.

x Available at https://glossaries.translatorswb.org/bangladesh/

xi Available at http://www.shongjog.org.bd/response/rohingya

xii Available at http://www.shongjog.org.bd/news/i/?id=d6ea30a3-be19-4747-bb90-64fd255ef97

xiii The national CwC platform – Shongjog – is chaired by the Department for Disaster Management. The Shonjog website also hosts key communication tools and research insight products. Since its inception in December 2017, 37,462 unique users have accessed 119,902 pages or resources. It is available at http://www.shongjog.org.bd/

xiv BBC Media Action (2018) How effective is communication in the Rohingya refugee response? Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/publications-and-resources/research/reports/asia/bangladesh/rohingya-response

xv BBC Media Action (2019) What contribution is the Common Service making to Community Engagement and Accountability in the Rohingya response? Available at: http://www.shongjog.org.bd/news/i/?id=0993b68f-be04-46dd-a76f-b0a546e60504b


xvii The glossary is a language glossary produced by the Common Service to support humanitarian practitioners communicating effectively with Rohingya community members.

xviii Other data sources examined which revealed similar trends included: The IOM needs and population monitoring data (Round 17 collected in January 2020, comparing with data from Round 15 collected in July 2019) – this data is collected from key informants (often mahjis) in each camp, rather than being a household survey and the Multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA) data collected in July and September 2019 which is collected through household surveys in the camps (3,418 households were surveyed across 34 refugee sites).

xix Ground Truth Solutions systematic survey data (Round 4 collected November 2019, comparing with Round 3, collected April 2019) This data is collected through surveys with 800–1,000 Rohingya people living across 30 camps, and around 500 Bangladeshis living close to the camps. The exact number of respondents varies by round.

xx A camp is divided into blocks; the number of blocks in a camp is not fixed, and it can be as few as two
and as many as 120. A block has, on average, 500 residents (100 households). See: https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20180606_acaps npm_report_camp_governance_final_0.pdf

xi CPP volunteers will use a ‘3 flag system’ to communicate the level of danger to the community by raising different early warning flags.


xvi The Common Service receives community complaints and feedback data shared by some agencies who have agreed to share data for joint analysis, analyses these complaints and provides summaries of trends in What Matters?