

Community of Practice (CoP)

Education in Rohingya Camps



Maiden 'Community of Practice' session held on Education in Rohingya Camps

A toddler, who was carried into Bangladesh during the Rohingya exodus back in 2017, is now perhaps six years old and eligible for primary education. A community that is already in peril due to its refugee state faced further challenges when schools, or non-formal learning centres in this case, were temporarily shut down to contain the spread of coronavirus.

Over the last five years, particularly after the outbreak of COVID-19, many techniques and approaches were adopted by the government, UN agencies, NGOs, and research organisations to keep education flowing in the camps. Distance learning via mobile phones, non-formal schooling, renovations to include facilities such as toilets and security in the overcrowded learning centres, psychosocial support to parents and caregivers are some of those strategies and practices.

Question is, after five years, which of these strategies and practices should be continued in order to ensure the children's basic rights and sow the seeds of necessary skills in them?

To discuss the learnings, challenges, and opportunities in this regard, BRAC has facilitated a session titled 'Community of

Practice (CoP) on Education in Rohingya Camps' in partnership with UNHCR and BRAC Institute of Education and Development (BRAC IED).

CoP is a platform for researchers, development practitioners, and relevant agencies to exchange research-based knowledge and experiential learning on Rohingya response. The maiden CoP session was held on 7 November 2022 at BRAC Centre.

Four papers presented at the event centred on Myanmar curriculum, barriers to Rohingyas' access to educational and economic opportunities, survival of Rohingya children, and outcomes of existing education models.



In his introductory speech, **UNHCR representative in Bangladesh Johannes van der Klaauw** said: “Let’s not forget that in continuing to serve the Rohingya population, we are entering a very challenging period where the funding and support from the international community is more fragile than it used to be. We need to prioritise, we need to know what is the minimum that needs to be done. We need to at least continue to keep education available to the most vulnerable.”

Citing research findings, the speakers suggested that the current allocation of humanitarian aid (presently 2%) for education should be increased. It was time strategic shift be made in the approach towards education for the Rohingyas, they emphasised.

A panel discussion attended by representatives of relevant government agencies, UN agencies, NGOs, research and academic organisations also took place during the event.



The event was moderated by KAM Morshed, senior director of BRAC’s Advocacy for Social Change, Partnership Strengthening Unit, Social Innovation Lab, Technology, and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning. It was attended by Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Dr Manzoor Ahmed, professor emeritus at BRAC University, Dr Helal Mohiuddin, professor of sociology and political science at North South University, John Ekaju, education manager of UNICEF Bangladesh, among others.

Additional Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Md Shamsud Douza mentioned in his research presentation: “The ultimate goal of the government is to repatriate the Rohingya people. So we want the Rohingya children to receive education, following the Myanmar curriculum. 52 percent of the Rohingya population are children – among whom, 36 percent are school-going. There are 6,000 learning facilities in the camps being run by the government of Bangladesh in partnership with UNICEF. Among them, 3,000 are home-based as many parents are not interested in sending their girl children to learning facilities.”

At the discussion, **Brig Gen (Rtd) Ilyas Iftekhar Rasul, senior director and head of education sector at Friendship**, said: “Young boys and girls from the camps are usually picked as Burmese Language Instructors [BLI]. But there is a scarcity of qualified instructors especially for grades six to nine. This brings us to the question of ensuring higher education for these BLIs too. We suggest lessons be recorded centrally and circulated in learning centres via solar powered laptops and monitors. Dialogue is going on with UNICEF in this regard.”

“ We are entering a very challenging period where the funding and support from the international community is more fragile than it used to be. ”

- **Johannes van der Klaauw**
UNHCR representative in Bangladesh

Another discussant **Dr Manzoor Ahmed, professor emeritus at BRAC IED, BRAC University**, said: “How do we impart the education, what kind of teachers and materials will be used – these are the pedagogical decisions. The government of Bangladesh, UNICEF, and UNHCR are under obligation that children’s right to education be ensured despite emergencies/refugee situations. Other tensions can be eased if children, girls in particular, are provided with education and do not pay the cost of political problems.”

The chief discussant at the event **Rasheda K Choudhury** said: “We don’t know if the Myanmar curriculum is gender sensitive. We have to see that as well. Education must not be deprioritised, be it any situation. Safe and successful repatriation is very much of a political agenda.” She went on saying, “Cox’s Bazar is one of the most ecologically sensitive areas in the world. Pumping funds is not going to solve our problem. Is the fund reaching the right people at the right time? Bangladesh is suffering with its own economy and the Russia-Ukraine war is there. But education cannot be deprioritised. Voices of the underprivileged youth are seldom present at UN events,” she opined.

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- Shamsud Douza

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In her presentation, **Dr Khadija Mitu, professor of Anthropology, Chittagong University**, said, “A package of gender transformative interventions targeting families, religious and community leaders, should promote the importance of girls’ education including vocational training and highlight the negative consequences of early marriage.”

BRAC IED researchers spoke on ‘P Ashe Achhi’ (‘Beside You’, literal meaning in English) – a remote learning mechanism developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the name suggests, the model was developed to keep learning uninterrupted and ensure the wellbeing of both the children and their caregivers. The telecommunication model provided the caregivers with psychosocial support and engaged the children in learning through playful approaches. By the end of the year-long programme, which was initiated in the middle of 2020, 99.3% caregivers reached a ‘nondepressed state’.

To sum it up, education models in place for Rohingya children need to be modified to match a cost-effective framework, not deprioritised; since the prospect of repatriation is diminutive and funding is on the decline.

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