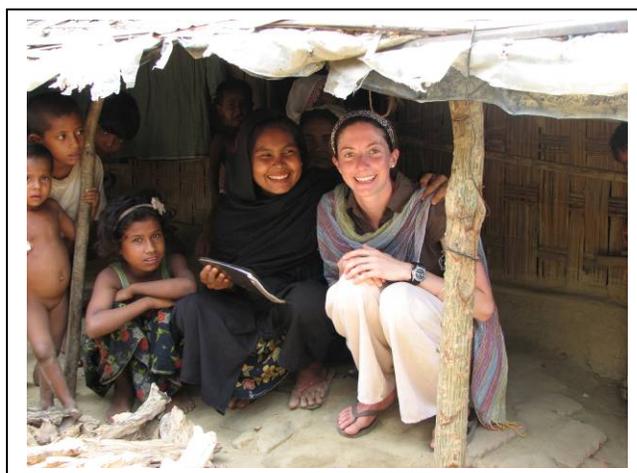


## Final Report

# Understanding the Food Provisioning Experience of Rohingya Refugee Women Heads of Household Living in Nayapara and Kutupalong Refugee Camps, Bangladesh

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# Executive Summary

## Understanding the Food Provisioning Experience of Rohingya Refugee Women Heads of Household Living in Nayapara and Kutupalong Refugee Camps, Bangladesh

This study is part of a program of research that seeks to support the achievement of the First Millennium Development Goal—that by 2015 there will be the eradication of hunger and deep poverty. It was also conceived of because of our concerns about the protracted refugee situation faced by the Rohingya, particularly female heads of households who in most circumstances are among the most disadvantaged members of the community. In November 2006, we sought permission from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), Dhaka office to access female heads of households in the Kutupalong and Nayapara refugee camps in the Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh in order to study their food provisioning experience. By *food provisioning*, we mean the acquisition, preparation and distribution of food in a family. Food provisioning is a broader concept than *food insecurity* which is access to adequate food through socially acceptable means. Our request led to an invitation to conduct the research in late 2006 with the data collection actually occurring in April 2007. Funding was gratefully received from the University of Calgary and logistical support was kindly provided by the UNHCR in both Dhaka and Cox's Bazar.

Our research terms of reference were to document the food insecurity and food provisioning experience of Rohingya refugee female heads of households, to learn about the coping strategies deployed by the women, and to hear from women what they would recommend be done to support them, with a particular focus upon future-oriented suggestions that might be considered as part of a durable solution.

Our methodology was quite straightforward—we conducted qualitative interviews, in private, with 31 women who were living alone with their children--15 from Kutupalong and 16 from Nayapara camp. The women were purposively chosen to represent the diversity of women in such a situation in the camps. They included a range of ages, number of children, differing circumstances through which they became female heads of households, and different education, skills and camp engagement levels within the camp. Women participated in an informed consent process, answered a few questions on their sociodemographic situation, responded to a food insecurity questionnaire, and responded to an in-depth semi-structured interview conducted by the researchers with the assistance of a qualified translator. They also participated in a focus group session where our preliminary results were presented to them for feedback, during which they had their height and weight measured. As researchers, we also gathered information by walking around within the camps and visiting sheds and some of the facilities. While in Bangladesh, we spent a lot of time considering what we were learning and searching for themes. In Canada, we have had the tapes transcribed and reviewed their content carefully, analysed the food insecurity questionnaire results, and the body mass index measurements of the women, and conferred at length on the findings and recommendations.

The methodology proved to be enormously effective, in our view, in casting a lens on the food security situation of the Rohingya refugee heads of household, and we believe that the sample that we had the privilege to spend a great deal of personal time with, reflects the situation not only of the women we interviewed but women like them—those who live alone with their children. We understand that this represents between 35 and 40% of the women in the two camps so is not an inconsequential population in terms of planning for a durable solution. Their vulnerability as female heads of households, should be considered among the other vulnerability assessments that we are aware of occurring within the camps.

We found three main findings from our research. The first result was that food insecurity is severe, pervasive and a preoccupation for these women. Despite receiving rations, they are severely food insecure and at nutritional and health risk as a consequence. We explain the reasons for their food insecurity in the body of this report. Our second finding was that this chronic food insecurity has had an adverse psychosocial impact on these families, and from what we learned from them, chronic food insecurity has also contributed to adverse social impacts within the camps. The crux of these adverse social impacts seems to be isolation and lack of mutual aid. Again, we elaborate on our observations in the body of the report. Our third research finding is that female heads of household, as represented by this sample of Rohingya women, are ill-equipped to live outside of the camp and its ration system at this time and will require a great deal of support to be able to sustain themselves and their families in a non-refugee setting. The Rohingya women are desperate for peace—“shanti” that is promised through a durable solution but they have little capacity now in terms of literacy, numeracy, or skills for independence with which to manage outside of the camps. We observed glimpses of empowerment among some women and sincerely believe that they have the capacity, if supported with adequate investments, to function in a larger society. We came away from our time in the camps with many other insights and the women provided us with many disparate recommendations which we also share in the report.

Our key recommendation is to alleviate the severe food insecurity of the Rohingya female heads of households and their families and to do so in a way that could achieve greater impacts towards self-sufficiency. Rather than perpetuating the ration-as-economy system that exists in the camps or exacerbating tensions that the rations have contributed to for refugee-villager/other relationship, we suggest that additional food should be delivered in a way that could stimulate mutual aid, agricultural skill-building, community cooperation, and economic expansion. We also strongly recommend that particular attention be given to increasing the basic level of literacy and marketable skills of female heads of households. One model that should be considered for these women, even while they reside within the camps, is the BRAC integrated development model, particularly that which is showing early success among the ultra-poor. The BRAC model assembles women in clusters of mutual interest and circumstance and without creating enclaves within the camps, it might succeed in building trust and mutual cooperation which appear to be lacking. We found that the UNHCR is highly trusted and deeply respected by the refugees—this can be no mean feat given the 16 years of oversight that the UNHCR has provided to the refugees. This privileged position can be an invaluable asset in truly mobilizing not only diplomatic missions who have shown an interest in finding a durable solution for the Rohingya, but also for the refugees themselves, who deserve the fundamental human rights that come from being free-living persons.



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# Understanding the Food Provisioning Experience of Rohingya Refugee Women Heads of Household Living in Nayapara and Kutupalong Refugee Camps, Bangladesh

## Introduction

In January 2002, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that 20 millions refugees and displaced person were living under its protection and supervision (UNHCR, 2006). Refugees living in camps are almost entirely dependent upon United Nations agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) for their basic needs, including water, food, cooking hardware and fuel. Governments of countries in which refugees have settled often impose restrictions upon refugees including lack of freedom of movement and prohibition from the use of land to grow crops. Beyond the fact that their basic human needs may not always be met, residents of refugee camps suffer other vulnerabilities including dependency and the lack of ability to control their own destiny.

While refugee emergencies are the most easily identified and understood aid to populations who have fled natural or man-made disasters, today, the majority of refugee groups have lived in exile for a period of time that extends beyond the traditional state of emergency period. It is estimated that the average duration of major refugee situations has increased from nine years in 1993 to 17 years at the end of 2003 (UNHCR, 2006). Protracted refugee situations now account for the vast majority of the world's refugee population. In 2004, UNHCR estimated that more than 60 per cent of these refugee groups were trapped in the world's poorest and most unstable regions, far from the reach of international actors. These people often face significant restrictions on their human rights and have difficulties meeting their basic needs after years in exile (Lewa, 2003).

Food shortages, food insecurity and nutritional problems are frequent among refugee populations and have led to high prevalence rates of acute malnutrition compared to similar prevalence rates commonly found in non-refugee populations. Analysis of data collected in 42 refugee camps in Asia and Africa has found a strong association between the prevalence of malnutrition and high mortality rates in refugee camps, most likely affecting women, lone mothers and children (Stevens & Bencke, 2001). Protein-energy malnutrition (PEM) is known to be a major contributory cause of death in refugee populations in the emergency phase. Therefore, in these critical phases, the highest priority is usually to ensure the distribution of adequate food rations to the whole population through general food distribution. However, in a protracted refugee situation, in addition to PEM, nutrients deficiencies such as vitamin A, iodine and iron will play a key role in nutrition-related morbidity and mortality among these people. Women and teenage girls are often the ones receiving the smallest portion of food in the family and are therefore more prone to suffer from malnutrition and from the associated long term consequences (Stevens & Bencke, 2001). The mother's nutritional status during adolescence and pregnancy has a direct impact on a child's nutritional future. The likelihood of giving birth to an underweight baby is increased by a mother who is undernourished, engaging the intergenerational cycle of malnourishment in subsequent female generations (UNICEF, 2005). Furthermore, previous research has reported that female heads of households and their children are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition when living in a refugee camp (Stevens & Bencke, 2001).

In the year 2000, the members of the United Nations agreed to eight development goals for the new millennium. The first goal was the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. *Hunger* is defined as a prolonged, involuntary lack of food that results in illness, weakness or pain that goes beyond the usual uneasy sensation (Nord, Andrews & Carlson, 2005). The World Food Summit, Declaration of World Food Insecurity, 1995, affirmed "the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger" (United Nations ACC/SCN, 2000; United Nations FAO, 2002; Office of UNHCR, 2005).

Acknowledging these facts, it appeared relevant to further investigate the food insecurity among the Rohingya women refugees in Bangladesh, particularly those who were living alone with their children and therefore, most vulnerable.

The purpose of this research project is to build solidarity and support the First Millennium Development Goal by collecting information about food insecurity and the food provisioning experience of Rohingya women living in two refugee camps in Bangladesh in order to share their narratives with the UNHCR, non-governmental organizations and governmental policy makers who are directly intervening on this critical area. *Food insecurity* is defined as "the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so" (Hamilton, Cook, Thompson, Buron, Frongillo, Olson et al., 1997). We define *food provisioning* as the acquisition, preparation and distribution of food on behalf of a household.

### Brief Historical Background of the Rohingya<sup>1</sup>

Since December 1991, around 250,000 refugees from Myanmar have sought asylum in southeastern Bangladesh. Mainly Muslims, these refugees are from the Rohingya minority in the northern part of the state of Arakan. The origin of the Rohingya is the subject of much dispute. Many Rohingya claim that they are the true natives of the Arakan State, having converted to Islam centuries ago. The region has been visited by Arab traders since ancient times, and cultural traits tend to support the Rohingyas being part of the native population of the region. However, Rakhine people and the Burmese military government claim that Rohingyas are migrants from southeastern regions in neighboring Bangladesh, in a process that started before the British colonial era, but accelerated during this time. Their linguistic and cultural similarity with the Chittagonian people in Bangladesh is often cited as evidence of this. U Nu, who was the first Prime Minister of Burma from 4 January 1948 to 12 June 1956, again from 28 February 1957 to 28 October 1958, and finally from 4 April 1960 to 2 March 1966 also did not recognize them as Burmese citizens due to lack of historical evidence that they were actually native Burmese.

The main reason for their exile in 1991 has been the systematic persecution of the Rohingya minority by the Myanmar military junta. The exactions included, but were not limited to, imposition of forced labour practices, religions persecution, gender-based violence, other violence, discrimination and exclusion. These factors forced the victims to leave their home country for the north-western neighboring country; Bangladesh.

The remaining Rohingya in Myanmar who live in northern Rakhine State, continue to suffer from several forms of restriction and human rights violations. The Rohingyas' freedom of movement is severely restricted and the vast majority of them have effectively been denied Myanmar citizenship. They are also subjected to various forms of extortion and arbitrary taxation, land confiscation, forced eviction, house destruction and financial restrictions on marriage. Rohingyas continue to be used as forced labourers on roads and in military camps, although the frequency of forced labour in northern Rakhine State has decreased over the last decade.

At the beginning of the crisis in 1992, the Bangladesh government granted temporary asylum to the refugees and asked UNHCR to assist in the provision of humanitarian aid. UNHCR and other organizations responded positively to this request. Since 1992, several repatriations have been carried out sporadically either on a voluntary basis under the supervision of UNHCR or at gunpoint with no

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed historical overview, consult the document "Group profile of the protracted refugees from the Northern Rakhine State", UNHCR Representation in Bangladesh, January 2007

international assistance. In 2006, the Government of Canada agreed to offer resettlement to 23 refugees. However, the future of the Rohingyas who remain in two refugee camps in Bangladesh (Nayapara and Kutupalong) and of likely two hundred thousand more Rohingya who have returned to Bangladesh from Myanmar as unregistered refugees is still unresolved and their situation needs to be addressed.

### Context for the Research

There are currently 26,000 Myanmar Rohingya Muslim refugees living in the Nayapara and Kutupalong refugee camps in the Cox Bazaar district, 450 km south-east of Dhaka, since they fled persecution in Bangladesh in 1991/1992 (UNHCR, 2005). The published literature is silent on refugees who live in camps in Bangladesh. A few studies have been conducted among the 140,000 refugees living in 10 camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border and provide a glimpse of the conditions for Myanmar refugees (Banjong, Menefee, Sranacharoenpong, Chittchang, Ed-kantrong, Boonpradern et al, 2003; Kemmer, Bovill, Kongsomboon, Hansch, Geisler, Cheney et al, 2003; Lopes Cardoza, Talley, Burton & Crawford, 2004). It is estimated that nearly 300,000 Burmese are refugees in Thailand, Bangladesh and India (Banjong et al, 2003).

Banjong and colleagues reported in 2003 on the dietary assessment of refugees living in one Thai camp, the Mae La Camp, home to 40,000 refugees. In this camp, basic food and relief assistance came from a consortium of non-governmental organizations, rather than from the Thai government. Data collected included consumption patterns, methods of food procurement, and adequacy of dietary intake among camp households. The study revealed that the vast majority of dietary nutrients were provided by ration foods, and, although the ration and the overall diet were adequate for meeting short-term dietary requirement subsistence, they were insufficient to ensure optimal growth, especially for younger children. The study provided some insight in food provisioning in the camp that had been established eight years prior to the study. The authors described the camp as having “a lively [market] economy.” The refugees did procure some non-ration foods by foraging, planting trees and vegetables, raising animals, and purchasing and exchanging ration foods for other items. However, the quantity and quality of this alternative food supply were insufficient to compensate for the nutrients that were low or lacking in the rationed food. In the same year, a separate study revealed that 65% of refugee children under five years suffered from iron deficiency anemia related to low iron availability of food rations (Kemmer et al, 2003).

Little has been written about the Nayapara and Kutupalong refugee camps in Bangladesh. They are government run. After a period of interruption, Médecins sans Frontières reopened a health clinic serving the camps in March 2007 (personal communication, UNHCR staff, April 9, 2007). The camps are inspected by the UNHCR office in Dhaka. Many (35% is the estimate) of the households are led by women (UNHCR, 2007). We relied upon personal briefings from UNHCR staff to prepare us for the research. These occurred by teleconference in January 2007 and in-person upon arrival in Dhaka. We were joined by a World Food Programme representative at this briefing. We also received copies of several reports that were prepared on various topics including food insecurity and a comprehensive assessment conducted as part of the joint assessment mission process of UNHCR and its collaborators.<sup>2</sup> In Cox’s Bazar, we had a briefing as well with two senior staff.

The information that we received was invaluable in rapidly orienting us to the terminology used in the camps, providing us with an understanding of the ration system and changes over the recent past in

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<sup>2</sup> These comprehensive documents include three of particular relevance to this research: Food Access and Utilisation Study, World Food Programme, February 2007; Mortality and Nutrition Survey in Nayapara and Kutupalong Camps, UNHCR & INRAN, February 2006; and WFP/UNHCR Report of the Joint Assessment Mission, Bangladesh 30-July-10 Aug, 2006

refugee conditions, and most importantly, giving us direction to focus upon future-oriented strategies rather than to capture only the current problems. Our qualitative methodology and attention to a highly vulnerable group is intended to explore beyond these previous studies and to contribute to the intense, good faith efforts on the part of the UNHCR to find a durable solution for the Rohingya in Nayapara and Kutupalong camps.

## **Research objectives**

The three research questions that we set out to address were:

- 1) What are the hunger, food insecurity, and family food provisioning experiences of women who live alone with their children and in deep poverty?
- 2) What coping and decision-making strategies regarding family food provisioning do mothers use in situations of hunger and food insecurity?
- 3) What suggestions do women have to reduce and eliminate hunger and food insecurity for themselves and for women like them?

In fact, the way we translated the research purpose to the women during the consent process is probably a clearer research question: **What are the daily food routines of Rohingya women heads of households in the Kutupalong and Nayapara refugee camps?**

The information that we gained from women heads of households responses to these questions led to a fourth research question:

- 4) What insights can we gain about the lived experience of refugee women heads of households when food provisioning is used as a lens to focus upon their lives?

## **Methodology**

In a private setting, we conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 15 women heads of household in Kutupalong (the first being a pilot interview), and 16 women in Nayapara, on workdays between April 11 and 23, 2007. All interviews were recorded and were conducted by the researchers with the assistance of translators who knew the Chittagongalese language, which is a different dialect from Bangla, the national language of Bangladesh. The interview process was followed by a focus group session on April 15 where the key findings were returned to the women at each camp, of whom 28 of 31 participants were able to attend.

The consent process [see Appendix 1] was abbreviated as the women readily agreed to participate and no signatures for consent were required because refugees are resistant to signing, as it led to repatriation in the past. There was no honorarium as cash is not permitted in the camp, so women were each given two small food items, usually a granola bar and a package of dry oatmeal as gifts. At the focus group, attendees received a juice box and either a small candle, note pad or a piece of the researchers' costume jewelry. One of the interpreters also brought some of her daughter's clothing for distribution for mothers of very young children.

The study had been approved by the Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board of the University of Calgary and Calgary Health Region. The research terms of reference including the research protocol were further submitted to the UNHCR –Dhaka for vetting and for sharing, as appropriate, to the Bangladesh Ministry of Food and Disaster Management.

The draft interview guide was modified [Appendix 2] after briefings with UNHCR and the World Food Program (WFP) in Dhaka and discussions with Cox's Bazar UNHCR staff. After the pilot interview, there were further modifications made in terms of emphasis. As the interview process unfolded, areas of new questioning were explored where others had been saturated. The unique circumstances of the various women were also explored to understand more about their daily lives. Each woman was also administered a Bangladeshi-developed food insecurity scale (Frongillo, Chowdhury, Ekström & Naved 2003) [Appendix 3] that proved informative but would not be suitable for food insecurity comparison with non-refugees. Each interview also collected basic sociodemographic information about the respondent and her family. At the focus group, all women had their heights and weights measured.

### *Sample and sample selection*

Women heads of household were purposively selected by knowledgeable, long-time field staff who were given criteria for selection. These included age of mother [<20, 20-29, 30+ years], number of children [<2, 2-5, 6+], length of time living alone with children [<2, 2-5, 5+ years], education of mother [none, skilled woman, volunteer], women with disability. Women with other unique features participated such as an unregistered refugee, adoptive mother, female child head of household, providing a rich cross-section of women who lived alone with their children.

We also collected some information from shed visiting and camp walks that enriched our understanding of places mentioned by the women in the interviews. For example, we visited the therapeutic feeding centres in each camp, the women's centres, soap factory, and took photographs of people (with permission from those whom we photographed) and places in the camps. We wrote daily field notes on the day as well as on the individual interviews and conferred daily on our interviews.

### *Analysis*

Each day the two researchers shared insights from our experiences of the camp and the interviews. Four interviews were transcribed fully while we were in the field in order to further validate our findings. One day was taken after all interviews were completed in each of the camps to draft our insights from the interviews. We also met over the recommendations. We identified themes that answered the research questions and that provided other insights into respondents' food provisioning experiences. These were organized into a model and a conceptual framework that we validated through our individual findings.

We also validated our findings through focus groups with our women respondents whose comments added further richness to our results. We also presented our results to Cox's Bazar UNHCR field staff and Dhaka-based UNHCR and WFP staff, and later with the head of agency UNHCR-Dhaka, and to Canadian and research colleagues with whom we worked in Dhaka after we left the camps. These responses aided our conceptual framework.

At the point of drafting this report, all tapes have been listened to by the first author, and all 31 interviews have been transcribed and most verified. These materials have not yet been coded (this is very time-consuming as we are mindful of the need for this report in a timely period; we intend to do this prior to seeking peer-review publication of these results). Instead raw transcripts have been read and re-read to determine whether or not our themes are consistent with the data. As researchers we are forced to rely on the back translation of women's responses relayed to us by translators who were not fluent in English. This results in simple phrases rather than full narratives; on the other hand we observed simple discourse as a main communication method even among the women. The respondents had to be encouraged to elaborate upon their replies and they often responded with rhetorical answers,

eg, Q: Does she take the bus to beg in Teknaf? R: Where would she get money to take bus? Hence the data are not quote rich but impression-rich.

Body mass indices were calculated in Canada from height and weight measures taken in the camp. Women were fully dressed when weighed and we used scales that may have been poorly calibrated. Height was measured against a post and may have been underestimated as well without an appropriate straight edge to gauge respondents' standing height.

Answers to the food insecurity questionnaire were first assessed collectively. We will later examine the value of trying to determine individual food insecurity scoring from the instrument. The questionnaire was deficient in many ways: a) most women did not reply to the forced-choice categories, so that we had to reclassify responses; b) the extremes that women answered were not available on the questionnaire, so were created; c) some questions were not applicable or measured the opposite attribute of what was intended, for example, fish consumption in the camps in a sign of food security, in free-living Bangladeshi women, it would be a sign of food insecurity; d) women were often unable to provide numbers within a 30 day interval. For our purposes, we used the questionnaire to orient the woman's food insecurity severity and orient the interview.

Since returning to Canada and having more time to spend with the data and in reflection of its meaning, we have also had time to reflect upon our initial strong impressions and our preliminary recommendations. We believe that this report represents a more balanced assessment of the situation.

## Results

We believe that the methodology did permit us to identify strong and important themes that describe the daily food routine and food provisioning experience of Rohingya refugee women heads of households. This inquiry functioned as a strong lens upon which we could examine not only food-related issues, but also the daily life of women, and with which we could interrogate their thoughts about the future. We also, perhaps inadvertently to the field staff who invited women to participate, had the opportunity to interview women who were married and lived with their husbands either in the camp or on occasion when their husbands returned from work outside of the camps. We were fortunate to interview a lone elderly woman, a female child head of household as well as an adoptive mother who herself was married so that the experiences that we report on are true for women beyond those who are strictly divorced, abandoned or widowed. Several women had been in a polygamous relationship but not were supported at all by the father of their children. Thus our findings may shed light on the food provisioning experience of a good third of the population of households in the two camps.

The women were forthcoming and appeared honest in their responses. The questions themselves were simple enough—to talk about getting rations, meal preparation, planning meals—topics that would not invite guile or manipulation. They appreciated the opportunity to talk about their experiences.

A woman said: **“I am happy to be able to talk to you today, because before I was not allowed to walk outside my shed or to talk to any outsider.”** Kutupalong refugee woman

This is not to say that the interviews were easy for them women. Many field notes recorded their emotional reactions:

- Woman became upset and very emotional (asked to stop the recording and cried) when she was asked the question about the difference of living without a husband. She had no money to buy

food for her children and medicine for her sick daughter. She had been suffering a lot since her husband past away.

- She was very embarrassed when she was crying (she turned around for a few minutes and was silent).

The feeling that their voices were important seemed to outweigh the emotion of recounting one's experiences. At the commencement of the first focus group which was held in Nayapara, a woman stood up and said: **"I would like to thank Madame and her colleague for these moments, it was the first time in 16 years that I was able to talk to a human being one person to one person."** Nayapara refugee woman

We were often asked our impressions of Kutupalong versus Nayapara. Our brief time in the camps and our sample of 15 or 16 in each camp is insufficient to make generalizations about camp distinctions but we would share a few impressions. Kutupalong exudes an atmosphere of tension. The children are subdued. Women refugees largely regarded it as the most undesirable of all places, and the worst of all camps. Women's fear was palpable from the villagers as well others (such as Mahjee).<sup>3</sup> Insufficient firewood for cooking is a huge concern. In contrast, in Nayapara the children are lively and there is more openness in the camp, not only because of its more isolated location, but because of its market, its shops, access to employment and to firewood. Women did not negatively comment about the place specifically, although they did complain about some Mahjee and corruption practices and associated violence. On visual inspection, it looked like the children had more bloated stomachs, appeared puffer and had more wasted buttocks and extremities in Nayapara than in Kutupalong. Food insecurity did not appear to vary by camp, however.

### *Conceptual Framework for Findings*

We organized the themes that arose from our research into a two-part conceptual framework. It has been little modified since our draft report and appears in Figures 1 and 2. The central organizing concept remains that food insecurity in the camps is severe, pervasive, and a preoccupation. We created a functional framework to illustrate this and its impacts which we organized around the shed, the camp, the interface [we described it as the in-between place to the women], the helping organizations, the outside, and future orientation. Within each of these domains, we identified themes and copious examples of what the women said to us to support the topic. From these themes, we also derived our key findings and for these, implications for action. We have also included a listing of other themes that are not specifically addressed in this report (Appendix 6. For this report, we concentrate only on our principal findings for which we have considered recommendations.

Our three main findings are that:

- 1) food insecurity is severe, pervasive and a preoccupation for these women;
- 2) chronic food insecurity has had an adverse psychosocial impact on these families, and from what we learned from them, chronic food insecurity has also contributed to adverse social impacts within the camps; and
- 3) female heads of household, as represented by this sample of Rohingya women, are ill-equipped to live outside of the camp and its ration system at this time and they will require a

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<sup>3</sup> The *Mahjee* is a male refugee selected by the Camp-in-Charge to oversee security matters in a block of sheds. The *Mahjee* is the link between the population and the camp authorities, and ranks first in the hierarchical line of authority to whom the refugees may refer.

great deal of support to be able to sustain themselves and their families in a non-refugee setting.

Our most important result is that **FOOD INSECURITY IS SEVERE, PERVASIVE AND A PREOCCUPATION** for women heads of households in Kutupalong and Nayapara refugee camps. Even though the interviews were focused upon food insecurity and the daily food routine, and would thus be a focus of the interviews, we nevertheless found that not enough rations and eating less were a central preoccupation for these women.

### *Women's weights*

The body mass indices (BMI) for both groups of women (Appendix 4) showed the vast majority were clinically underweight at BMIs less than or equal to 18.5; on average, women in the Nayapara sample were more underweight than the Kutupalong sample—the numbers preclude any population estimates but they do confirm that the women who complained about eating less, not having enough to eat, did have their weights reflect underconsumption. Women were also consistent in how food distribution favoured their children in accordance with age and not by gender, and on how they always ate less, along with an older girl child, when there was insufficient food in the shed.

### *Food insecurity questionnaire results*

We began every interview with administration of the food insecurity questionnaire and we quickly learned that while it did elicit differences among women, results could not be compared with a non-refugee sample because women's replies were usually 'off the map', i.e., women more food insecure than the responses allowed, and their barter economy reduced the usefulness of some items, for example, questions about buying food. We also found that women could not describe the times when they had a fulfilling meal. They also had a poor sense of days of the month and numbers so that monthly replies may have been erroneous. In the standard food insecurity questionnaire, more fish eating was regarded as less food security whereas for the camps, particularly Kutupalong, fish consumption, both dried and fresh, represented a high level of food security. Severe food insecurity for the women was described as eating half, eating less, skipping a meal, not eating that day or for several days. Food insecure meals were in descending order from highest food security to lowest: rice with meat or fish; rice with vegetables; rice with leaves; rice with chili; rice with salt; and rice with water. Eating rice alone, (without chili, only salt) for as many as half the days of the month, was common.

**"I collect water from the pump and wash the rice in the house. I make a fire in a clay stove. Then I put the rice in a cooking pot with only water and salt. Sometimes I cook some pulse and sometimes vegetables, but rarely."** Refugee mother in Kutupalong Camp

**"I have to cook just a little bit, not eat too much, keep some for later and sometimes skip meal for myself in order to give enough for my children."** Refugee mother in Kutupalong Camp

**"The worst part of meal time: "What I have, I cook it nicely because I cannot hope that anybody will give me better or more food for my family."** Refugee mother in Nayapara Camp

Appendix 5 presents the collective food insecurity responses of the women. A few points are noteworthy. About half of women did not sell their rations because they did not have enough food. They were, therefore, constrained in how they could acquire other foods, described as 'kanchabajar', the perishable foods of fish, meat, fruit and vegetables. The vast majority of women borrowed food, (all

paid back or intended to pay back), did not report a fulfilling meal in the month, fed only their own family members, and had rice alone or with chili more than three times per week. There did not appear to be a difference between camps in terms of responses, including low levels of fish consumption, even in Nayapara which is proximal to the fishery. Taking all the responses, we would suggest that between 5-7 of 14 days are food compromised in these households.

**“I might have enough food for two meals, but never for three meals a day. My children always ask for more.”** Refugee mother in Nayapara Camp

**“I have enough food for maybe 1 week, but not for the other week before the rations distribution.”** Refugee mother in Kutupalong Camp

## **Interview data**

In the interviews, women reported a preoccupation with vegetables (leaves—a green leafy foodstuff--being the most basic food available in this food group), fish (with fresh fish deemed the best even if it was rotting, then dried fish), and meat although very few consumed meat. These food needs were huge and unmet most of the time. Meat was the highest representation of food security although it was elusive. Fruit consumption was elusive because of its expense; in some seasons melons were consumed but rarely. Women’s own perceptions of their household food security was defined by access to these other-than-ration foods.

**“My children would like meat or fish but I cannot provide them with these food items. I know that pregnant women and children need special food (meat, fish, it is better to give fruits and vegetables there is more vitamins!) but it is impossible for me to have those items, it breaks my heart.”** Pregnant refugee mother in Nayapara Camp

**“Eating fruits is luxury; there is no luxury in this camp.”** Refugee woman in Kutupalong Camp

It is important to note that women described many privations—food yes, but also cloth, household materials, and proper shed. When asked what they would do with a small amount of money, women without exception would buy food first, illustrating the primacy of food insecurity despite multiple deprivations.

**“With little money, I would buy some food first; my child has no clothes so I would buy clothes for them after.”** Refugee woman in Kutupalong camp

**“With little money, I would buy some good food like some meat, fish and vegetables and with any money left I would buy clothes for my little sisters.”** Female child head of household, Nayapara Camp

**“With little money, I would buy fish and meat, a sewing machine and books for my daughters that go to the informal school.”** Refugee mother in Nayapara Camp

Women reported few alternative food sources such as a garden or domestic animals. We did purposively select women with alternative food sources for interview and learned from them that they did have the skills to tend a garden and raise animals but they needed land, fencing, seeds and security to protect their animals from theft.

Figure 1

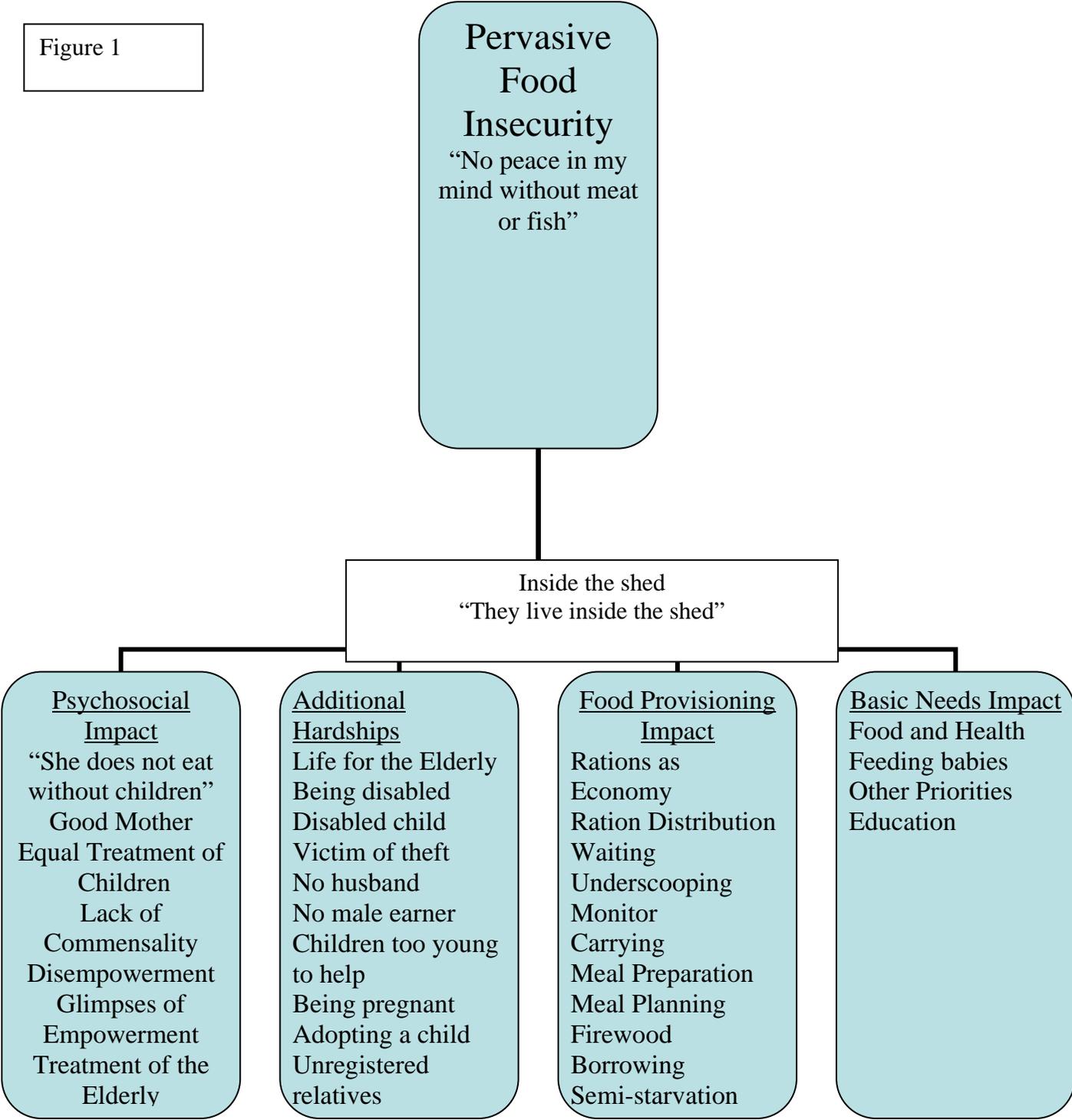
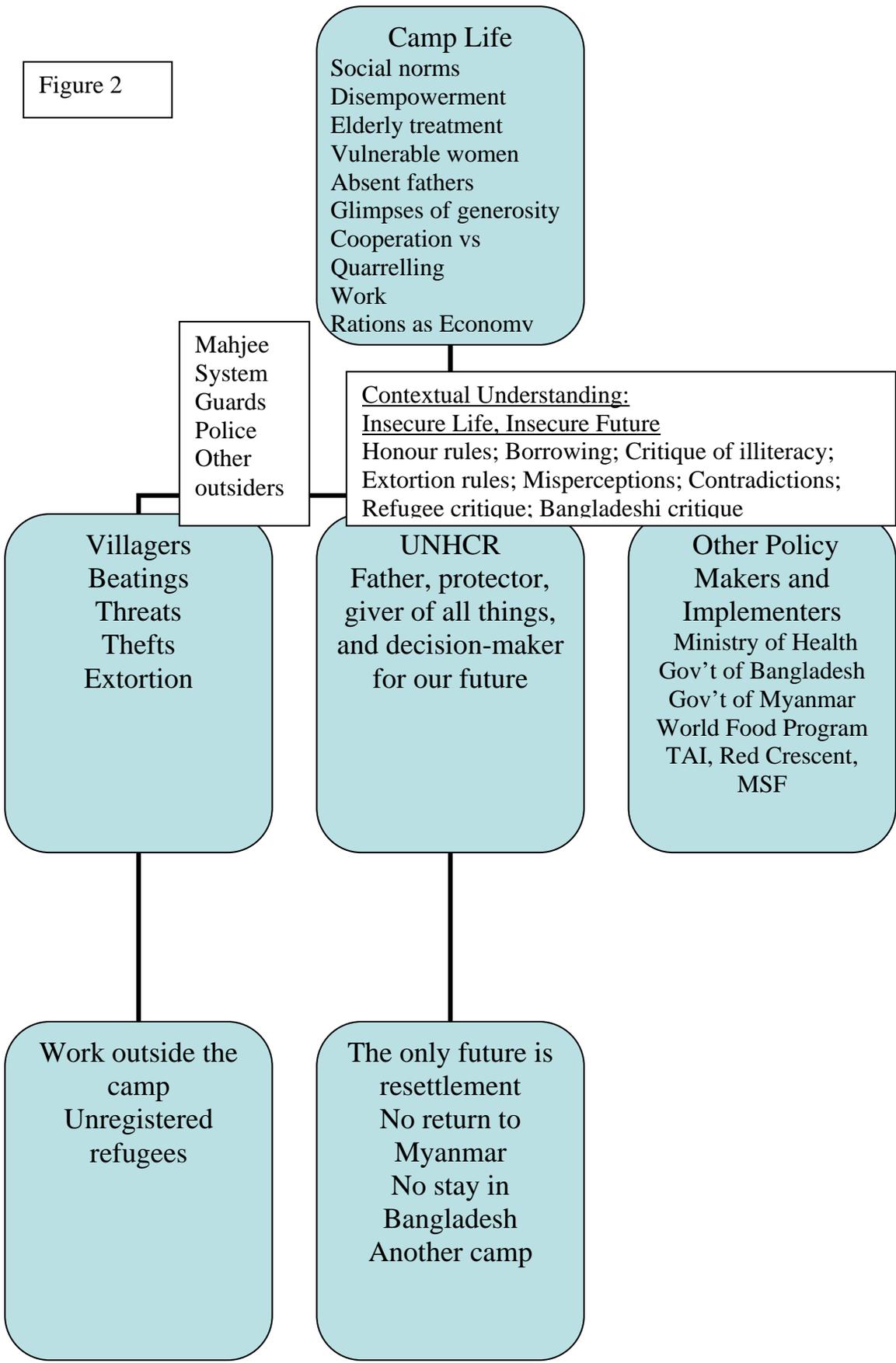


Figure 2



We had multiple evidences for lack of food. Women came to the interview without having eaten for a day or unable to eat for a forthcoming period of time until the next ration distribution. No woman said that there was any food in the shed more than two weeks—there were absolutely no food reserves reported. Women borrowed if they could pay back regularly in order to meet their family’s needs. There was limited food spoilage and few losses from rats and insects—the main problem was not enough food. While most women told us that the rainy season was the hardest time to feed their family (because of firewood problems, getting around, and cost of food), others said that it was Ramadan (hard to work and hard to borrow food), but then almost all concluded that **“Every day is the same, every month is the same, it is very hard. Same, we are suffering the same all the time.”** Various women refugees. The exception was that for the very old, without a blanket, winter was the hardest season.

Five of the women begged outside of the camp for food; except for the one unregistered refugee that we interviewed who had a lean-to in the camp, they were all older women. This is an illustration of extreme food insecurity.

The preoccupation with food was well-described by a Kutupalong participant who said: **“The only way and time she has peace in her mind is when she can eat meat and fish with her family!”** This was not meant to say that meat was required for food security but that one could never have a sense of well-being with persistent food needs. This comment also brought to our notice how complex the concept of ‘shanti’/ peace is to this refugee population. This is described in detail later on in the report.

### *Food Rations*

We began our interviews asking the women about getting rations for their family. Many of their concerns such as long waits and underscooping are well-known to the UNHCR and WFP. While we heard the problems that our briefings with these groups advised us we would encounter, we were struck by a more overriding theme, namely that: **FOOD RATIONS ARE AT THE CENTRE OF ALL THINGS; A SYMBOLIC AND LITERAL CURRENCY OF ALL ASPECTS OF DAILY LIVING**

Women recounted how everything costs rations and every cost has a ration equivalent. Rice is king in the ration world as it is most pervasively sold, borrowed, and used as payment. Women who were totally illiterate and mostly innumerate knew exactly the ration amounts and how much they had been cheated now and in the past. Perhaps because of the complicated family book system or perhaps because the ration asset must be known precisely, women participated in the re-weighing or re-scooping of all rations once they were received and back in the shed, hence they knew exactly how much they were short-changed.

When asked to speak to the future, almost every solution was ration-focused, whether it was increased rations or different rations. Feeding oneself or the community would be almost unthinkable without rations.

**“The only food I know well is rations, I don’t even know if it’s good or bad food for my family.”**  
Refugee woman in Kutupalong.

**“She does not know the price of rice in the market, she only knows ration price.”** Refugee woman in Nayapara

**“Rice is 10 taka in the camp; 17 taka outside for X k.g.”** Refugee woman in Nayapara

While the ration distribution situation is debatably better today than in the past, almost none of the women (the exception being a sole recipient) are receiving their full rations. Many women would claim that ‘the people who distribute the food keep some for themselves’. Every commodity is perceived to be underscooped.

**“For a two-person ration, I must have 12 k.g. of rice but I receive always 10 k.g., two k.g. less. They underscooped all the time.”** A refugee women with one child in Kutupalong Camp

**“There is no improvement in the distribution centre, it is worst than before; we get fewer rations.”** Refugee woman in Nayapara Camp

When weighing by the monitor occurs, they always get more but women claim that the only ‘proper time’, i.e., when the correct rations are given, is when visitors and outside persons are there. There are negative repercussions if a woman asks for the monitor to weigh.

**“The monitor does not weigh. If you ask, he tells you to go.”** Refugee woman in Kutupalong

**“If they ask to [the monitor]...when they did, first time upset so that [grab] by the neck and then send them to go outside.”** Refugee mother in Nayapara Camp

While the waiting for rations is inevitable, it may not have to be so lengthy and it is a genuine cause of suffering. The wait for those in Kutupalong is four to five hours; it can be as little as two hours in Nayapara but usually spans three to five hours. Improvements in waiting time would be very much appreciated by the refugees.

**“We are suffering waiting for the rations.”** Kutupalong woman refugee

**“I am too old to push so am the last to get rations.”** Elderly Kutupalong refugee woman

**“The waiting time, it is very hard for us.”** Nayapara woman refugee

Women with more than a small number of family members are unable to carry rations back to their sheds and are thus required to pay carriers who are men in the camp. No carrying is done for free, even by relatives not in the shed, and the usual payment is 500 g of rice in Kutupalong and 250 g of rice in Nayapara. Women were asked if a wagon or other carrying device could help them get rations back to the shed and while, the ‘hilly way’ could makes a wagon unpractical for some, it was thought a good idea by others. See later in the recommendations how this might be a cooperation-building tool at least for those who can take flat ground to their shed.

The female heads of household refugees are almost totally dependent on the bi-weekly distribution of food.

**“Inside or outside the camp is both hard to provide food for my family (no work for us anywhere, no factory, doesn’t know what outside is like) but at least inside we have the rations. There is nothing to do; we depend on the rations to survive.”** Refugee mother in Nayapara Camp

The food basket consists of rice, pulses, oil, sugar, salt and blended food. Although this food basket may contain adequate protein and energy nutrients, it lacks in mineral and vitamins nutrients and does not

make a recipe. In order to add diversity and palatability to their diets, the women will sell or trade their ration items (mostly rice) for other food items, most commonly fish (a few women would even buy rotten fish for the cheapest price) and vegetables, the cheapest of which is leaves.

**“My daughter cries a lot and asks for other food, it breaks my heart of mother because I cannot provide it to her.”** Refugee mother in Nayapara Camp

**“We received the same food for the past 16 years, how a human being can survive on that?!”**  
Refugee mother in Nayapara Camp

**“I know that rotten fish can be harmful for my family, but it is better than only rice with chilli or pulses.”** Refugee mother in Nayapara Camp

Rations constitute the central economy inside the camp. For many of these women, food is the only source of income, as employment, other than short-term volunteer work with rice payment, is unavailable in the camp and is officially prohibited outside of the camp. Informal employment outside of the camp is only a possibility for older women. It is not culturally accepted and considered too dangerous for younger women living alone to go outside the camps. In the absence of cash, rice must be bartered or sold to obtain vegetables, fish, clothes, or other items that are not included in the ration package. Therefore, selling or trading food rations also results in a subsequent shortage of food.

**“I don’t sell my rations. Instead, I exchange them in order to buy other food (in the village market).”** Refugee woman in Nayapara Camp

**“I don’t go outside the camp to exchange my rations. I wait for the merchant to come inside to do the exchange.”** Nayapara refugee mother

Borrowing, lending, trading, selling and buying food are common coping mechanisms among these women to compensate for the food deficit. These coping strategies tend to create a situation of ‘food debt’. To pay back the loan of one, a refugee borrows from another, or immediately apports out that amount from the next distribution. This in turn can generate an endless vicious cycle.

**“I have to borrow food in order to sell it and use the money to buy other types of food for my children.”** Refugee mother in Kutupalong Camp

The food provisioning concept encompasses not only the acquisition of food but its preparation and distribution among family members. Meal planning is integral to meal preparation and in most settings, provides an opportunity to observe household management skills. Unfortunately, in the case of Rohingya women heads of households, meal planning is only rationing. Meal planning was limited to managing the quantity of rations remaining and the availability of other foods and their planning is almost exclusively until the next ration day. Other foods are stretched to last as long as possible.

Meal preparation involves the use of precious firewood in the inefficient clay stoves. Women do use compressed rice husks that they call “CRH” for cooking material but it is not enough, they all must use firewood. Women state that the worst part of preparing meals is firewood; sometimes you cannot even buy; it is also expensive. In Kutupalong, refugees cannot go to collect firewood because it is for the villagers. Forestry officials and wild elephants are also problems for firewood collection. The situation is much better in Nayapara than in Kutupalong.

One of our themes was ‘*semi-starvation*’. This is perhaps unnecessarily provocative and it was not the norm but we do not know what else to call the following situations:

- A young mother was interviewed on a Sunday. She had not eaten that day and said she had no food in the house at all. She had borrowed to get food for her child but none for herself and she would eat on Tuesday when she next got rations
- There was persistent semi-starvation exhibited by the unregistered refugee woman who survived on begging and whose legs would be too sore to beg (likely due to malnutrition) on occasion
- A woman who had not eaten for two days was too weak to start the interview. She was half-crazed with hunger; when given a granola bar, she devoured it, and then finally recovered—she was a registered refugee. She understood the problems of overfeeding after semi-starvation and indicated that she could not eat another granola bar until later because she was used to not eating and it would be a problem.

There seemed to fewer problems of abject hunger in Nayapara although one woman ate only once a day and was very food insecure—she was registered.

*Summary: Food insecurity in the face of rations*

The World Food Programme provides 2160 calories per day per person in the family book. Statistically and from a base nutritional survival point of view, this should be sufficient to sustain a person. Why then are the refugees, particularly the female heads of household we spoke to, severely food insecure, when all but one was registered and most had all of their family members in the family book? There are many reasons for this. One is that identified in the literature—that acute emergency rations in the amounts and types of food provided to the Rohingya refugees, do not protect against malnutrition in a protracted refugee situation in terms of micronutrients and possibly protein-energy needs (Banjong, 2003). The anemia survey of children under five years conducted in the camps found 65% anemia rate (UNHCR & INRAN, 2006). This is identical to the results found by others in the Thai camps (Kemmer, 2003). It is unfortunate that the anemia rates were not done for non-pregnant women in the camps.

The second factor is that almost none of the women are receiving their full rations; they are underscoped, by their estimate about 20% [our conversion from 12 to 10 Kg rice for example] for the items that are not pre-packaged.

The third factor is that the ration must be ‘converted’ into other food for the family in order to supplement the diet. That conversion includes exchange or selling for essential food items such as kanchabajar and foods palatable to babies who cannot eat the ration foods. The exchange leads to a deficit in the staple of rice which leads to borrowing and a cycle of food debt. As well, other essential items, that are ostensibly provided by the UNHCR or its collaborating agencies, are sometimes also required, and the primary economic resource that the families has is rations. Other essential needs that draw upon rations includes paying a carrier to get the rations to the shed, paying for assistance such as roof repair or carrying water (for elderly women), or other assistance which is rarely given without a fee.

The fourth factor that erodes the rations available is the requirement to feed an unregistered direct family member. That includes a husband who has been struck from the book, a child borne to a registered refugee mother but after the father has been struck from the book, and an adopted child who is unregistered. This does not include feeding unregistered refugees that are not living in the shed as a

family member—a circumstance that we did not encounter, nor the feeding of other unregistered refugees, except for one instance where a woman said that she gave food to unregistered if she had enough and another who said that if her unregistered child cried a lot in the camp, the neighbour would give food to make the child stop crying. Thus, there was little evidence that the rations were trying to be stretched to non-registered recipients as an explanation of food insecurity; indeed, the rations were insufficient when received by those to whom they were intended.

### *Psychosocial Impacts*

Our second major findings is that **CHRONIC FOOD INSECURITY HAS HAD AN ADVERSE PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT** on these families, and from what we learned from them, chronic food insecurity has also contributed to adverse social impacts within the camps. Figures 1 of the conceptual framework list the impacts that we identified at the household level (psychosocial, basic needs, food-related, additional hardships). The umbrella theme for these impacts we have chosen is, “**They live inside the shed.**” This quote came not from our respondents but from one of the translators who became frustrated after every woman seemed to answer questions about what needed to be done with the camps, with the refugees, in the future, with replies related to what her own needs were in the shed. She commented “they live inside the shed” to indicate that women’s vantage point did not venture beyond their sheds, nor could they see any needs or solutions beyond their sheds. The quote seemed apt in both a literal and figurative sense, and while orthodox Muslim women may generally live inside their ‘sheds’, the Rohingya refugee women seemed profoundly inward-looking and as will be described later, did not really have ideas for the future nor specific recommendations on what could be done to improve their situations.

A noteworthy psychosocial impact was maternal self-sacrifice that we characterized as “**She does not eat without children.**” We learned this lesson after our first pilot interview with a lone mother of five who was really struggling to feed herself and her children. We handed her a biscuit from the airplane at the end of the interview and coaxed her to eat it. She refused. We said it was for her and she should eat it now. Her answer was “She does not eat without children” and we observed this again and again during the interviews.

- She refused tea because her children are starving alone in her shed. She would feel guilty to eat without them. (Field note, Nayapara)

The disempowerment theme was large as a psychosocial impact. Women lacked any sense of individuality—they did not think of themselves as being unique or special in any way. They lacked the capacity to imagine or to dream except for some hopes for their children and a better life. They could not offer novel suggestions even when they struggled to think about questions that sought their ideas. They had no sense of looking into the future—they could not foresee anything in the future but the next few days, the next ration distribution, and the seasons to come when it would be easier or harder to feed their families. The answers they had to improve their state were rations, more rations, better rations, different rations, specific rations. When they did not answer rations, they presented vague notions of ‘help’ and vague notions of earning money. There was never an inkling that refugees would work together and help each other. “**Whatever Madame decides to do will help**” was said like a mantra of acceptance of total lack of control over their lives and situation; also stated as “**Madame knows**”, “**UNHCR knows**”.

Women did offer some insight into why they did not have suggestions on what should be done:

**“I do not know, I am illiterate”** Refugee woman in Nayapara

**“We cannot expect anything better, it won’t happen anyway. We have to be happy with what we have because we will have nothing more!”** Refugee woman in Nayapara Camp

A woman in the focus group explained that if we thought about our life and our future, we would only cry.

Figure 2 presents a framework for how we perceive chronic food insecurity in the camps adversely impacting the wider camp life. Foremost among our findings is that there is little mutual aid in the camps. The elderly are not assisted; they are exploited in fact. Most assistance is compensated by ration or money. While women would say that they had friends and that they were friends with other women in circumstances similar to theirs, there was no mutual aid. **“We only share our sorrows”** one refugee woman said during the focus group.

We were also able to document problems that are well-known to the UNHCR and other agencies working in the camps. So we will not elaborate here except to say that the experience of violence and coercion over the years has inevitably fostered a climate of fear and distress among this group of refugees. This has no doubt also contributed to a distrustful climate and lack of mutual aid in the camps.

**“I have problems with young villagers; they would steal my money when I go outside the camp. Every time that I go outside to work, I have to give money to the guards in order to come back in, otherwise I will have to sleep outside the camp.”** Refugee woman who practices begging to earn money, in Nayapara Camp

**“I have no money to buy food for my children and medicine for my sick daughter. I have been suffering a lot since my husband passed away. There is no one to protect me and my family against the Mahjees and the villagers.”** Refugee mother in Kutupalong Camp.

Perhaps because people have so little, assistance is not offered to those in great need. This is true for both registered and unregistered refugees.

#### Unregistered refugee interview

Interviewer: She never ever received help from any refugee inside the camp?

Translator: No.

Int: Can she think about why they refuse to help her?

Tr: She mention that she has no family book that why she is not receiving ration. The main reason is because she is not receiving ration. If she receive ration that time the other refugee will give some help.

Int: OK, because she will be able to pay back?

Tr: Yes that why.

#### Child Female Head of Household Interview

Int: Does sometime she receive food that she doesn’t borrow, buy or doesn’t get from the ration? Food, money or materials?

Tr: No.

Int: She has no relatives outside the camp?

Tr: No. She has a stepbrother but he never help. Outside the camp, he stays outside the camp and he never help.

Tr: She tell that the last 16 years, now she is 20 years, so for the last 16 years she never have peace in this camp so it would be better if they can go anywhere. If anyone help them for resettlement to another country. Because it is impossible, anything is impossible to do. One of her sister got beaten by a Mahjee's for no good reason.

Tr: She is telling that if you give us food we can eat easily but it is not good for us, we cannot live peacefully in this camp in this land.

Int: So even if we provide food....

Tr: It is not good for them because they cannot live freely or they cannot live without any problems from these kind of people that are taking care of them. Mahjees and the police are problem people they do bad things all the time with them.

This interview excerpt also illustrates well one of our conceptual findings, namely that **PEACE (SHANTI) IS THE UNIVERSAL GOAL**. *Shanti* embodies a myriad of concepts from safety to basic needs including food and material security, health, higher education and work. It relates not only to the absence of oppression and it is not about place or what you do, it is a full expression of what it is to be a human being.

**“I want ‘SHANTI’, better security, better education for me and my family instead of food security. I am tired of suffering.”** Refugee mother in Kutupalong Camp

**“Even if you give me more food it won't be good enough because we cannot live peacefully because of the Mahjee system, the Government of Myanmar and Bangladesh.”** Refugee mother in Nayapara Camp

**”The only way and time I have peace in my mind is when I can eat meat and fish with my family!”** Refugee mother in Kutupalong Camp

**“All I am asking is peace in Myanmar and in Bangladesh.”** Elderly woman in Kutupalong Camp

### *The Future*

As mentioned, the future is a vague conception and reality in the minds of these women. They harbour hopes for ‘shanti’, a peaceful future for their family. Where that will be is elusive. It does not seem to be in the vicinity outside of the camps.

**“I am not feeling safe anywhere even if I get land outside the camp I would have to sell it or give it to the police or the villagers.”** Refugee woman in Nayapara Camp.

**“It would be easier outside the camp but I am too afraid of the villagers taking everything from me.”** Refugee mother in Nayapara Camp.

**“I won't live outside the camp, I am not Bangladeshi so I won't have any land in the area and the villagers don't like us.”** Elderly refugee woman in Kutupalong Camp.

**“Living outside the camp; it would be very hard, there is no rations, nobody that I know and no husband to work.”** Refugee woman in Nayapara Camp

Refugees were adamant that they will not return to Myanmar and are seeking country resettlement. Women offered some vague ideas about how they could earn a living working outside of the camp.

Potential occupations included sewing, being a domestic servant, having a grocery shop, tea shop, selling vegetables, and farming. They put a great store on their children becoming educated so that they would be able to support themselves.

## Recommendations<sup>4</sup>

It is essential that food security be increased through more food and more diverse foods in order to reduce individual, shed, and community food insecurity stress and improve health. Our key recommendation is to **alleviate the severe food insecurity** of the Rohingya female heads of households and their families and to do so in a way that could achieve greater impacts towards self-sufficiency. Rather than perpetuating the ration-as-economy system that exists in the camps or exacerbating tensions that the rations have contributed to for refugee-villager/other relationship, we suggest that additional food should be delivered in a way that could stimulate mutual aid, agricultural skill-building, community cooperation, and economic expansion.

Without substantial transition support, female heads of households will not be able to survive outside of the camps and will need special attention in any plans for camp closure. There are huge implications for **women's basic education and training** if they are to survive outside of the ration system. Social development opportunities should now be identified for them within the camp that would translate outside of the camp. We also strongly recommend that particular attention be given now to increasing the basic level of literacy and marketable skills of female heads of households. One model that should be considered for these women, even while they reside within the camps, is the BRAC integrated development model, particularly that which is showing early success among the ultra-poor. The BRAC model groups women in clusters of mutual interest and circumstance and without creating enclaves within the camps, it might succeed in building trust and mutual cooperation which appear to be lacking.

The most challenging task ahead is **social development**, including social capital formation. There are strong positive values upon which to build, and glimpses of generosity outside of the household. Cultural and personal (non-refugee) identity seems to be lacking. Social development will require the building of community and sub-community with its expectations for cooperation and mutual aid. Both large and small social development opportunities should be identified within the camps, and consideration of NGOs being invited to deliver them within the camps.

A dialogue and reflective process needs to commence to **engage the population in its future**. New initiatives such as camp development should be framed as future-oriented for a time when refugees will live outside of the camp, rather than only current problem-oriented initiatives for improvements to daily life. Strategies that progressively move refugee orientation from shed to block and then to village might shift the current 'bird cage' thinking.

We found that the UNHCR is highly trusted and deeply respected by the refugees—this can be no mean feat given the 16 years of oversight that the UNHCR has provided to the refugees. This privileged position can be an invaluable asset in truly mobilizing not only diplomatic missions who have shown an interest in finding a durable solution for the Rohingya, but also for the refugees themselves, who deserve the fundamental human rights that come from being free-living persons.

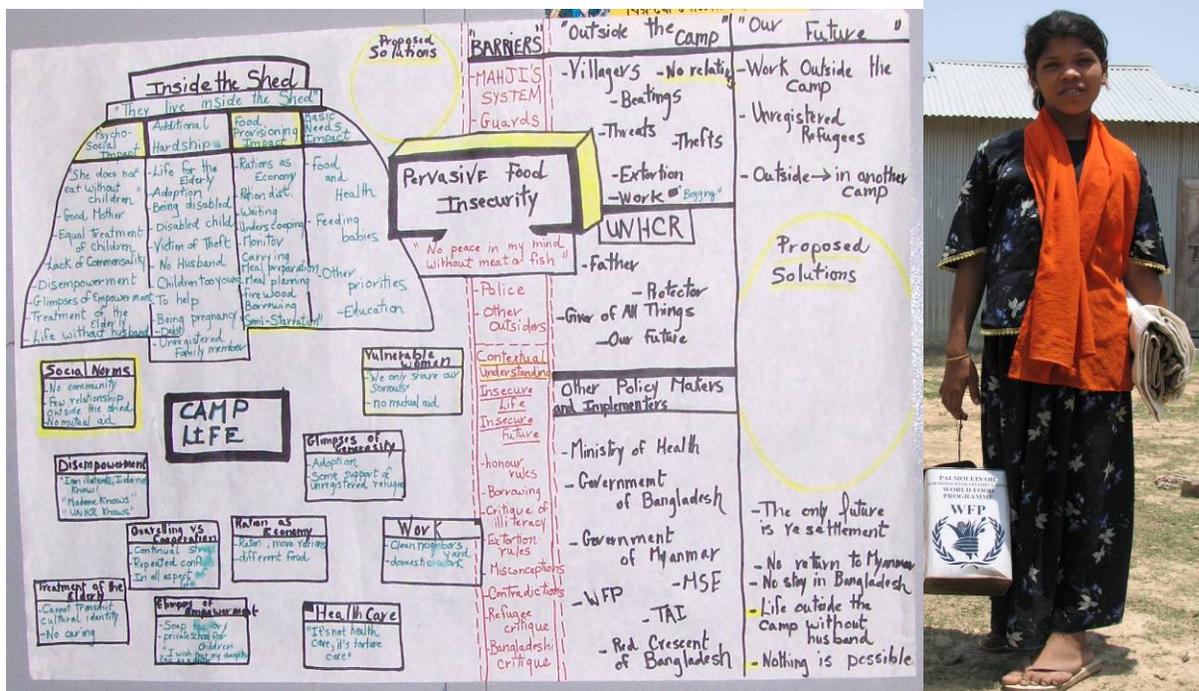
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<sup>4</sup> Note that additional, specific recommendations that arose in the course of interviews or after conferring on some peripheral findings are presented in Appendix 7.

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# Appendices



## Appendix 1-Interview Process

### INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCHER INTERVIEWER AND TRANSLATOR:

Dr. Lynn McIntyre, medical doctor and researcher from the University of Calgary in Alberta, western part of Canada

Anne-Marie Magny Dusablon, nurse researcher- student also from the University of Calgary

- translator introduces herself

### CONSENT PROCESS

Before we begin, I would like to explain what we would like to do in this interview and why we are doing the study so that you can decide if you would like to participate.

You do not need to participate in this interview, and if you do agree to participate, you do not need to answer all the questions. We can stop at any time.

The purpose of the interview is:

- To study the daily food routine in Rohingya refugee families with female heads of households

We hope that the information that we receive will be helpful to UNHCR, WFP, the Government of Bangladesh, TAI and others groups who work in the camps to improve the food situation.

We also hope it will help support a long term durable solution for the refugees.

We cannot make any promises but will do our best to use this information for improvements in the lives of refugee female heads of households and other families.

This interview has nothing to do with resettlement.

### WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO DO

We are planning to interview 15 Rohingya women in each of Kutupalong and Nayapara camps.

The interview is private—the guard will make sure that no one can listen to what is said.

The information is confidential—no one except for the researchers and translators will know what is said.

When we write our report, there will be no information presented that could identify who said specific information in the report.

The interview could take as long as one hour (maybe more) because we are asking for many small details.

We would like to record the information on a machine so that we can listen carefully to what is said later.

There is also a short questionnaire on feeding the family that takes about 5 minutes.

We will invite all the women who participated to come to hear a summary in private about what they said, and at that time we would also like to weigh the woman and measure her height. This will help us know her nutrition state.

#### RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might be tired from the interview. You might feel upset about talking about your problems.

You might also feel satisfied to help us in finding out important information that could help you and other women in your situation in the future.

As mentioned, you do not have to participate. The interview is voluntary.

#### DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

Are you willing to participate?

If yes, THANK YOU THEN LET US BEGIN.

#### FIRST WE HAVE ONLY A FEW SHORT QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU

##### Information about the woman

Age of mother [<20, 20-29, 30+ years],

Number of children [<2, 2-5, 6+],

Length of time living alone with children [<2, 2-5, 5+ years],

Education of mother [none, up to 4 years, 5+ years]

How she came to be a female head of household? [Husband died, abandoned wife, husband left camp, other \_\_\_\_\_]

#### NEXT WE WILL ASK YOU SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT FEEDING THE FAMILY

Administration of food insecurity module

LATER

Height and weight measurement:

## APPENDIX 2: Interview Guide- April 12, 2007 (Adapted Version)

### Questionnaire:

I want to learn about your daily food routine.

### Part 1: Food acquisition

I am going to start by asking about the food that you get to feed your family.

### Rations: TELL ME ABOUT GETTING RATIONS FOR YOUR FAMILY

Do you personally go to pick up rations?

Who else does?

How long does it take?

Do you have trouble getting the rations back to the shed?

DO YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS ABOUT THE RATION DISTRIBUTION?

Have you ever asked the monitor to weigh your rations?

Over the last 30 days, when you got two rations, did you get the right amount?

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS HAVE YOU NOTICED ABOUT RATION DISTRIBUTION OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS?

CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU GOT RATIONS AND IT WAS A VERY BAD EXPERIENCE

CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU GOT RATIONS AND IT WAS BETTER (EASIER) THAN USUAL

### Other food sources:

WHERE ELSE, OTHER THAN RATIONS, DO YOU GET FOOD?

- Do you go outside of the camp to buy food?
- Do you buy from the outside villagers who come in to sell food?
- What foods did you buy in the last 30 d?
- Did you borrow food? From whom? How much?
- 
- Any garden food?
- Any eggs from chicks?
- Any domestic animals?
  
- Is there any other food that you get for your family that you do not buy or borrow or get from rations?

CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES GETTING FOOD THIS WAY?

- How do you get money to buy food?
- Do you get money, food or cooking materials from someone else? Can you count on this help on a regular basis?
- Do you buy your food from usually the same vendors?

DO YOU USE PART OF YOUR RATION TO GET OTHER FOOD?

- Tell me about that.

WHAT WOULD MAKE IT EASIER TO GET OTHER FOOD THAN WHAT IS IN RATIONS?

Of these things, what would be the most important thing to do to make it easier to get other food than rations?

If the woman has a garden:

- How big is the garden?
- What do you grow?
- How long have you had the garden?
- How did you learn what to do?
- Any problems with the garden?
- Do you sell what is grown or eat it in the family?
- Are you able to store any foods for later eating?
- What would help you the most with your garden?

If the woman has chickens?

- How many?
- How many eggs?
- Do you sell eggs or eat in the family?
- How did you learn to raise chickens?
- Any problems raising chickens?
- What would help you the most with your chickens?

If the woman has goats or other animals?

- How many?
- Used for milk?
- Used for meats?
- Do you sell the milk or meat or eat in the family?
- How did you learn to raise these animals?
- Any problems raising these animals?
- What would help you the most with your animals?

## Part 2: Meals

Now I would like to ask about meals that you give your family.

### Meal preparation –

DESCRIBE A USUAL DAY IN TERMS OF PREPARING YOUR MEALS. I am interested in all of the steps from getting water to cooking?

Who does most of the cooking at your shed?

How did you learn how to make meals?

Do you think you cook better, the same, or worse than most women in the camp. Why do you say that?

WHAT ARE THE MAIN PROBLEMS YOU HAVE IN PREPARING MEALS?

WHAT WOULD HELP YOU THE MOST IN BEING ABLE TO PREPARE MEALS?

### Eating/ Feeding –

IF I CAME TO YOUR SHED WHEN YOU AND THE FAMILY WERE EATING, WHAT WOULD I SEE?

Are you eating with other members of the family?

Are there other people there other than your family who are sharing a meal with you?

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW YOU DIVIDE UP THE FOOD AMONG DIFFERENT FAMILY MEMBERS?

WHAT IS THE WORST PART ABOUT MEAL TIMES?

WHAT IS THE BEST PART ABOUT MEAL TIMES?

HOW WOULD MEALS CHANGE IF HAD MORE MONEY TO SPEND ON FOOD?

Would your children eat more? Differently?

Would you eat more? Differently?

### Planning meals –

- How do you decide what you are going to feed your family today?

- Do you know what you will feed your family seven days from now?

WHEN THERE IS LESS FOOD IN THE SHED, HOW DO YOU PLAN MEALS?

- How do you decide if you will only have one or two meals in a day?

- How do you decide if you will eat less than your children?

DOES ANYONE IN YOUR FAMILY, INCLUDING YOURSELF, HAVE ANY HEALTH CONCERNS THAT YOU HAVE TO THINK ABOUT WHEN YOU ARE PLANNING MEALS?

- What health concerns are you thinking about? Affecting whom?
- What foods would be needed because of health concerns?

DO YOU EVER HAVE MEALS FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS SUCH AS HOLY DAYS? HOW DO YOU PLAN FOR MEALS FOR THOSE DAYS?

- Are you able to store food for use past the two weeks before rations?

WHAT WOULD HELP YOU TO BETTER PLAN AHEAD THE MEALS YOU ARE GOING TO GIVE TO YOUR FAMILY?

### Part 3: Coping strategies and Decision Making

Now I want to ask you general questions about how you manage food for your family.

#### GENERAL FOOD MANAGEMENT

Is there a time of the year when it is harder to feed your family? Why?

Is there a time of the year when it is easiest to feed your family? Why?

Does your food become rotten before you can eat it? Why?

Do you have to worry about your food being stolen?

Do you worry animals or insects eating the food?

#### DIET QUALITY and QUANTITY

Do you think the food you have for you and your family is good for your health?

What are the foods to eat that you think are good for you and your family's health?

What foods do you think are not so good for you and your family's health?

In general do you think you have enough food for you and for your family to prevent sickness?

#### FOOD WITHIN HOUSEHOLD CONCERNS

We have been talking only about food but if you had a little money, would you first buy food or something else? What?

We are talking only to female head of households like you? Do you think it would be harder or easier to feed your family if you had a husband in the family?

Do you think that the ration that would come from having a new baby would make it easier or harder to feed your family?

#### EXTREME COPING

Has there been a time when you had no food or almost no food for you or your family? How did you manage then?

When you have very little food now, how do you manage to be sure your family has enough to eat?

WE ARE NOW IN THE LAST PART OF THE INTERVIEW

Part 4: Future-oriented strategies:

WHAT DO YOU THINK COULD BE DONE TO HELP FAMILIES SUCH AS YOURS PROVIDE FOOD FOR THEIR FAMILIES?

What rules need to change?

What else needs to be done?

What do you think that the people in this camp could do to feed themselves?

If you were living outside of the camp today, do you think it would be easier or harder to feed your family? What do you think would be different?

DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER CONCERNS ABOUT FEEDING YOURSELF OR YOUR FAMILY THAT WE HAVE NOT ASKED ABOUT?

DO YOU HAVE ANY FINAL IDEAS ABOUT HOW THE FOOD SITUATION IN THE CAMP COULD BE IMPROVED?

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR TIME. WE WOULD LIKE TO BRING YOU BACK NEXT WEEK TO HEAR A SUMMARY OF WHAT ALL OF THE WOMEN HAVE TOLD US ABOUT GETTING FOOD FOR THEIR FAMILIES.

## **APPENDIX 3: FOOD INSECURITY MODULE**

(from Frongillo, Chowdhury, Ekstrom, & Naved, 2003)

Q-1. During the last 30 d, at what interval has your household purchased rice?

1. Did not buy
2. 1–3 times the last 30 d
3. Once in 7 d
4. 2–3 times in 7 d
5. At least 4–5 times in 7 d

Q-2. During the last 30 d, at what interval has your household purchased “kanchabajar”? (Note: “kanchabajar” refers to shopping of perishable food items such as vegetables, fish and meat.)

1. Did not buy
2. 1–3 times the last 30 d
3. Once in 7 d
4. 2–3 times in 7 d
5. At least 4–5 times in 7 d

Q-3. During the last 30 d, how many times a day did cooking usually take place in your household?

1. Never
2. Once a day
3. Twice a day
4. Three times a day
5. Four times or more

Q-4. During the last 30 d, has your household helped others with cash or food items (like rice) for enabling them to make a meal? (If the woman is rich, tell her that we need to ask this question of everybody, so she does not mind.)

1. No
2. Yes

Q-5. During the last 30 d, how often has your household had to borrow from others to make a meal?

1. Never
2. 1–3 times in the last 30 d
3. Once in 7 d
4. 2–3 times in 7 d
5. At least 4–5 times in 7 d

Q-6. Have you paid back or do you think you can pay back?

1. No
2. Yes

Q-7. During the last 30 d, how many times on average have you had a fulfilling meal in a day when you did not lack appetite?

1. One time
2. Two times
3. Three times
4. Four times

Q-8. During the last 30 d, how often has it happened that you could NOT eat as many fulfilling meals as you would like to have done when you did not lack appetite?

1. Never
2. 1–3 times the last 30 d
3. Once in 7 d
4. 2–3 times in 7 d
5. At least 4–5 times in 7 d

Q-9. For the last 30 d, did you usually have snacks in between meals when you did not lack appetite?

1. No
2. Three times or more
3. Once or twice

Q-10. For the last 30 d, how often did you have fish when you did not lack appetite? (If the woman is rich, tell her that we need to ask this question of everybody, so she does not mind.)

1. Not once
2. 1–3 times the last 30 d
3. Once in 7 d
4. 2–3 times in 7 d
5. At least 4–5 times in 7 d

Q-11. During the last 30 d, how often have you had to eat rice with just chili and salt even if you did not lack appetite?

1. Did not have to
2. 1–3 times the last 30 d
3. Once in 7 d
4. 2–3 times in 7 d
5. At least 4–5 times in 7 d

## Appendix 4

### Body Mass Indices of Participants

<b><u>Kutupalong Camp</u></b> (N=15)					
Subject	Weight (kg)	Height (m)	Age*	BMI	Special characteristics
KK	52	1.47	20	24.1	Pregnant (~7 months)  Elderly woman Unregistered refugee Did not attend focus group  Elderly woman Did not attend focus group
SK	55	1.50	38	<b>24.4</b>	
AB	56	1.53	38	23.9	
RK	42	1.47	30	19.4	
SK	32	1.36	76	<b>17.3</b>	
FK	40	1.43	25	19.6	
RB					
H	40	1.53	27	<b>17.1</b>	
Z	57	1.55	40	23.7	
V	36	1.47		<b>16.7</b>	
L					
LI	50	1.54	20	21.1	
H	59	1.53	21	25.2	
FaK					
S	50	1.63	35	<b>18.8</b>	
<b>Averages</b>	47.4	1.50	33.6	<b><u>20.9</u></b>	
<b><u>Nayapara Camp</u></b> (N=16)					
Subject	Weight (kg)	Height (m)	Age*	BMI	Special characteristics
RB	43	1.50	25	19.1	Elderly woman
SN	37	1.51	25	<b>16.2</b>	
LB	48	1.40	50	24.5	
AN	35	1.49	38	<b>15.8</b>	
NK	34	1.47	32	<b>15.7</b>	
AK	39	1.52	35	<b>16.9</b>	
MK	35	1.55	20	<b>14.6</b>	
JB	58	1.56	20	23.8	

MB	42	1.51	40	<b>18.4</b>	Elderly woman
D	36	1.47	28	<b>16.7</b>	
R	38	1.51	20	<b>16.7</b>	
AB	41	1.48	21	<b>18.7</b>	
K	54	1.50	40	24.0	
MK	30	1.48	30	<b>13.7</b>	
Ro	42	1.49	50	<b>18.9</b>	
Li	46	1.48	32	21.0	
<b>Averages</b>	41.1	1.50	31.6	<b><u>18.4</u></b>	
<b>Weighted averages of both camps</b>	43.8	1.5	31.3	<b><u>19.5</u></b>	

\* ages may not be accurate

### Canadian Guidelines for Body Weight Classification for Adults

- < 18.5 Underweight (increased risk)
- 18.5 - 24.9 Normal weight (least risk)
- 25.0 - 29.9 Overweight (increased risk)
- 30 and over Obese (increased risk)

## APPENDIX 5: COLLECTIVE FOOD INSECURITY MODULE RESPONSES

Q		N=31	Did not buy	1-3 times the last 30days	Once in 7 days	2-3 times in 7 days	At least 4-5/7 days	More	
1	During the last month, at what interval has your household purchased rice?	Kutupalong Camp	5	8			1		
		Nayapara Camp	10	6					
		<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>			<b>1</b>		
2	During the last 30 days, at what interval has your household purchased 'Kanchabajar' (perishable food items such as vegetables, fish and meat.)	Kutupalong Camp	3	5			1	6	
		Nayapara Camp	2	11			1	2	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>16</b>			<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	
3	During the last 30 days, how many times a day did cooking usually take place in your household?		Never	Once a day	Twice a day	Three times a day	Four times a day	More	
		Kutupalong Camp			3	10	2		
		Nayapara Camp			2	13	1		
		<b>Total</b>			<b>5</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>3</b>		
4	During the last 30 days, has your household helped others with cash or food items (like rice) for enabling them to make a meal?		No	Yes					
		Kutupalong Camp	13	2					
		Nayapara Camp	16						
		<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>2</b>					
5	During the last 30 days, how often has your household had to borrow from others to make a meal?		Never	1-3 times the last 30days	Once in 7 days	2-3 times in 7 days	At least 4-5 times in 7 days	More	
		Kutupalong Camp	2	9			2	2	
		Nayapara Camp	1	6	1		4	4	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	

			No	Yes			
6	Have you paid back or do you think you can pay back?	Kutupalong Camp	1	14			
		Nayapara Camp	4	12			
		<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>26</b>			
			None or one time	Two times	Three times	Four times	More
7	During the last 30 days, how many times on average have you had a fulfilling meal in a day when you did not lack appetite?	Kutupalong Camp	14	1			
		Nayapara Camp	14	1	1		
		<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>		
			Never	1-3 times the last 30days	Once in 7 days	2-3 times in 7 days	At least 4-5 times in 7 days
8	During the last 30 days, how often has it happened that you could NOT eat as many fulfilling meals as you would like to have done when you did not lack appetite?	Kutupalong Camp					4
		Nayapara Camp		2		1	1
		<b>Total</b>		<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>
			No	Three times or more	Once or twice		More
9	For the last 30 days, did you usually have snacks in between meals when you did not lack appetite?	Kutupalong Camp	11		4		
		Nayapara Camp	13	1	2		
		<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>		
			Not once	1-3 times the last 30days	Once in 7 days	2-3 times in 7 days	At least 4-5 times in 7 days
10	For the last 30 days, how often did you have fish when you did not lack appetite?	Kutupalong Camp	6	6			3
		Nayapara Camp	6	6			2
		<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>			<b>5</b>
							<b>2</b>

		Did not have	1-3 times the last 30days	Once in 7 days	2-3 times in 7 days	2-3 times in 7 days	More
11	During the last 30 days, how often have you had to eat rice with just chili and salt even if you did not lack appetite?						
	Kutupalong Camp		2	1			12
	Nayapara Camp			1	2	1	12
	<b>Total</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>24</b>

Notes: Women seemed to have problems with counts, often referring to the ration cycle of 14 days rather than the monthly 30 day cycle. They interpreted buying rice and other foods as exchange for ration foods so both are included as ‘purchased’ items. Women emphasized that rice with just chili and salt was not as food insecure as rice with just salt and rice with just water. They also interpreted more fish eating as higher food insecurity. Of those who had borrowed food, all intended to pay back but some had not done so yet until the next set of rations was received. In terms of snacks, this was not well understood and for most meant a few cakes made with blended food early on in the ration cycle. The question about having or not having a fulfilling meal was asked twice for consistency and the women were adamant and consistent that they rarely had a fulfilling meal. We did not ask them to explain what they meant by fulfilling meal but some volunteered rice with kanchabajar including fish and meat.

## **APPENDIX 6: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK THEMES NOT OTHERWISE HIGHLIGHTED [Figures 1 and 2]**

### **Psychosocial Impacts of Food Insecurity**

#### **GOOD MOTHERS**

- \*- never eating without the children
- \*- not discriminating between boys and girls; one wonders if any gender differentiation occurs in households where there are no husbands (the women told us no); note we asked specifically to interview a female head of household with a child in the therapeutic feeding centre and this was the only category of woman we did not have referred to us
- \*- always worried about feeding children
- \*- would like to give better food to children
- \*- aspirations of children being literate and working
- \*- I want my children to be good human beings

#### **A HUSBAND WOULD MAKE LIFE EASIER**

- \*- women are far worse off without a husband
- \*- he could carry rations, go out to buy food, work outside
- \*- protection in the shed
- \*- life is impossible without a man in the camp
- \*- in every household with a husband the children eat more and better; meat, fish and vegetables

#### **CHILDREN ARE TREATED EQUALLY**

- \*- they say that they give their children each the same amount of food; making a distinction that they sometimes give more the elder child and less to the youngest child
- \*- gender is not a consideration in feeding children

#### **THE MEALTIME EXPERIENCE, IE, COMMENSALITY, HAS LOST ITS SOCIAL MEANING**

- \*- the meal experience is defined by what is on the plate—is there more or less; fish or greens or none
- \*- there is no visitation during meals; no meal offerings to others

#### **GLIMPSES OF EMPOWERMENT**

- \*- sells and buys from unregistered refugees (one step above at least someone)
- \*- would like to run a small grocery shop
- \*- would like a wagon
- \*- suggested that there be baskets made to house chickens so that they would not be stolen
- \*- suggested seeds, fencing materials for gardens that were now barren
- \*- suggested pigeons instead of chickens
- \*- suggestions on work that could be done in the camp
- \*- do support their children's education including sending for double shifts despite no understanding of the education process
- \*- dressing in sari as a Bangladeshi woman; using Bangla words in order to improve begging results
- \*- paying two years of private school for child; main wish to have child admitted to school in camp, they say wait
- \*- "I wish for my daughter to be a doctor; she wishes too"

- \*- going out of Nayapara and working outside (eg,: working for fisherman in the village)

## **THE ELDERLY**

- \*- we would like to share about Myanmar to the young people who do not want to know
- \*- in Myanmar and even Bangladeshi people are good to old people, not in the camp
- \*- they don't help us, we pay for carrier, water, if we are sick in the shed they do not come to cook or help
- \*- they do not give us food; even my adopted son does not help
- \*- we still worry about our children and grandchildren getting enough food, especially if they are out of the family book working outside
- \*- they would like to tell stories of their history and culture but the young people are not interested to listen
- \*- the elderly care for their grandchildren; no one cares for them

## **GLIMPSES OF GENEROSITY**

- \*- I give to unregistered refugees if I can afford it
- \*- when my relatives came from Myanmar, they stayed in the shed and we fed them

## **Additional Hardships**

### **ADDITIONAL HARDSHIPS**

- \*- being elderly
- \*- having a disabled child
- \*- suffering from theft
- \*- children too young to help
- \*- being disabled
- \*\*\*- having no husband

### **YOU CAN'T EASILY RECOVER FROM THEFT**

- \*- I used to have three pots, now I only have one and have to do the cooking in it
- \*- I went to report the theft to CIC; they sent me to UNHCR; they sent me to CIC and I have never had any compensation
- \*- winter is the hardest because our blanket was stolen, it is four months ago

### **INDEBTEDNESS**

- \*- only heard about in Nayapara; asset base may be too small for monetary borrowing in Kutupalong

## **Other Basic Needs**

### **ON FOOD AND HEALTH**

- \*- general belief that ration foods are insufficient in quantity and diversity for health
- \*- seemingly sound understanding of basic nutrition
- \*- it is harder to be pregnant because I need special foods to not feel dizzy; that costs more—vegetables, fruit, meat, fish—I also need special food for the baby that is going in my belly
- \*- do not seem to make a connection between health ailments, eg, cough, fever, and nutrition, except for weakness
- \*- there was not a health preoccupation in terms of ailments, just concern about inadequate nutrition

- \*- we observed (often through the burqua) some women who were extremely thin and we observed extreme thinness among the elderly and the unregistered woman; at times, women appeared anemic but generally they appeared like ordinary women; given the reported level of insufficient intake, we suspect micronutrient deficiencies at least
- \*- women told us that they were too thin, that they needed food; one mentioned how much weight she had lost since her husband died
- \*- women attributed their weakness to lack of sufficient food

### **THE SPECIAL CASE OF FEEDING BABIES**

- \*- babies cannot eat rice, chilis, they need special food including milk
- \*- the only way to wean a baby is to sell rations
- \*- buying baby food from rations exceeds the price one gets for the child's ration
- \*- supplemental feeding is therefore needed for every baby but now offered to only some
- \*- mothers seem to have tremendous awareness in general about nutrition (including vitamins) and about weaning foods
- \*- protracted exclusive breastfeeding is occurring because only Allah knows how baby foods will be acquired when there is not enough food in the shed

### **BASIC NEED PRIORITIES**

- \*- virtually all women would buy food first
- \*- cloth was very much needed for children
- \*- household materials like cooking pot, sleeping mat, mosquito net, firewood, water jug
- \*- higher education

### **NEVER LEAVING THE CAMP YET FEARFUL WITHIN (Kutupalong)**

- \*- 2/3 women never leave the camp; most said they were too shy or mentioned the decree
- \*- not leaving the camp also means not wanting to live outside the camp; Why would I live outside the camp when the Rohingya living outside come inside asking help from us?

### **NOT LEAVING NAYAPARA CAMP**

- \*- younger women do not leave the camp; even if you are unmarried child head of household, you cannot go out
- \*- I am still a young woman, I cannot go out (It is not culturally accepted)
- \*- you can buy what you need in the camp
- \*- Why would I go outside, there is nothing to do for me outside the camp

### **CAMP-WIDE IMPACTS**

#### **HEALTH CARE**

- \*- MSF is there to give in-patient care but patients cannot get referrals for such care through MOH; MSF does not want patients who are too sick for them to care for—they should be referred directly to a referral hospital
- \*- it is not health care, we call it torture care

#### **COOPERATION AND QUARRELLING**

- \*- we used to take 4 or 5 families to go get ration and then they would weigh and it would be perfect amount but then there was quarrelling and we go by ourselves

- \*- in the shed there are 20 people, different families, when they give to the shed, we have too little, even if we cut the soap; when we have bamboo mat, they give us one, we think to cut it but sell instead and distribute the money
- \*- sometimes my children quarrel over the food; they take from each other

### **A WEAK, VULNERABLE WOMEN'S COMMUNITY**

- \*- we found no true friendships or even family supports outside of the shed; some neighbour relations are good with some cooperation
- \*- the soap making factory did create a solidarity among these vulnerable women who did not realize perhaps that other women were like them
- \*- "we only share our sorrows"
- \*- no evidence of mutual aid, "we do not have enough"
- \*- How can we help each other?

### **WORK INSIDE THE CAMP**

- \*- if they only had a sewing machine
- \*- would like to continue in the soap factory long term
- \*- I do nothing

### **THE HELPING AGENCIES**

#### **UNHCR—FATHER, PROTECTOR, GIVER OF ALL THINGS**

- \*- total trust, not a negative word other than bureaucracy
- \*- their future is in the hands of UNHCR
- \*- everyone from UNHCR know better what is good for us than we know
- \*- when I have problems we go to UNHCR
- \*- dependency is too facile a word to describe the relationship of these refugee women with UNHCR
- \*- less direct mention of UNHCR in Nayapara, just you know, they know
- \*- still no criticisms
- \*- a lot of watchful waiting for verification of sons, adopted children, own unregistered children

### **OUTSIDE THE CAMPS**

#### **THERE CANNOT BE ANY GREATER DISADVANTAGE THAN TO BE AN UNREGISTERED WOMAN HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD REFUGEE**

- \*- the only way to have food is to beg; if I am too weak or sick to beg, we will not eat/we don't eat

#### **MAHJEES AND VILLAGERS**

- \*- greatest threat(s)
- \*- the mahjee system must end, and the only way it will end is if the mahjees go away; everyone wants them to go (in response to heirs and successors)
- \*- we don't go outside because of the villagers
- \*- EVERYTHING is impossible because of the villagers
- \*- villagers are perceived as a threat in Nayapara as well
- \*- Mahjee problems, Mahjee had me beaten

## **OUTSIDE OF NAYAPARA**

- \*- women work outside, helping out at the fish market sorting fish; at the brick factory breaking bricks for 30 taka a day minus the 5 taka bribe
- \*- you go to the forest yourself or with your child to collect firewood

## **NAYAPARA JOBS OUTSIDE THE CAMP**

- \*- look at my hands and my thumb, I do brick breaking three days a week and it is hard
- \*- I collect firewood in the forest; sometimes I sell
- \*- I work at the fish market and separate fish; they give me fish that is not good for sell
- \*- I go begging with my daughter
- \*- I am unmarried, I cannot go outside the camp

## **A CONTEXT FOR UNDERSTANDING**

### **THE CONTRADICTIONS ABOUT RATION AND NON-RATION FOODS**

- \*- ration foods resonate with ‘on the one hand’ but ‘on the other hand’ themes
- \*- on the one hand, the rations should be nutritionally sustaining (energy, nutrients)
- \*- on the other hand, ‘everyone’ [women, staff] knows that it is not possible to survive without selling rations; for some this is only greens, for others it is fish as well  
(- see special case of babies below)
- \*- on the one hand, everyone sells rations; on the other hand, everyone borrows rations—usually rice—an endless cycle
- \*- the refugees are given rations as if this were an emergency situation, in terms of calories per person and what is given—everyone knows this is a protracted refugee situation and that a person cannot live on the rations; it is not enough and not enough variety
- \*- you receive rations that you do not sell because there is not enough, so you beg, mostly for other foods, sometimes rice

### **HONOUR RULES**

- \*- stealing is shameful work, I would rather die than steal food
- \*- if a semi-starved refugee had a little money, she would first pay back her debt

### **THE CRITIQUE OF ILLITERACY**

- \*- it is important that my children get an education so that they will not be illiterate like me; if they get an education, they will be able to work and earn money, maybe work in an office
- \*- it is because we are illiterate that we are having problems
- \*- I am illiterate, I do not know

### **EXTORTION: RULE OF 50%**

- \*- you sell your rice at half the price
- \*- if you go outside and earn money, the guards and Mahji will beat you, even tie you up and will take 50% of what you earned, every time, even last month

### **OTHER EXTORTION**

- \*- if you break brick at the brick factory, you make 30 taka a day and you must pay the guard 5 taka each day—the owner only pays you when he sells bricks

## **BANGLADESH(I) CRITIQUE**

- \*- there is no peace for us in Bangladesh
- \*- Bangladesh is a poor country
- \*- the Bangladeshi don't like us, we are different, not from this country

## **REFUGEE CRITIQUE**

- \*- refugees are registered or unregistered
- \*- people are refugees or not refugees
- \*- refugees have been persecuted and are still persecuted and tortured
- \*- the UNHCR takes care of refugees and is helping us
- \*- even my daughter does not want to know about Myanmar, she says why, I will never go there
- \*- children constantly ask researchers "Where do you come from?"; if you say "Where do you come from?" they have trouble, they start to say Myanmar and then they say nothing
- \*- we want peace is a frequent refrain
- \*- women carry the family book with them everywhere
- \*- letter complaining of beating to researcher signed by woman with block, shed, room number
- \*- researcher received a note on behalf of refugee signed, "your most obedient refugee"

## **MISPERCEPTIONS/MISCONCEPTIONS**

- \*- if you give the shed a bamboo mat they will sell it and complain they do not have mats to sleep on; IN FACT if you give a single mat to a shed with 20 people of different families, they will think about cutting it into pieces and when that does not work and it causes quarrel, it is better to sell it and distribute the money; also they complain about not having mats because they are broken, worn out
- \*- the soap factory is not really needed because there is a lot of soap; IN FACT soap is given by shed and when there are many people in a shed, even if they cut the soap into pieces, there is not enough to wash
- \*- the soap factory provides vulnerable women with an opportunity to improve the situation for the families; IN FACT, women are only able to work in the soap factory for 7 months—there is false hope raised by this short engagement; they would like to work longer (in fact—this was the favourite job reported of the various described)
- \*- if they want to eat fish or meat, they sell ration; IN FACT for the poorest, this is rare and some have almost none; firewood is most often bought than fish, meat or kanchabajar
- \*- at least the refugees have ration so that they should not be hungry; IN FACT there is deep, persistent, chronic food insecurity with hunger throughout every month, throughout the year, every day we are suffering is what many say; rations really only last one week of two
- \*- some assistance is perceived to come from refugees outside of the camp or relatives elsewhere including getting visits from their relatives from Myanmar; IN FACT, they receive no assistance that we could find from refugees outside who come asking for help inside the camp and the Myanmar relatives arrive without any food or gifts and are housed and fed
- \*- the refugees want to be resettled; IN FACT, there are many for whom life outside of a camp (not Kutupalong) is unthinkable, life without rations and UNHCR is unthinkable
- \*- illiterate women must lack health and nutritional understanding; IN FACT, what we heard was a remarkable level of understanding of nutritional needs for child and their own well-being
- \*- the refugees do not plan ahead; IN FACT, a great deal of thought goes into every day planning and managing the foods available
- \*- living together in such an isolated place must have created a sense of community and evidence of mutual aid or working together or belonging; IN FACT, we found nothing outside of the shed

- \*- there are many many problems in the camps of which food insecurity is only one; IN FACT we believe that food insecurity is the primary problem for these women
- \*- begging is shameful; IN FACT, begging is honourable work; it is not stealing and you need to feed your family
- \*- the main theft threat is from villagers; IN FACT in Nayapara theft is reported from inside, from neighbours as well as villagers
- \*- people have children for rations; IN FACT women know the difficulties a new baby brings despite rations, both in the short term, when they are weaning and later on; it is unclear why so many babies are born (not a subject of our study)
- \*- the Mahjees are purely evil: IN FACT, the Mahjees while being contemptible in their dealings do have approaches from refugees for assistance “you are my Mahjee, why do you not help me to get repair for my shed”, “Mahjee arranged liaison for my daughter’s marriage” “I paid Mahjee 800 taka for my daughter’s child to be put into my family book, so far I have only paid back 200 taka, I pay little by little”

## **FUTURE ORIENTATION**

### **NO RETURN TO MYANMAR**

- \*- no peace in Myanmar
- \*- they tell us we are better off in the sea

### **RESETTLEMENT ANALYSIS**

- \*- the only place for us is resettlement
- \*- we do not want to stay in Bangladesh, we do not want Myanmar, put us in a dustbin in any other country and we would be better off than where we are
- \*- woman would not budge after the interview, she only wanted resettlement

### **WORK OUTSIDE THE CAMP (FUTURE)**

- \*- would be better because we could earn money to buy food
- \*- we could maybe have a farm with some animals including cows
- \*- I could have a small grocery shop
- \*- I could open a small tailoring shop with my two daughters who also know tailoring

### **OUTSIDE OF HERE MEANS LIVING IN ANOTHER CAMP**

- \*- women cannot conceive, or can only poorly conceive, of living ‘outside’ or of living without rations
- \*- what would I do outside, the only thing I know is inside the camp
- \*- why would I live outside the camp when the refugees that live outside the camp come inside and look for help
- \*- it is not safe for us, they torture us

\* indicates repeated reference and consensus between interviews

## Appendix 7: Additional Recommendations

### A) Transition recommendations for UNHCR 2007-2009

#### Sectoral development approach

##### *Human development*

- need mass education
- identify promising young people for targeted professional education return to village contract
- individual assessment, asset mapping and needs identification, build upon
- 

##### *Economic development*

- economic analysis of region examining new opportunities for investment and training of new work force
- micro credit in camp for business development; sewing machines for tailoring---external market than camp
- older sons might be able to run mothers' shops, build support
- sustainability of current training enterprises

##### *Food security*

- community agriculture
- food processing
- can/planter gardens
- integrated weaning food program—including education, business, agriculture, local products assessed
- could also be food made by this group for feeding centres

##### *Civic development*

- engagement of refugees in design and planning of new village
- full participation in reconstruction activities

##### *Social development*

- 1) new initiatives aim at building cooperation, mutual aid, empowerment, control of decisions
- 2) create sub-communities of refugees who will work together, including female heads of households who are not marginalized but could be organized among common work goals, eg, grocery shops, farm agriculture—domestic animals, gardening, chickens, tailoring, embroidery, soap making, domestic workers (cooks), fried rice making, restaurants, food processing, drying fish, drying chilis. In forming groups, consider individual's personal interests and skills
- 3) create a pervasive learning environment, skill-building throughout, integrate literacy, numeracy with skills, eg, cutting of cloth, learn basic measurement
- 4) deliberate inclusion of older refugees particularly women, with skills and cultural transfer in initiatives
- 5) consider integration of vulnerable women from neighbouring Bangladeshi villages in BRAC-like development activities with refugee women
- 6) recreate health worker cadre from among the traditional birth attendants and community health workers in the camp who have largely been disbanded since Concern left, and consider joint training with local Bangladeshi health workers
- 7) BRAC integrated model for ultra-poor would be an excellent development model
- 8) camp staff could attempt to empower refugees in all interactions, eg, providing decision latitude

## **B) Specific Sectoral Recommendations**

### Improved camp subsistence agriculture

- baskets be provided to house chickens so that they would not be stolen
- seeds, fencing materials for gardens that were now barren
- pigeons instead of chickens

### Cultural identity preservation and enhancement

- role for the elderly to share their stories
- refugee identity may need to transition to other sense of self
- individuality could be enhanced by having a name that is not shed number, knowing others' names
- in deciding upon resettlement solution consider the lessons of the great diasporas

### Ration Distribution System Improvements

- support improvement to date to reduce underscooping
- enhance monitoring system, upon request
- reduce wait times in Kutupalong especially; explore if appointment blocks or even sequential pick up, ie, smaller number of sheds for distribution, could reduce waiting time
- could a mechanical aid be devised that could both hold rations and navigate the hilly ways? We saw a small wheelbarrow shaped device that would work. Possibility for male employment in its construction; possible revenue generation for those with wagons—would like to avoid conflicts from privilege though so consider the ability to borrow a wagon, wheelbarrow or similar device from UNHCR as a way of reducing carrier cost but also to build community ownership, sharing, shared responsibility

### Health Care

- continue to improve the referral service between OPD and MSF and between OPD and the therapeutic feeding centre
- improve in-service education of health providers on management of gastric irritation
- reconnect with the skilled TBAs who have been ignored since Concern left

### Feeding Babies

- strong support for offering all babies supplemental food, shed to shed
- investigate why girl babies significantly outnumber boy babies in therapeutic feeding centre when there is no evidence of gender discrimination in child feeding
- policy change that permits all babies and toddlers to receive feeding support regardless of registered status for adopted children and children with one registered parent
- support for the introduction of breastfeeding supplementation after six months of age to reduce protracted exclusive breastfeeding

### Education and Training

- support additional grade availability
- support mass literacy for illiterate women
- provide mass numeracy education
- consider school sport teams to foster team work and achievement
- strong support for soap-making factory that transmits more than skills; build social relationships, consider opportunities for long term work
- child to child education but also child to mother, child to adult education

### Household Materials

- firewood is a critical issue, particularly in Kutupalong, and increased fuel, CRH, essential
- encourage shortening of cycle for housing material replenishment, particularly fuel, cooking pots, sleeping mats, cloth, roofing materials, soap, mosquito nets, water jugs, in that order.
- solar cooking used in other refugee camps

### Shed Repair and Replacement

- support efforts to replace sheds
- develop cooperative system for roof repair and door repair/replacement for security

### Security and Extortion

- support efforts that have reduced these problems
- would a self-defense, special constable force be too risky? Any community patrol or policing would need to build community rather than create a new cadre of oppressors
- would community meetings with villagers and village leaders and Rohingya spokespersons (not Mahjee naïve or could it build a forum for dialogue and co-habitation?
- support recommendations to disband Mahjee system
- could there be joint economic or cooperative initiatives for villagers and Rohingya without suggesting that the Rohingya were there to stay?

### Fathers' Abrogation of all Child Responsibilities

- consider Imam system to encourage fathers to maintain at least filial if not financial relationships with children

### Dispute Resolution

- consider elder's counsel for community-level disputes, eg, confiscation of garden by neighbours to build the ability to resolve conflicts rather than turning always to CIC or UNHCR
- could consider wise women's counsel as well for family conflict mediation or wise woman-man pairing for reestablishment of father's links with children
- what did the Rohingya culture do to resolve conflicts when they lived in Myanmar villages?

### Work Inside the Camp

- support the soap-making factory as an integrated social and training development activity
- consider early microfinance for capital such as a sewing machine for inside the camp enterprises
- diversify ration economy with work payment by other means than food

### Work Outside the Camp

- extend labour rights to refugees working outside of the camp

### Unregistered refugees

- support for verification efforts
- encourage non-discrimination on the basis of gender for entitlement for registered women who are married to an unregistered man
- consider integrated solutions for all Rohingya

### Future Research

- study other families using qualitative interviewing methodology
- follow up of resettled refugees in Hamilton to see how they managed
- Myanmar comparison study