



# Tales of Rohingya Youth



World Food  
Programme

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# Project Overview

The World Food Programme (WFP) is collaborating with the Government of Bangladesh, represented by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), to execute Component 5 within the 'Safety Net Systems for the Poorest' (SNSP) Project. This particular component, titled 'Strengthening Community Resilience for the Displaced Rohingya Population,' encompasses five key interventions, with Volunteer Services being a prominent aspect.

To effectively implement the project, WFP has established a Field Level Agreement (FAL) with ActionAid Bangladesh for the period of 15 January to 31 December 2023.

The primary objective of the project is to engage youth in meaningful activities, with the overarching aim of enhancing their self-esteem. By doing so, the project seeks to discourage Rohingya youths from engaging in anti-social activities and, concurrently, elevate community resilience. The initiative targets 3200 youths, involving them in various activities such as life skills and awareness training, door-to-door awareness raising, light work, mentorship, gender champions, youth corner, interactive theatre performance, and emergency preparedness and response.



## A Journey of Self Growth

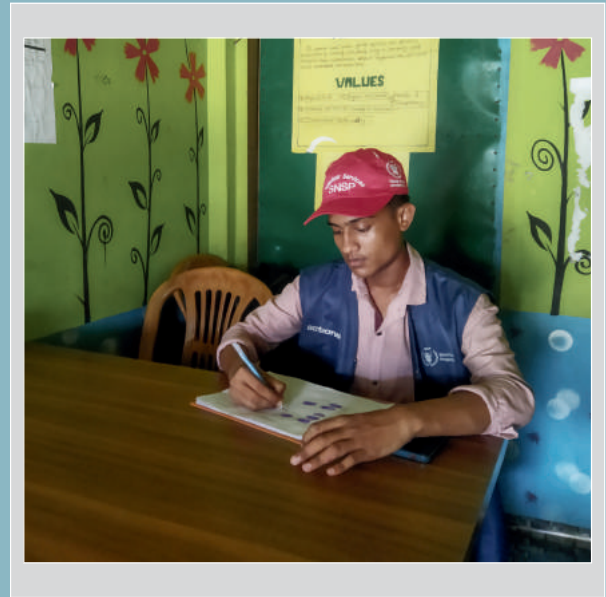
Nur Kalam at the age of 17 is transforming his and his community's life.

Born in Bangladesh after his father's arrival from Myanmar in 1994, Nur was the first child in the family. Since childhood, he has always been passionate, playful, and full of energy. Driven by his own determination, he managed to study up to class nine. Like many adolescents, he harboured dreams of higher education and supporting his family.

Before Nur found his way to the Volunteer Services-Safety Net System for Poorest project, he had participated in a short-term project related to gender-based violence under YPSA. However, the project didn't provide enough room for him to showcase his talents. After the project ended, Nur found himself at a crossroads, spending idle days at home and with friends.

Then one day, staff of the VS-SNSP project visited Nur's home to shortlist participants for volunteer service activities. Intrigued and eager for a new path, Nur Kalam enthusiastically joined the project, marking the beginning of a transformative chapter in his life.

Right from the start, Nur proved to be an attentive and responsible participant in VS-SNSP project activities. His favourite endeavour within the project became mentorship, where he delved into attendance-related work, training facilitation, drafting weekly plans, field monitoring, follow-up, and supervision. Guided by his mentor, Nur learnt the intricacies of using the KoBo toolbox for data entry and platform utilisation. His progress was nothing short of impressive, showcasing his commitment to personal growth.



Mentoring became Nur Kalam's favorite endeavour

Nur Kalam's newfound skills and leadership qualities didn't confine himself to the project alone. Among his peers, he became a respected figure, sharing insights about VS-SNSP activities, discouraging involvement in anti-social behaviour, and imparting the knowledge he had gained. Evenings with friends transformed into sessions of motivation and education, where he passionately explained the significance of his work and its real-world applications.

His parents, once burdened with worries, now beam with pride. Nur not only shared his knowledge with family members but also disseminated it within his peer group. "One of the best decision I took was to join the VS-SNSP initiative. I now have acquired a wealth of knowledge that has assisted me in discovering my innate aptitude", reflected Nur Kalam.



## Dismantling Biases as a Gender Champion

Jahangir Alam is a gender champion, advocating against gender-based violence in the Rohingya community.

He lives in Camp 14 with his mother and two younger sisters, who took refuge in Cox's Bazar with him after they fled Myanmar.

Jahangir's encounter with ActionAid Bangladesh marked a turning point in his life. The Volunteer Service project, focusing on life skills and gender champions training, aimed to empower displaced youth like Jahangir with essential tools for life. The project also encouraged positive contributions to the community through activities like light work, emergency preparedness, and gender championship.

ActionAid's training covered vital topics such as GBV, protection from sexual exploitation, gender equity, power dynamics, and gender roles. This not only imparted valuable knowledge but also sparked a sense of responsibility in Jahangir, motivating him to become a catalyst for positive change.

Armed with new knowledge and a transformed perspective, Jahangir became a gender champion in his community. He reflected on his actions, committing to treating girls and women with respect and steering clear of harassment. Jahangir initiated door-to-door awareness campaigns, addressing the issue of child marriage in his community. His efforts bore fruit as he successfully prevented a child marriage (Razia Noor, Age 16) and influenced families to reconsider this harmful practise.



Jahangir Alam is currently advocating against gender-based violence

“After undergoing gender champions training, I've been striving to transform myself. I now hold great respect for women and refrain from speaking negatively about anyone,” shared Jahangir Alam.

Jahangir expressed deep gratitude to ActionAid Bangladesh and the World Food Programme (WFP) for the positive changes in his life. He acknowledged the organisation's role in shaping his character and providing opportunities to advocate for gender-based violence awareness in his community.



## Empowering Hope

Mohammed Azim, a 20-year-old resident of Camp 25, faced a tumultuous journey after leaving Myanmar. Living in a refugee camp, his life took a downward turn as he grappled with unemployment and a sense of purposelessness.

Azim was never fond of passing idle time and it bothered him that he could not do anything productive. When he learnt about ActionAid Bangladesh's VS-SNSP project, he felt he found a beacon of hope. Intrigued and passionate, Azim wasted no time in expressing his eagerness to join this transformative initiative.

He joined a light work activity, by discovering a Penta Vaccination Campaign in his camp. In this role, he engaged with project staff, spreading awareness about the campaign, and ensuring children received essential vaccinations.

Azim found his volunteering journey both challenging and fulfilling. Escorting small children to vaccination centres demanded effort and responsibility, yet he embraced these challenges with unwavering dedication, fuelled by love for his community.

Reflecting on his commitment, Azim shared, “Bringing small children to get vaccines and ensuring their safe return home was a daunting task. Nonetheless, the immense satisfaction derived from supporting our community made it worthwhile.”





Mohammed Azim is escorting children to receive vaccination

The impact of VS-SNSP volunteers resonated as community members expressed gratitude. Through their efforts, parents were informed about the vaccination campaign, and children received timely vaccinations.

One community member expressed, “The timely information provided by the volunteers enabled us to vaccinate our children and be aware of essential life-saving messages.” Commending the volunteerism, the Camp in Charge and health sector focal for Camp 25 expressed great satisfaction.

The VS-SNSP project provided Azim with a platform for personal improvement and community service. His story is inspiring others, illuminating a path of change and community resilience.



## From Despair to Empowerment

Mohammad Ehshan studied up to class six before his family took refuge in Bangladesh, escaping Myanmar to be safe. Although relieved to have a second chance to life, Ehsan felt empty inside, longing for something more, to be able to contribute to his family's well-being.

Ehshan came to know about ActionAid's 'Volunteer Services - Safety Net Systems for the Poorest' Project during a visit by the project staff to his block. His curiosity led him to the training centre the next day and with his parents' approval, he joined the project as a volunteer.

Ehshan actively engaged in life skills and awareness training, immersing himself in community well-being initiatives, such as assisting the elderly, tending plants, minimising losses in emergencies, and cleaning blocks. Among these activities, lightwork was his favourite, as he can directly help others through it.

Reminiscing his journey from Myanmar to Bangladesh, Ehsan shared, "I enjoy helping others because when my family and I left Myanmar, my baby brother was only 7 days old, and my mother had a tough time during her 4-day long journey to get to Bangladesh. We got help from people then, and it made me realise how important it is to lend a hand to those who need it,"

Amidst economic hardship in the camp, Ehshan's parents contemplated sending him to Malaysia for better income through illegal migration. However, equipped with the knowledge gained from the training, he convinced his parents about the dangers of taking such a path.



Ehshan actively engaged in community well-being initiatives

During this time, Ehshan came to know about the Communication with Communities (CwC) Project's paid volunteer job circular by ActionAid Bangladesh. He immediately approached the Project staff, prepared his CV, and attended the job interview. His experiences and learnings from the VS-SNSP project, helped him to secure the job. Now, he works for the community, raising awareness about the proper use of food cards and addressing diverse issues. With the money he earns, he supports his family.

Ehshan acknowledges the impact of the VS-SNSP project. It provided him the opportunity to prove himself, instil self-confidence, and a scope to take care of his parents.



## Power of Resilience

From a very young age, Muhammad Ali found himself struggling with both physical and mental challenges, setting him apart from the other youth of his community. Added to his difficulties was the life in the refugee camp, where Mahmud took shelter with his family after fleeing Myanmar.

Muhammad always felt a sense of isolation from others, being unable to think like his peers. Conversation scopes with others were limited, and the crowded spaces in the camp offered little room for engagement.

To support youth like Muhammad, ActionAid Bangladesh launched the Safety Net System for the Poorest (SNSP) programme, targeting youth aged 15 to 24 in the camps to boost self-esteem, discourage anti-social activities, and strengthen community resilience. The programme captured Muhammad's attention. He expressed a keen interest in joining, aspiring to find a pathway to personal growth.

Initially shy, Muhammad gradually opened up as he engaged in project activities, including storytelling, peer learning, and indoor sports with his peers. Regular attendance at life skills and awareness session training equipped him with valuable knowledge—how to make decisions and manage waste. Light work activities became his favourite, as he began nurturing plants like his fellow project participants. These activities became Muhammad's pride and joy.

He recognised the importance of these activities in fostering a beautiful living environment for the Rohingya community.



Awareness sessions equipped him with valuable knowledge

“I get to support my community and do what I enjoy most—that is, support my friends—by participating in these activities,” shared Muhammad Ali.

The impact of the VS-SNSP project extended beyond Muhammad's personal journey. Project volunteers like Muhammad, through awareness messages and light work, contribute significantly to the community's well-being. In the face of adversity, Muhammad Ali's story became a testament to the transformative power of resilience.



## Quest for Self-Transformation

“What fascinates me the most is being able to lead training sessions with my peers and comprehend them in my own way,” shared Mosammat Jesmin who discovered her true passion and purpose through the Volunteer Services project.

From the desire to do something meaningful, Jesmin joined the Volunteer Services-Safety Net System for the Poorest project. It offered her the opportunity to not only gain new skills but also to actively engage in community development.

She learned first-hand about different life skills training, community awareness sessions, light work and establishing youth corners for recreation and learning opportunities. Interactive theatre performances and mentorship activities added a new dimension for the youth of the camp, fostering a sense of empowerment among the participants.

As a mentee of the project, Jesmin acquired essential skills like utilising the Kobo toolbox app, managing attendance records, conducting field monitoring, and facilitating training sessions. Jesmin found herself in a role that not only challenged her but also allowed her to discover the joys of leadership. The experience of maintaining trainees' attention and covering diverse topics within the allotted time became an exhilarating endeavour for Jesmin.

Reflecting on her journey, Jesmin acknowledged the profound impact of youth-led initiatives within the refugee camp. She considers these initiatives to be not only catalysts for personal growth but also invaluable sources of knowledge for those eager to learn.



Jesmin acquired essential skills, including using the Kobo toolbox app and facilitating training sessions



## The Dreamer

At the age of 16, Muhammed Suhail dreamt of becoming a teacher and uplifting his community—a dream that he found to be tested by the harsh realities of life.

Suhail, with his family, moved to Bangladesh in November 2017, seeking refuge from the turmoil that had engulfed their motherland, Myanmar. The camp back then was a barren land, without opportunities, filled with fear, and haunted by the echoes of a war they had left behind. Money was scarce, and the prospect of rebuilding their lives seemed like a distant dream.

Soon the government and various non-governmental organisation brought much-needed aid – shelter and food - to support the community. After initial settlement, Suhail with the assistance of CODEC, found the opportunity to study again, rekindling the flames of his dream. However, CODEC's educational programme ended abruptly, leaving Suhail in uncertainty again. He drifted, spending aimless hours with friends, neglecting his studies, and showing a lack of respect for others, trying to cope with the challenges he was facing.

A friend introduced him to the Volunteer Services Project during this time. Suhail discovered the project, aimed to develop the soft skills of young individuals like him. It opened a new chapter in his life. Through this project, he underwent a remarkable behavioural shift. Instead of idling away in shops, he now worked to support his community, valued others' opinions, refrained from fights, and exhibited leadership qualities.



His role extended to inter-group conflict resolution, providing positive feedback to peers, and motivating them to steer clear of antisocial activities. He worked tirelessly to maintain a clean and healthy environment within the block, assisting the sick and elderly in their times of need.

“I love to help the elderly and work for the betterment of our community as I always dreamt” Suhail passionately stated about the Volunteer Services Project. His desire to become a teacher was strengthened by the knowledge he gained from taking part in the life skills and awareness training, enabling him to facilitate training sessions with his peers.

The impact of his efforts extended beyond goodwill. Suhail received financial incentives—50 taka per hour, with a maximum of 5 hours per day, totalling 250 taka per day. His monthly engagement of 10-12 days yielded 2500-3000 taka, empowering him to financially support his family.



Muhammed Suhail underwent a remarkable behavioural shift



## The Spotlight of Change

Shahab Uddin, a 17-year-old youth travelled from Myanmar to Bangladesh during the 2017 exodus. The incident took a toll on Shahab, as he found very limited opportunities for work in the camp. Shahab wanted to improve himself, but he struggled to find the right opportunity.

One day, the volunteer services staff from ActionAid Bangladesh knocked on Shahab's door. They were looking for enthusiastic participants for the Volunteer Services project, connecting young individuals from different blocks of the camp. The project's goals echoed with Shahab, and he expressed his interest in participating in its activities.

Shahab joined the interactive theatre but faced a significant challenge—overcoming his shyness and speaking confidently in front of a mass audience. The initial stages were tough; nerves and self-doubt clouded his attempts to present himself effectively. However, with dedication and regular practise, he gradually honed the necessary skills and gained the confidence to speak boldly in any situation. This activity paved his way for personal growth and the ability to address large audiences with ease.

Reflecting on his journey, Shahab shared, “I used to struggle a lot when talking in front of a crowd. But, with the experience of doing drama and interactive activities, I've learnt a lot. Now, I can talk confidently with everyone.”



Shahab Uddin's role in a play on human trafficking helped him overcome shyness

Shahab's captivating performance in the play on human trafficking gained him a lot of appreciation. The audience were blown away by the dedication and performance of the volunteers. "We're really impressed by how committed our volunteers are. They're using plays to teach and help our community understand important things," shared one community member after watching the play.

As the volunteer services project continued to unfold, more young people like Shahab Uddin joined as volunteers, eager to contribute their skills and efforts towards positive change. The project became a platform for personal development and sharing of crucial information on topics like human trafficking, disaster risk reduction, child marriage, and female education.



## Triumph of Compassion

The horrific events that forced Abdul Hannan to seek refuge in Bangladesh still lingers in his mind. Those days were horrific, he recalls. He felt blessed to have survived that difficult phase of life after taking shelter in the camp but longed for a stable future with opportunities to utilise his skills.

However, living in the camp, Rohingya youths like Hannan grapple with the fear of an unknown future and the constant concern for their safety. Hannan therefore was relieved to learn about the Volunteer Services-Safety Net System for Poorest project operating in his community. Inspired to become a part of this initiative, Hannan contacted the project's training centre to understand its objectives and engage in its activities.

The project introduced a variety of volunteering activities to him, and scopes of collaboration with multi-sector stakeholders, such as the WASH sector. Hannan soon found himself enjoying actively participating in these activities, distributing water to pregnant women, people with disabilities, and the elderly in the community.

Through his involvement, he realised the potential for change within himself and the opportunity to contribute for the betterment of his community. Financially supporting his family became an added blessing.

“We used to be shy and hesitant to talk to others, often afraid to assist the community. Now, we have become more courageous and feel inspired to support our community”, shared Abdul Hannan.



Abdul Hannan feel inspired to support his community

Volunteers like Abdul Hannan find solace and fulfilment in the opportunity provided by ActionAid's VS-SNSP project—a chance to shape and enhance their lives in ways previously uncharted. Hannan is hopeful again to have a stable life and repatriate to his homeland peacefully one day. Until then, he pledges to continue supporting his community.



## Unveiling the Firefighter Spirit Within the Community

Kobo Nur, lives in the Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar. He is a young, spirited soul, who finds immense happiness by helping others in his community.

Kobo was trained on gas stove repairing by an NGO in the camp after he moved here. However, he struggled to find opportunities to utilise his skills in the camp, eventually often passing idle time in tea stalls with his friends.

When Kobo found out about the VS-SNSP project, it ignited a new hope in Kobo to be engaged in activities that would benefit his community. He joined the project, became a mentee, and delved into diverse activities, learning valuable skills such as leadership, field monitoring, and planning. Familiarising himself with emergency preparedness support Kobo actively participated in supporting his community during fire responses too.

When a fire broke out on April 24, 2023, Kobo and his fellow programme participants joined forces with site management volunteers to safeguard the families in danger. Despite not having fire-retardant clothing, he courageously helped the families at risk by moving goods from houses not yet engulfed in flames and assisted in relocating elderly individuals and small children to safe shelters. The day after the fire was doused, Kobo and his team worked tirelessly to clear ash and debris from the site, swiftly preparing the area for the reconstruction of new shelters.

“Through my association with this project, I gain new and informative knowledge every day. What brings me the most joy is being able to assist the people in my community when they need it the most,” shared Kobo Nur.



Being able to help the community is what Kobo Nur is most happy about

Photo Stories





16 Days of Activism event to prevent violence against women in the camp by increasing awareness



16 Days of Activism event to prevent violence against women in the camp by increasing awareness



Volunteers from the VS-SNSP Project engaged in painting activities



Engaging in gender champions' activities within the camp



Volunteers from the project participated in fire response activities



Volunteers from the project participated in fire response activities



Project volunteers rehearsing for an interactive theatre performance



A project volunteer is conducting a mentorship session





Volunteers engaging in a peer learning session



Project volunteers celebrated World Environment Day in 2023



Observing World Environment Day through tree plantation

# Acknowledgment

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## Volunteer Services - Safety Net Systems for the Poorest

