



# Staying Tuned

Radio Programming for  
Sustained Behaviour Change and  
Accountability in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

This is one of a series of case studies based on UNICEF-supported communication, community engagement and accountability activities as part of the larger humanitarian response to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, from September 2017 to December 2019.

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# Abbreviations

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
BITA	Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CAP	Communication, advocacy and Partnerships
C4D	Communication for Development
CCP	Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs
CMV	Community Mobilization Volunteers
CwC	Communication with Communities
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
IEC	International Education Centre
IFC	Information and Feedback Centres
IPC	Interpersonal Communication
ISCG	Inter Sector Coordination Group
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
PCP	Partner Coordination Protocol
SPEAR	Social Policy, Evaluation, Analytics and Research
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

# Introduction

The onset of the Rohingya refugee crisis in August 2017 irrevocably changed the present and the future of hundreds of thousands of children, women and men from the Rohingya community and introduced the entire Cox's Bazar district, one of the poorest areas in Bangladesh, to an unprecedented crisis and a new social reality. The situation was so dire that a month later, on 20 September 2017, UNICEF activated a Level 3 emergency response<sup>1</sup> – the highest level of alarm.<sup>2</sup> Together with the Government and other humanitarian partners, UNICEF immediately responded to provide life-saving assistance and protection to the newly arrived Rohingya children and their families, also taking a lead role in health; nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); child protection; and education – areas that are fundamental to the survival, protection and wellbeing of the refugee community. UNICEF also played a strong supporting role in communication for development (C4D) interventions as well as community engagement and accountability to the affected population.

## Background

In today's media-rich, diverse communication landscape, radio has proven to be one of the most effective and far-reaching methods of transmitting information to those in need. Radio is a powerful, low-cost tool for producers, accessible and resilient in emergency situations, and portable with the potential to be powered by a wind-up receiver, solar energy cell or battery. Radio functions as a one-to-many mass

communication device, disseminating messages to an entire community in real time, reaching the least accessible community members and those living in remote corners of a country or territory. Radio can be informative, educational or entertaining. It is both public and private, allowing its listeners to access sensitive information in the privacy of their homes, while stimulating public discussion. It broadcasts life-saving messages to the most vulnerable: children, youth, women, mothers, disabled or illiterate members of the community, appealing to oral traditions and adaptable to diverse cultures, including refugees and other populations at risk. Messages can be tailored to a specific group of listeners at key locations, for example, information hubs, learning centres, listeners groups, hospitals and households. With its interactive features, radio promotes hope, confidence and a sense of belonging.

In an emergency, where other technologies such as television and internet are not readily available, radio can play a primary role in safeguarding human rights, including the right to access information and the right to freedom of expression and participation. For that reason, expanding radio access and ownership and making the content of radio broadcasting inclusive and accessible constitutes a human rights priority. When used to reach out to vulnerable populations with life-saving messages and information, radio saves lives.

Overview of a camp at Balukhali Rohingya camp, Moinarghona, Cox's Bazar.

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# Overcoming the barriers:

## The role of radio in the Rohingya response

During the initial phase of the humanitarian response to the Rohingya refugee crisis, an immediate challenge for UNICEF and other humanitarian organizations was to overcome existing communication barriers and deliver life-saving messages to the increasing number of Rohingya refugees – an estimated total of 915,000,<sup>3</sup> more than half of them children.<sup>4</sup> The Rohingya families took shelter in dense, makeshift refugee camps, located on the hills surrounding Cox's Bazar, one of the most disaster-prone zones in the world.

In the confusion of the crisis a large number of Rohingya refugees were unable to access basic services and life-saving assistance. Women<sup>5</sup> and adolescent girls<sup>6</sup> were particularly vulnerable because social-cultural norms restricted their mobility and they were not able to leave their households freely to gather information and access the available services. Almost 80 per cent of Rohingya men and women reported that they did not have enough information to make good decisions for their families and themselves.<sup>7</sup> Misinformation, myths and misconceptions were prevalent within the Rohingya and host communities, causing negative impacts in a number of critical areas, including healthy behaviours, the importance of vaccination, and maternal and newborn care.<sup>8</sup>

The challenge was not only disseminating information to the affected population but actively communicating in an engaging, interactive and impactful way. The challenge was further complicated by the emergency context and ability

of aid workers to communicate when over 70 per cent of the population was illiterate and there was no accessible media in the Rohingya language.<sup>9</sup> In addition, infrastructure and internet were lacking and the purchase of SIM cards was blocked.<sup>10</sup> In such circumstances, radio had unique potential to be used for communication, with the capacity to reach Rohingya and host communities rapidly, and to promote accountability and increase social cohesion. Radio was quickly identified as a critical means to communicate information rapidly and uniformly to both refugee and host communities.

### Collaborating with radio partners

As part of the effort to swiftly respond to communication challenges on the ground, UNICEF Bangladesh initiated dialogue with BBC Media Action, the state-owned Bangladesh Betar Regional Station<sup>11</sup> (100.8 FM) and the community initiative Radio Naf<sup>12</sup> (99.2 FM). In line with the multi-sectoral approach and in the spirit of communication for development in the humanitarian response, many sector-specific themes were integrated into radio programmes to advance the demand for services and to promote positive changes in behaviours and social practices. A wide range of life-saving messages were broadcast to the affected communities through a variety of formats, including live phone-in programmes, expert interviews, quiz shows, radio dramas, public service announcements and magazines. The messages were updated regularly to reflect the changing needs of children and their families.

During the first phase of the humanitarian response, UNICEF focused its efforts on saving lives and providing emergency services and relief for children and their families. The new arrivals were desperate. Children were traumatized by the violence they experienced during their flight from Myanmar and many were suffering from gunshot wounds, burn injuries, physical disabilities, speech difficulties, malnutrition, diarrhoea and mental distress.<sup>13</sup> They were also exposed to dangerous health hazards and water-borne diseases such as hepatitis and cholera. What made the situation even more acute was that the new arrivals often did not seek support until it was too late, and many were not even aware that medical services were available in the camps.<sup>14</sup> Raising awareness at the community

level was therefore imperative as the first step to address such challenges.

In order to accelerate outreach and deliver life-saving messages on healthy behaviours and available assistance and services, UNICEF worked in close collaboration with radio partners, distributing 3,000 wind-up radio sets through local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community leaders and imams for use in learning and other service centres, child-friendly spaces and among adolescent groups. The population of refugees and host communities targeted for outreach was estimated at 1.2 million,<sup>15</sup> with a particular focus on reaching 3,950 girls and boys through 158 adolescent radio listeners clubs.<sup>16</sup>



*A radio is more than just a radio for many Rohingya in the camps.*

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In close collaboration with the local radio broadcasters Bangladesh Betar and Radio Naf 99.2 FM, and with technical support provided by BBC Media Action, UNICEF successfully delivered critical messages to the Rohingya community on health; child protection; education; nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); and emergency preparedness, as well as information on the services available in the camps and how to access them. The aim was to harness the power of radio broadcasting to reduce casualties and halt or reverse the spread of highly communicable diseases in the camps and host communities, and by doing so, improve general health conditions and the wellbeing of affected children and their families. Radio outreach was combined with other community engagement tools, accountability mechanisms and mobilization campaigns and proved successful, resulting in greater participation in vaccination campaigns and stronger disease outbreak prevention.

Radio's impact was particularly effective during the nutrition and immunization campaigns to combat outbreaks of measles and chickenpox. During the vaccination drive, UNICEF and radio partners intensified their efforts to inform the population at risk. Repeated radio announcements increased to eight campaign alerts and three public service messages daily, combined with phone-in radio shows, and guided discussions at the adolescent radio listeners clubs (ARLCs) across the refugee and host communities. Radio broadcasting helped facilitate rapid access to vaccines in Cox's Bazar by providing accurate information and dispelling rumours. "So many rumours were swirling through the camps at the beginning," says Mahfuzul Haque, regional director of Bangladesh Betar, "'Vaccination will convert your children to Christianity,' or 'vaccination makes women sterile,' or 'the biometrically registered refugees will be sent back to Myanmar'... To fight against

such rumours, we recorded the views from religious leaders, *mahjees*,<sup>17</sup> doctors, people from local administration and other trusted people from the community. And we succeeded."<sup>18</sup> The counter-narratives produced and broadcast by radio partners gradually won the support of the community. Today, radio messages on critical issues, including post- and antenatal care; vaccination; diphtheria; cholera; skin infections; measles and rubella; gender-based violence; human trafficking; sexually transmitted diseases; AIDS;<sup>19</sup> and emergency preparedness reach across refugee and host communities in Cox's Bazar.

Because good hygiene is a necessary first step towards reducing the spread of diseases, hygiene education is fundamental to UNICEF's core mandate. Hygiene education is primarily concerned with teaching and promoting hygienic behaviour in daily activities, such as washing hands, collecting and using water safely, and using latrines and other sanitary facilities. However, behavioural change does not happen in a single step, nor does it automatically follow knowledge change. Instead, sustainable behaviour change requires repetition, reinforcement, addressing counter beliefs and normative influences, and sensitization, as well as a strong motivation to maintain new behaviour patterns. Radio advocacy collaborators repeatedly aired public service announcements and programmes on hygiene, together with information on highly communicable diseases, to promote good hygiene practices among community members and help sustain behaviour change. Examples of successful radio programmes include *Beggunor Lai* (For Everyone)<sup>20</sup> and *Shishur Hashi* (Children's Smile).<sup>21</sup> The voices of community members have been successfully incorporated into these programmes (see text boxes) but efforts to include community voices in other programmes

required more innovative approaches. In order to communicate directly with members of the refugee community who were not permitted to buy a SIM card, live phone-in shows opened

a phone line and coordinated with community volunteers who offered their personal mobile phones for refugees to call into the show.

## ***Beggunor Lai***

*Beggunor Lai* or For Everyone is a 25-minute programme supported by UNICEF and BBC Media Action and broadcast by two radio stations: Bangladesh Betar (100.8 FM and 1314 AM, on air at 1:10 pm every Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Thursday), and Radio Naf (99.2 FM, on air at 10 am every Saturday, Monday and Wednesday). The programme is broadcast in local Chittagonian dialect, which is accessible to both the Rohingya and host communities. In order to promote and increase the listeners' engagement and direct participation, the Bangladesh Betar team visits camps throughout the week and interviews community members, recording their questions, needs and concerns. The voices of community members are then incorporated into *Beggunor Lai* and other programmes, with advice and responses provided by experts in the studio. The programme has produced more than 260 episodes.

## ***Shishur Hashi***

A magazine programme, *Shishur Hashi* or Children's Smile is directed towards refugee children who suffer from trauma, violence, illnesses and other physical and psychological distress. The programme is prepared in the Chittagonian dialect and broadcast by Radio Naf (99.2 FM, on air at 10 am every Sunday and Tuesday).

By coordinating their efforts in the field to deliver as one, the radio partners increased the coverage and the coherence of their humanitarian messages and outreach. The collaboration between the radio broadcasters Bangladesh Betar and the community initiative Radio Naf in Cox's Bazar is an example of how coordinated efforts improved results. It enabled programmes produced by Bangladesh Betar to be re-broadcast by Radio Naf, reducing costs and increasing coverage. *Shongjog*,<sup>22</sup> Bangladesh's national multi-stakeholder platform on communicating

with communities, is another example of a coalition for humanitarian action. Functioning as a credible online repository of information, *Shongjog* allows development practitioners and humanitarian workers to download and reuse relevant audio-visual and multi-media contents produced by other agencies from a broad range of sectors (including health; nutrition; WASH; education; child protection; and disaster risk reduction). The radio programmes, originally produced by Bangladesh Betar in partnership with UNICEF, were consolidated in a downloadable

podcast/MP3 format by BBC Media Action and released through 'Listen Again' on the *Shongjog* platform. Each programme download included topic-specific guidelines available in both English and Bangla languages for reuse by discussion facilitators during radio listeners group meetings across the camps and host communities.<sup>23</sup>

The discussion guidelines for 'Listen Again'<sup>24</sup> were prepared in a reader-friendly and accessible format and style, using brief and clear messages and providing practical advice to facilitators. The guidelines consist of several sections, including information on a week's topic, talking points, key take-aways and a group facilitator's feedback sheet. The latter served both to collect useful information on the demographic profile of listeners (such as age, gender, pregnancy, disability, venue, camp, block) and to receive feedback about the relevance and accessibility of the discussions and radio programmes, as well as other critical concerns and issues raised by the listeners. After each discussion, a feedback form was completed by the facilitator and submitted to 'Listen Again' partners (for more details on the radio feedback mechanism, see the section on adolescent radio listeners clubs below).

Nurturing a sense of community ownership of local radio among the affected population requires commitment and action beyond access to the device. In order to reinforce engagement and participation of girls and boys in refugee and host communities, UNICEF is collaborating with partners to form new ARLCs. UNICEF, BBC Media Action, Bangladesh Betar and Radio Naf 99.2 FM have been regularly analysing the feedback received from listeners groups and, based on data, are working on new and innovative edutainment programmes, promoting the active participation of listeners and reflecting their current needs and vulnerabilities. "Talking about innovation, one should remember that

there was no radio aimed at the Rohingya population in Myanmar, except the state radio, which broadcasts in Burmese and was considered by the community as a distrusted



*Rohingya men listen to a radio programme regularly broadcast by Bangladesh Betar and Radio Naf 99.2 FM.*

source of information,” reminds Kate Gunn, senior project manager from the BBC Media Action in Cox’s Bazar. She explains, “Just having a radio programme dedicated to the Rohingya

community – a programme where people can call in and get answers for their questions – itself is actually innovative.”<sup>25</sup>



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# The importance of radio in emergency preparedness

During the monsoon season, from May to October, cyclones become a top priority for humanitarian partners. Hundreds of thousands of refugees are exposed to high risks of cyclones, floods and landslides. Outbreaks of communicable diseases, including hepatitis A and E, cholera and diphtheria, rise steeply during this period. The Rohingya population lives, for the most part, in fragile, overcrowded shelters, made of bamboo and plastic tarpaulin, a combination of materials that is extremely flammable and will not withstand the strong winds that often occur during the monsoon season. In May 2017, a few months before the number of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar spiked, Cyclone Mora caused the worst landslide disaster in 10 years, leaving a quarter of the refugee settlements badly damaged and 50,000 buildings demolished. When the high risk of cyclones in Cox's Bazar district is juxtaposed with the fact that only 5 per cent<sup>26</sup> of the refugee shelters can resist winds up to 80 km/h, the situation becomes even more dire.

UNICEF and radio partners stepped up their efforts and revised the messages to respond to new threats. Together they distributed radio sets and mega- phones to the Cyclone Preparedness Program<sup>27</sup> volunteers for the host community in the cyclone-prone sub-districts of Cox's Bazar. As an active member of the Emergency (Cyclone) Communications Taskforce under the Communication with Communities Working Group, UNICEF, in cooperation with government and development partners, contributed to the finalization<sup>28</sup> of cyclone preparedness messages, delivered via radio announcements to prepare



*Kutupalong Camp, Cox's Bazar, deforestation has left the refugee camps vulnerable to erosion and landslides.*





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people for any potential cyclone. Radio drama also proved successful as a way to prepare and strengthen the resilience of listeners from different age and gender groups. With the plays specifically tailored for this purpose, radio was able to communicate to the affected community in a less didactic, more engaging and creative way.

## Adolescent radio listeners clubs

*“Radio dramas are our favorite... The other day, 25 of us came together in this club and listened to a very funny story... It begins with a little child asking an old man why the fox likes to eat chickens [awareness raising for chickenpox] ... It was so much fun that we couldn't stop laughing even after the play ended!”*

Mohammad,<sup>29</sup> 16, ARLC, Kutupalong camp

Radio has a unique ability to pinpoint the needs of the community and to speak the local dialect. This has helped create a sense of belonging and solidarity, helping those who were forced to flee their homeland feel at home again. In order for local radio to be effective during an emergency, a strong sense of ownership by the affected community in ‘their own radio station’ is crucial. This requires the active participation and engagement of listeners across multiple genres, including live call-in programmes, interviews, dramas and participatory events, such as radio listening groups.

The ARLCs supported by UNICEF aim to engage adolescent listeners and build ownership within the community. ARLCs provide a safe, participatory space to promote social interaction between adolescent girls and boys, stimulate discussion about their concerns, encourage



Adolescents listening radio programs in an ARLC in camp 13, in refugee camp.

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solidarity and give hope for a better future. By doing so, listeners clubs also help reduce adolescents' vulnerability to child marriage, gender-based violence and other harmful behaviours, and encourage health and hygiene. The network of ARLCs increases the capacity of adolescents to act as change agents and contribute to sustainable behaviour change in their communities.

UNICEF-supported partners Bangladesh Betar, Radio Naf 99.2 FM, BRAC<sup>30</sup> and the Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA)<sup>31</sup> have established more than 225 ARLCs in Rohingya camps and host communities in Cox's Bazar. Approximately 25 to 30 adolescents participate in each club, exchanging information and discussing the variety of challenges they face in everyday life. Through their discussions and joined efforts they seek solutions. Other young people who are not registered in the ARLCs are also invited to engage as youth volunteers. Through open registration, all adolescents who show interest and a willingness to participate can join the listeners clubs at any time.

"We come to the club four times a week and listen to the radio programmes together. We are a mix[ed] group. Girls and boys," says Bahar, an adolescent Rohingya girl who fled from Myanmar with her parents when she was 14. With a voice that reflects the hope and optimism her name – meaning 'spring' in Persian – implies, Bahar continues, "I learnt so many things since I joined this club: About cholera, chickenpox, safe water, girls' hygiene, hand washing, child marriage..." She goes on to explain how the ARLC impacts her family, "We first discuss about the message introduced by radio programmes. And then I go home and share what I learnt with my parents. Each time I teach them something new, some useful information, my parents thank me!" Similar accounts have been given of knowledge

sharing and the appreciation of parents and families by many listeners club members in both refugee and host communities. "It was not until I attended this club that I realized my parents and I knew nothing about some dangerous diseases such as malaria, how it is spread, how to avoid it," says Emina from an ARLC in a refugee camp, "now we try to keep our home and environment clean and do not let still water around – otherwise, mosquitos would grow and spread the disease to everyone!"

Begum is another female member of the listeners club. She emphasizes the importance of education for the future of the girls in the camps, "I want to finish my school I started when I was in Myanmar. And when I grow up, I want to help people like us around the world." She tells how radio has helped empower her, "We all need education, better education. Radio could provide us some extra courses on different subjects – an English lesson, for example, just a lesson a day, or a drama in English ... This way, I could talk to you without a translator and, one day, travel around the world!" The young people participating in listening groups are self-confident and motivated as they talk about the role of ARLCs in their life. However, the cheer in Begum's voice fades as she continues: "But my parents wouldn't send me to school even if I wish. Because I'm a girl."

Begum's account reveals two factors threatening the future of Rohingya adolescents. First, in the current emergency context, 97 per cent of the youth between age 15 and 24 are not attending any type of education facility. In numbers, this means that out of an estimated 915,000 persons residing in the camps, 117,000 adolescents have limited or no access to education.<sup>32</sup> Second, most adolescent Rohingya girls stop going to school when they reach puberty (between 10 and 12 years old) due to powerful social, cultural

and religious norms that compel parents to keep girls at home until they marry.<sup>33</sup> From the gender perspective, the radio listeners groups serve as an excellent platform for the refugee girls to access public space, socialize and discuss their concerns with their peers, while deepening their knowledge about the particular challenges they face, such as gender-based violence, child marriage, trafficking, engaging in risky behaviours or insecurity in the camps. The popularity of ARLCs among female adolescents is evident as the majority of the participants in the club meetings are girls.<sup>34</sup> This is reinforced by girls' active engagement in other humanitarian initiatives. In addition to adolescent boys, hundreds of female adolescents participate in a range of activities supported by UNICEF and other humanitarian partners, for example, providing support to information and feedback centres and volunteering as community mobilizers to deliver information on immunization, health and hygiene, WASH, nutrition, child protection and disaster risk reduction, which, in turn, empowers them and increases the gender

responsiveness of the actions taken.

The 158 ARLCs, with active membership of more than 3,950 adolescents, 1,950 boys and 2,000 girls (*see Table 1*) across the camps and host communities, also function as an effective way for gathering feedback. Through the guidelines available on the *Shongjog* website, the listeners clubs provide feedback on the radio programmes, as well as information on specific issues in everyday life. The Common Service Consortium, comprised of BBC Media Action, Internews and Translators without Borders, analyses the feedback collected from the field and publishes snapshots of the data in *What Matters*, a bi-weekly bulletin to assist the humanitarian response in better planning and programme implementation. Between August and November 2018, for example, 9,281 individuals provided feedback through 1,981 listeners group discussions on issues including safety and security, ration cards, water issues and livelihoods.<sup>35</sup>

**Table 1. Number of adolescents who are active members in ARLCs in camps and host communities**

	Camps	Host communities	Total
Adolescent boys	750	1,200	1,950
Adolescent girls	655	1,345	2,000

## Radio in the host communities

When the Rohingya refugee influx into Cox's Bazar began in August 2017, the host communities were the first to respond. Local residents shared their meals, shelters, yards and already scarce resources with hundreds of thousands of refugees who had fled the violence in Myanmar. The initial welcome has

been dampened by the impacts of the crisis on the host communities: the loss of farmlands; an estimated 2,000 hectares of surrounding forestland cut down to make space for Rohingya refugees; and the contamination of almost 80 per cent of the available drinking water. Increasing concerns about the impact of the emergency on local livelihoods, the environment and the economy has put tremendous pressure on

host communities, inevitably escalating the tension with the Rohingya refugee population. Recent reports and observations in the field<sup>36,37</sup> indicate that the needs and views of the host communities have not being adequately understood or addressed by public authorities

and humanitarian agencies.<sup>38</sup> This is supported by the feedback from the listening groups. Between February 2018 and January 2019, at least half of the 312 questions posed by the host community audiences of Bangladesh Betar concerned issues surrounding livelihood, safety and security.<sup>39</sup>

## ***Betar Sanglap***

*Betar Sanglap* or Radio Dialogue is a monthly programme that brings together about 70 people from the host communities and a panel of experts comprised of elected representatives of local government, local administrators, medical doctors, the Refugee Repatriation and Relief Commissioner, representatives of civil society and other actors from sub-district level who are close to the host community.

UNICEF has been working with BBC Media Action, Bangladesh Betar and Radio Naf 99.2 FM to offer an interactive, participatory platform for Bangladeshi community members to address intercommunal tension and promote social cohesion. *Betar Sanglap* (Radio Dialogue), a monthly programme of Bangladesh Betar, is an

excellent example of such efforts. As its title suggests, the programme provides space for host community members to voice the challenges they face and share their views with local authorities and aid providers. In this way, radio not only safeguards the affected community's freedom of expression but also serves as a



*Dialogue creates the opportunity for exchanging information and perspectives, clarifying viewpoints, and developing solutions to issues of common interest to the community.*

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watchdog that calls for accountability from the authorities and service providers. UNICEF also supports live call-in programmes for girls and boys in the host communities to engage with experts on issues such as health, nutrition, sanitation and protection. In January 2019, 775 adolescents and 46 teachers came together in 35 ARLCs to discuss social, cultural and healthcare issues, including mother/child care, menstrual hygiene, hand-washing and child-marriage.<sup>40</sup> On 13 March 2019, one of the *Betar Sanglap* programmes was recorded in the Deputy Commissioner's Office with 36 participants who had a chance to directly express their frustrations and concerns. Recommendations highlighted by participants for government action included the need for immediate repatriation of the Rohingya people; for updated information on the relocation process initiated by the Bangladesh government; and for relocation of the Rohingya people and their commercial activities outside host community neighborhoods.<sup>41</sup>

In such complex social settings, radio is an effective channel for listeners to express their views, while also building resilience and promoting social cohesion between Rohingya and host communities. This is in line with the 2019 Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis, which focuses on maximizing opportunities to strengthen social cohesion as one of its three strategic objectives.<sup>42</sup> UNICEF and its radio partners combined their efforts to contribute to the realization of the target. Founding 63 ARLCs<sup>43</sup> in host communities, including 45 school-based listeners clubs, is another example of such efforts. More than 1,570 boys and girls come together in the listeners clubs to learn and openly discuss a variety of issues, including sensitive issues such as child marriage and menstrual hygiene. "When I was 13, my father wanted me to marry," says a girl (age 15) from the host community, "but I learned in our [listeners] club

that this is not good for girls. So I asked UNICEF, Bangladesh Betar, NGOs and my school to help me. Now I'm free. I continue my education and take part in a theatre play that teaches why child marriage is bad for girls." A girl (age 14) from one of the ARLCs finds radio programmes on childcare particularly useful: "I have three little brothers; it's not easy for my mother to take care [of] everyone at home. The programmes on child-care are very helpful. I pass the information [I learned from the radio] to my mom, but also try myself to help her in taking care of my brothers." Another ARLC member (age 13) from the same listeners club explains that she enjoys the quiz shows the most, "I listen to the radio usually on Fridays since we don't have school. Quiz shows are my favorite; questions are tough, but I learn a lot from them." More than 6,000 students from 12 schools in Cox's Bazar participated<sup>44</sup> in quiz competitions on key life-saving behaviours. In addition, on 13 February 2018, the ARLCs took part in World Radio Day. This gave the listeners groups an opportunity to engage in a larger platform and learn about the experiences and concerns of other young people around the world, demonstrating that radio is not yesterday's technology<sup>45</sup> but a powerful, reliable and interactive technology for today.

Building and sustaining social cohesion is a long-term task that requires constant monitoring and reinforcement. This was evident during an ARLC exhibit that highlighted concerns about the challenges that young members of the Rohingya refugee community face in their everyday life. One boy explained, "Drug [use] is the biggest problem young people face in our neighborhood. [Drug use] is everywhere and it kills people. More radio programmes on this topic would be helpful." The young listeners believe that drug abuse has become widespread, particularly after the most recent arrival of Rohingya refugees. The issue of drug abuse is part of a wider discourse

among the Rohingya youth, suggesting that there are two groups of Rohingya refugees with distinct social practices and norms. According to the youth, those who arrived in Bangladesh in the 1970s share similar values, beliefs and norms, and therefore have integrated well into a community of friends, neighbours or peers. Some young people said during interviews that they believe that the new arrivals are more likely to engage in risky behaviours, resulting in a reluctance by the host community to accept and interact with newly arrived refugees.

One message that humanitarian and development actors can derive from such observations is that, in order to build social cohesion and acceptance, more attention should be paid to mainstream media and the prevailing discourses that discriminate against the Rohingya population. It is essential that humanitarian programmes integrate media strategies to counter-balance negative narratives about the refugees. Harnessing the unique potential of local radio to promote peaceful co-existence, create constructive dialogue and highlight communal interdependence between Rohingya and host communities serves that purpose.

## Lessons learned and way forward

- Observations in the field and interviews with UNICEF radio partners reveal that, in order to increase radio coverage and optimize message delivery, the local broadcasters need further technological support and improved infrastructure (such as establishing new antennas for a stronger radio signal).
- Despite several reports on the positive impacts of radio communication in the camps, the assessment of local radio programmes is inconclusive.<sup>46</sup> Several surveys<sup>47</sup> conducted in 2018 showed that, among the affected community, face-to-face/interpersonal communication remains the best approach to obtain information. In order to achieve better results, access to radio at the household level should be increased. The humanitarian agencies have made efforts to realize this

objective. For example, the International Organization for Migration distributed 60,000 radio sets to refugee communities. Currently, 32,445 households have access to radio, with 12,028 participants reached by 752 radio-listening sessions and 13,000 participants able to access radio programmes through narrowcast broadcasting,<sup>48</sup> where programmes are stored on USBs or other mobile devices and played back to a particular segment of the audience.



# Endnotes

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- <sup>17</sup> *Mahjees* are unelected community leaders.
- <sup>18</sup> Focus group discussion with UNICEF radio partners, 7 February 2019, UNICEF Cox's Bazar Office.
- <sup>19</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'Bangladesh Humanitarian Situation Report No. 24 (Rohingya Influx)', UNICEF, Dhaka, 25 February 2018, <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNICEF%20Bangladesh%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20%20No.%2024%20C%2025%20February%202018....pdf>>.
- <sup>20</sup> The programme reaches 11 per cent of the affected community.
- <sup>21</sup> The programme reaches 7 per cent of the affected community.
- <sup>22</sup> The multi stakeholder platform Shongjog was launched in July 2015 and is chaired by the Department of Disaster Management of Bangladesh. Shongjog's members include NGOs, international NGOs, UN agencies and the Red Cross/Red Crescent. The following definition is from the platform's official website: "The Shongjog multi-stakeholder platform (MSP) on Communication with Communities (CwC) will aim to ensure that there are identified credible sources of information, where information is managed and updated. The MSP will also aim to promote trust between communities and the disaster response sector by recognizing voices of the community and reflecting them in strategies, policies and decision-making processes ... It will also establish close feedback loops so that communities are aware of this commitment and how information is used." For more information, see <[www.shongjog.org.bd/about-the-msp](http://www.shongjog.org.bd/about-the-msp)>.

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- <sup>29</sup> All names of the refugee and host community members quoted in this case study have been changed to protect their identities.
- <sup>30</sup> BRAC is an international development organization based in Bangladesh, founded in 1972, after the country's independence. The organization operates across Bangladesh and other countries in Asia and Africa. For more information see <[www.bracinternational.nl](http://www.bracinternational.nl)>.
- <sup>31</sup> Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA) is a non-government organization, working in the field of human rights, social inclusion, cultural heritage awareness and poverty alleviation since 1994. For more details see <<https://net.ichcap.org/bangladesh-institute-of-theatre-arts-bita/>>.
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