

Merging Equitable Systems Evaluation with Rapid Cultural Change in ECD in a Humanitarian Context: Experiences of Rohingya young children in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

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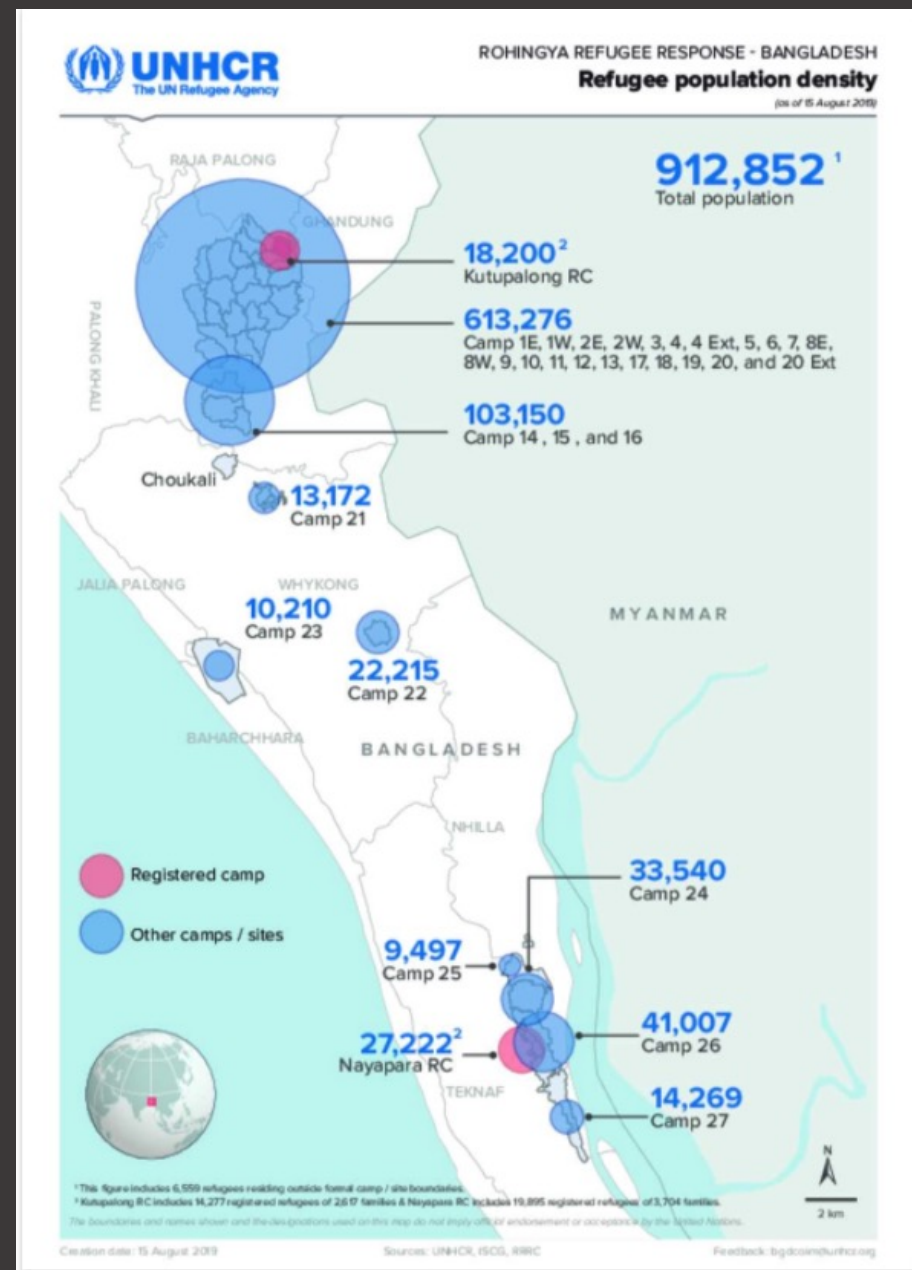
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Goals of the Play to Learn project in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

- Develop and implement early childhood development (ECD) programs grounded in experiences and culture of Rohingya refugees (2019-2023); understand contexts and child development among the Rohingya
- Extensive, multi-year pilot research followed by two major studies (program for fathers of 0-2 year olds; longitudinal prenatal / birth cohort study)
- **The Rohingya – no research to date on ECD; indigenous group with unique cultural and linguistic background; experiences of genocide in Myanmar**

Research Questions

- What are the contexts and processes of socialization for young Rohingya children (ages 0-6) growing up in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh?
 - Multiple sources of socialization – peers, caregivers / parents, siblings
- What are the experiences of camp contexts that may constrain or enable child learning and development?
- How are fathers involved in young children's development and how might this inform programming for fathers?
- What are impacts of a 6-month program for fathers of 0-2 year olds on Rohingya and host community father engagement, father-child activities, father well-being, and child development?





A cultural systems view of Rohingya adaptation in Bangladesh

- In fleeing genocide in their home country, Rohingya kinship structures and culture have adapted to
- An entirely new ecology in Cox's Bazar – restricted movement; unprecedented crowding; perilous housing and new vulnerability to climate; statelessness in a new country (Bangladesh)

Emergent holism in rapid cultural change

- Rapid adaptation of kinship structures to network and physical environment
- Adaptation to a set of entirely new livelihoods as former ones – agriculture and fishing – are not possible
- Rapid learning of multiple languages – Bangla, English in addition to Rohingya and Arabic -- and intentional deployment of them in new relationships with Bangladeshi host community, Bangladeshi government and camp authorities; local and international NGOs and UNHCR

Methods of a multi-phase, multi-method pilot study under various COVID restrictions and changing camp conditions, 2019-2022

METHOD	N=
Semi-structured qualitative interviews	125
Quantitative surveys	322
Child point-of-view rapid ethnography	61
Qualitative free-listing and key informant interviews to generate culturally and linguistically specific language for measurement	108 / 29
Direct child assessment development and adaptation, 3-6 year olds / 0-3 year olds using iterative, multi-stage piloting	282 / 315
Quality monitoring measure for Pashe Achhi phone-based caregiver program	300

Three Learnings from Pilot Work

- 1) Cultural conceptions of caregiver well-being
- 2) How do Rohingya children play? Rapid ethnography of children and semi-structured interviews of fathers and mothers
- 3) What is meaningful community engagement in program implementation and improvement? Participatory research with Rohingya community members

Uncovering Cultural Conceptions of Well-being, ECD and context through Free listing [led by Abdulkadir Rahim and Caroline Hiott]

- 1) Ask Rohingya caregivers to freely list words associated with a concept (e.g. distress, play, parenting, daily functioning)
 - E.g. distress: *Tenshon* (tension), *Feshar* (pressure), *Beshi sinta* (overthinking), *Gum zai nofare* (insomnia), *Soit-soit lage* (feeling trapped or anxious)
- 2) Engage key informants with knowledge of this concept to generate definitions
- 3) Develop quantitative survey items with accurate and culturally grounded knowledge
- **Critical for an indigenous and linguistically unique group with virtually no ECD research**

Example: cultural language for distress with associations

Pressure (*Feeshar*) is often associated with **neck pain** that climbs up towards the neck, causing an increasingly tense sensation in the sufferer's face. The person becomes very **weak and lethargic** when they experience it. They are also said to be extremely irritable and act out. Common symptoms of *feeshar* include neck pain (*goddona sissiya*), body pain (*gaa sissiya*), headache (*matha horani*), face swelling (*muk fuli zagoi*), being upset or unhappy (*oshanti lage*), and **feeling numb** (*besuth oi zagoi*). *Feeshar* can either result from or cause *tenshon* and *bishi sinta*. **Financial concerns, insomnia, and conflicts within the household, or perceived / actual blood problems** (*roktho horaf oile / lou nosoli le*) can also trigger *feeshar*. *Feeshar* will affect individuals' ability to take care of their children (*fuwain soli no faribo*), manage household tasks (e.g., cooking; *goror ham gori no faribo*), and ability to socialize (e.g., will not be able to speak to others, or *manuish loi hotha hoith no faribo*).

16 items not overlapping with existing depression and anxiety measures derived from free listing

25	Angry with people
26	Sharp body pain
27	To feel upset/unsettled
28	Does not feel like talking to people
29	Just sitting at home / feeling bored (gender specific)
30	Does not feel like working
31	Body feels unwell
32	A feeling of sudden and sharp mental shock or pain
33	Will quarrel with family members
34	Will not feel happy with children
35	Sharp neck pain
36	Face swelling
37	Feel numb
38	Feeling tired
39	Will suffer from blood pressure
40	Will turn red from anger

What does this mean for understanding refugee contexts

- **Culturally specific language** for important ECD constructs in research and programming
- **Distinguish Chittagonian and other local Bangla from Rohingya conceptions** of ECD, wellness, and context
- **But NOTE: Cultural shifts and adaptation extraordinarily rapid** – intentional deployment of languages in a newly multi-lingual context among the Rohingya

Three Learnings

- 1) Cultural conceptions of well-being, ECD and context as bases for program design
- **2) How do Rohingya children play? Rapid ethnography of children and semi-structured interviews of fathers and mothers**
- 3) What is meaningful community engagement in program implementation and improvement? Participatory research with Rohingya community members

Mixed-age peer group learning through play in hazardous environments

- Mahi (3) was sitting on the mat with her other friends. Dina (5) said to everyone, "Done! Let's move." They (Dina, 5; Absar, 4; Mahi, 3; Didar, 2) all stood up, took different things of the arrangement in their hands. Mahi took a plate full of sands in her hand and stood up. They all walked to the stairs to make their new setup for playing. Absar spread the mat on a stairstep, and others started putting their things on the mat. Mahi also went there and put her plate beside the other plates. Then, she sat beside Didar (2). **Mahi said to Dina, "Don't give me much broth."** Suddenly, Dina stood up and left the place without saying anything to anyone. Everyone there excepting Mahi also stood up and followed Dina .
- *“Abbul was sitting on the concrete steps holding in his hand a piece of bicycle wheel spoke bent in a 60-degree angle. He had 4 rubber bands spiraled one after the other and a matchstick that he was using to remove gunpowder and pour into the end of the spoke.”*

The social structure and fathers' vs mothers' perceptions of child play

- Social structure of play: Most in **mixed-age peer groups, not same-age**
- Different interactions in “**urban**” **crowded** vs more “**rural**” **sparse micro-settings** in the camps
- **Fathers: fear of danger of kidnapping and physical harm** (road accidents, or in play-fighting)
- Fathers involved extensively in 2-5 year olds' lives; **much less for 0-2**
- **Mothers: hygiene, what children are ingesting outside the home**
- **Fathers perceived HPL's as a women's space**

Implications of play findings for evaluations and future programming

- **Build on mixed-age peer groups in community contexts** [child-to-child type models, but within the full range of the early childhood period]
- **Include approaches to parental monitoring of child play** – flexible to peer group structures, but attention to danger and harm
- Boost attention to local materials children are playing with – and **distinguishing danger (eg. playing with gunpowder; sharp bike spokes)** from safety
- Leverage and understand shifts in household **gender roles (e.g. in father engagement impact evaluation)**

Three Learnings

- 1) Cultural conceptions of well-being, ECD and context as bases for program design
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TWO PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP STUDIES

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (CE) STUDY

Understanding Community Engagement for ECD Programs:

A 6-day workshop to unpack community engagement in ECD programs in the Rohingya context:

- Aim: What are the forms and ways in which camp inhabitants can come together to play roles of importance in early childhood development programs?

PREGNANCY STUDY

Sharing Experiences of Pregnancy in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

- Two 5-day workshops
- Aim; Explore lived experiences of pregnancy with young pregnant women in a safe, collaborative and creative space to potentially provide a platform for resilience, sisterhood, or something else.



Goals of Community Engagement Study using PAR

- By exploring the past development, present and future of BRAC's Humanitarian PlayLab model in Cox's Bazar:
- Understand how community leaders, caregivers, stakeholders can be meaningfully involved in development of ECD programs.
- How can the model include a range of stakeholders and be participatory and include solicitation of drawing, art – both retrospective (pre-migration) and current (camp context).
- 5-day workshop model

Research Questions of CE Study

- At the core of community engagement is a continuum of actions that underline how a community can be involved in trying to work on issues that impact their well-being. In exploring community engagement in the HPL context, we were therefore guided by two overarching requestion questions:
 - What is the place of BRAC's main ECD model – the Humanitarian PlayLab (HPL) - in the Rohingya community and how is it or can it be meaningful for the community in its current time and for the future?
 - What does the current model need for it to effectively highlight what the community wants?

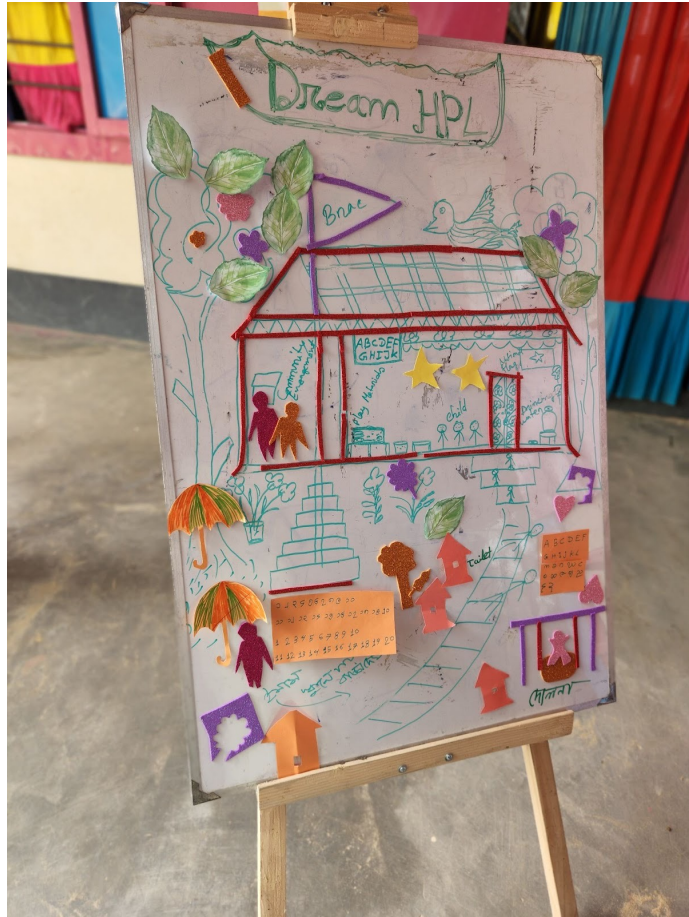
Participants in CE Workshop

Mothers/Female Group Rohingya only group	Male Bangla group
Rohingya Mother 0-2 in the HPL program	Community Leader (Majhi)
Rohingya Mother 3-5/4-6 in the HPL program	Community Elder (Knowledgeable person from the community)
Rohingya Mother with child previously and now dropped out of the HPL program	Rohingya Father 1
Rohingya Mother with no child in HPL program	Rohingya Father 2
Rohingya Grandmother	Rohingya father engagement volunteer
HPL Play Leader 1 (Center)	BRAC Field Manager
HPL Play Leader 2 (Home)	BRAC Para Counsellor
HPL Mother Volunteer	BRAC Programme Officer

The Workshop Days

- **Day 1:** Introducing the project, the facilitators, and the participants and building a shared understanding about how to create a safe space for open discussions.
- **Day 2:** Discussing parents' aspirations for their developing children.
- **Day 3:** Discussing the community's aspirations for their children during a child's early years.
- **Day 4:** Discussing community engagement and how the community can be more involved in the way the HPL has been developed and deployed.
- **Day 5:** Developing a step-by-step process of community engagement to scaffold the participants, so they can unpack their own strengths to resolve community issues, especially those related to ECD.
 - *Brainstorming, active engagement with one another, and working in small groups to 1) recognize self and community strengths through conversations and question-answer sharing sessions and 2) implementing those strengths into ideas about building an HPL in a targeted way.*

Pictures of "Dream" HPL



The Effective Community Engagement – Rohingya (ECER) framework developed from participant discussions

- The **ECER Framework** is the seven-pronged conceptual structure, developed by the participants, that would make the HPLs more community-centered. It has both *recommendations* of and *processes* for concepts that need to go hand-in-hand for the HPL model to better reflect the communities' wants, roles, expectations, and hopes. The concepts that emerged in the framework are as follows:
 - Fostering Sustainable Trust
 - Enhancing Children's Safety with Deliberation and Strategy
 - Focusing on Capacity Building
 - Empowering Community Members to Take Ownership and Leadership Roles
 - Continuing to Integrate Rohingya Culture in the Curriculum
 - Starting to Focus on Outcomes beyond ECE – transitions to primary schooling
 - Prioritizing making HPLs and their community / physical environments better resourced and more comfortable for children

Participatory, Equity-Focused Research Strategies in this context

Diverse evaluation team with refugee, indigenous and multiple local languages represented

Practice-embedded researchers and research-embedded practitioners working together in analysis teams

Attention to power differentials – using participatory methods while remaining feasible (rapid ethnography; 5-day workshops instead of full PAR)

Sustained, multi-year partnership

Partnership with both large and small, local NGOs

Multiple qualitative and quantitative methods

Thank you!

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