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Community Based Protection: A Chronicle of Success

About Community-Based Protection Project

ActionAid Bangladesh's community-based protection (CBP) programme is a comprehensive initiative aimed at empowering Rohingya communities in various camps. Through the functionalization of key structures like Camp Management Committees, Imam Groups, Female Religious Teacher (FRT) Groups, Men Groups, Women Groups, Boys Groups, and Girls Groups, the programme fosters community leadership by addressing challenges and leveraging local capacities for sustainable solutions. Integrated Community Centres (CCs) and Information Service Centres (ISCs) have been established as accessible hubs, providing essential information and services. The programme emphasises the success of unpaid volunteerism, encouraging active participation of Community Groups (CGs), including the formation of Women-Led Emergency Teams for preparedness and community support. Continuous capacity-building initiatives, such as recognising long-serving community members, have been carried out in collaboration with UNHCR. Community Outreach Members (COMs) play a crucial role in identifying protection risks, Persons with Specific Needs (PSNs), and providing non-cash support, contributing to the overall well-being of the community. Additionally, the programme focuses on social cohesion through religious engagement, involving Imams and Female Religious Teachers in sessions that address protection risks and promote unity within the host communities. The sustained enthusiasm of community-led initiatives remains vital for the programme's long-term success.

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“My Dream is to Participate in the FIFA Women's World Cup.”

In the heart of Refugee Camp 27, a remarkable tale unfolded on December 19, 2022, marking a historic moment for Rohingya adolescent girls. In a bold move orchestrated by the Community-Based Protection programme of ActionAid Bangladesh, these girls defied societal norms, challenging the rooted belief that football was an exclusively male domain. Navigating the conservative landscape of the community, the CBP team faced staunch opposition. They embarked on a mission to convince parents, families, and community leaders to embrace the idea of girls playing football. With Block Majhi's support, they set out to inspire change.

The CBP team's enthusiasm proved infectious as they approached parents, delivering a compelling message of empowerment through sports, particularly football. Two adolescent girls' squads, each comprising 15 members, were created from Camp 27. These young girls, under the guidance of CBP teammates, embraced the challenge and embarked on their football journey. As the chilly morning of December 19 dawned, the refugee camp's field transformed into a stage of empowerment. CBP of AAB, with the backing of the Site Management team, organised a friendly football match. In attendance were esteemed guests, including CiC Tanvir Ahmed, ACiC Zia Uddin, UNHCR representative Yuri Honda, and the Camp Manager and staff of SMS, AAB, along with Rohingya spectators eager to witness this groundbreaking event.

The culmination of the match saw the presentation of champion and runner-up trophies, a symbolic gesture to these trailblazing girls. Camp in Charge Tanvir Ahmed expressed his admiration, foreseeing this event as a catalyst for breaking cultural barriers and social challenges in the Rohingya refugee camps during the FIFA World Cup season.

“After watching the boys' football match, I wanted to play, but I couldn't due to the atmosphere in the camp,” a teenage girl stated. “I enjoyed the match today and want to play more in the future”. Jahida Sultana Salma, Associate Officer – Community Centre, reflected on the initial fear and challenges of organising the match. “The success of the event brought immense joy, confidence, and a sense of accomplishment’ as she highlighted the profound impact on girls’ participation.

CBP's legacy extended beyond Camp 27, as they formed teenage girls' football teams in nine Rohingya camps. This initiative aimed not only to foster leadership development but also to uplift spirits and empower young girls, leaving an indelible mark on the community's collective journey towards progress and gender equality.

“My Dream is to Participate in the FIFA Women's World Cup.”



Rohingya refugee girls are enjoying a friendly football match



Prize-giving ceremony of the football match

Healing Power of the Art Club

Amidst the struggles and challenges in the refugee camp, a beacon of hope emerged in the form of an art club, courtesy of the Community-Based Protection programme of ActionAid Bangladesh. Their mission was clear, to alleviate the mental anguish plaguing the children in the camp, where almost one in five suffered from severe mental health issues.

The Rohingya refugees, grappling with restrictions on livelihoods, movement, and education, found solace in the art club established by CBP in the NRC camp. With limited access to essential services, the lives of these children became even more challenging, increasing the risk of kidnapping, accidents, human trafficking, and involvement in crime.

The art club, with its 21 members, including two individuals with disabilities, became a haven for creative expression. CBP, acting as facilitators, provided art materials and technical support, creating an environment conducive to artistic exploration. Through audio-visual sessions, the children were sensitised about life skills, while CBP connected them with various service providers organising art competitions in the camps.

The outcomes were inspiring. The art club members not only competed but triumphed in painting competitions themed around 'World Environment Day,' 'World Refugee Day,' '16 Days of Activism,' and 'World Hand Washing Day'. During a visit by delegates to the NRC community centre, the young artists proudly shared their creations.

Motaleb, the leader of the Art Club, stated, "Leading meetings enhances my leadership skills and empowers me. The art club serves as a relief and peaceful place for me." Another member, Rabi Alam, expressed, "Sketching connects me to a world of beauty and heals my pain in the camps." Md. Golam Kebria, the Community Centre Associate Officer who initiated the art club, shared, "I took the initiative to promote children's mental growth, protect them from accidents, and foster unity and solidarity. Children's participation in the community centre has increased, and one of the significant achievements is that they consider me as a family member."

CBP believes that engaging in art activities is a human right for refugees, allowing them to express their culture, personal freedom, and spirit. It serves as a therapeutic outlet, platform, and opportunity to spread positive vibrations in the Rohingya refugee camps.

Healing Power of the Art Club



Rohingya Refugee Children were expressing their feelings through painting

Promoting the Use of Environment Friendly Bags

In the Rohingya Refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, a Community Group under CBP promotes the use of cloth bags as opposed to disposable ones to decrease the use of single-use plastic.

Nur Nahar, a dedicated member of the community group in Camp 11, voiced her concerns during a planning meeting. She highlighted the adverse impact of plastic waste on the camp's environment, citing choked drains that heightened the risk of mosquito-borne illnesses like dengue and malaria. Recognising the gravity of the situation, she emphasised the need for a sustainable solution, especially with the surge in plastic usage amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The planning meeting sparked a vibrant discussion among community members. Echoing Nur Nahar's sentiments, they collectively agreed that eco-friendly cloth bags were the answer. These bags, deemed durable, long-lasting, biodegradable, cost-effective, reusable, and recyclable, promise no negative impact on the environment or health. Fatema Khatun (28), another community member, pointed out, "The accumulation of polythene in the soil has created a false layer acting as a hindrance between the soil and water." Morjina (32), a community group member, stated, "We will make cotton bags from our old clothes, such as bed sheets, and encourage other refugees to do the same."

It's remarkable to witness the changing attitudes and perceptions of the community members. This small act of making cloth bags will one day bring a positive change in the Rohingya Refugee camps. CBP is actively conducting awareness sessions, tree planting, and other activities in the Rohingya refugee camps to transform the views, behaviour, and practises of the Rohingya refugees, alleviating the effects of climate change and water, air, and soil pollution.



Rohingya refugee women were sewing eco-friendly bags

Library: A Beacon of Hope for Us

'For me, the CBP library at the community centre is a sanctuary of peacefulness. Everything around me fades when I start reading books in the library, and I forget about all the atrocities inflicted by the Myanmar army and the difficulties within the camp'. Mohammed Zubair, a 16-year-old who lives with his six family members in a crowded shelter in Rohingya Refugee Camp 12, Cox's Bazar, said, 'It takes me to another place where I can see, feel, hear, and sometimes even smell what the author is describing'.

Despite the absence of formal education opportunities, Zubair's intense desire to study led him to private lessons within the camp. However, the lack of a conducive study environment in his shelter left him often upset. As word spread around the camp about a library opening, the community centre—a spot for play with friends—became even more significant.

Overjoyed, Zubair exclaimed, "Yeah! Now I can read new books in the library". He made it a daily ritual to visit the library, bringing his books along. Inspired by Zubair, more teenage boys joined in, studying together and supporting each other. They not only engaged themselves in reading but also shared stories with little children in the community.

Expressing his love for the smell of new books, Zubair voiced a desire for more educational books, envisioning a colourful and vibrant library that would encourage the entire community to read and foster harmony. Currently, the Camp 12 library boasts 85 story and educational books, with 'Neighbour' holding a special place as Zubair's favourite.

The library and community centre were established with a purpose — to engage adolescents, safeguard them from trafficking and illegal activities, alleviate emotional pain and trauma, build resilience, and empower the community. CBP's seven libraries across seven camps have proven successful, making significant contributions to the betterment of the Rohingya community.



A smiling face studying in the CBP library

Jornisha Begum's Heartwarming Smile

In Camp 12, Jornisha Begum, a 63-year-old woman, found herself in a desperate situation caring for her mentally and physically ill husband. Her two sons and daughter, living in different camps, were unable to provide support. Fleeing Myanmar during the 2017 persecution by the Myanmar Army, Jornisha lost her husband at the border.

A glimmer of hope emerged four and a half years later when fishermen informed her that her husband was spotted on Teknaf beach. Rushing to Teknaf, she found him, but the cruel twist of fate revealed that he didn't recognise her due to his mental condition. Despite the reunion, her husband's inability to walk properly was a result of the horrors he faced — torture, witnessing the murder of loved ones, and the loss of his family. Bringing him from Teknaf to Camp 12 wasn't without challenges. His lack of registration data meant no Moha ID card, depriving him of food and medical support. Jornisha tirelessly sought help from various institutions but faced delays.

As a last resort, she turned to AAB, and ISC, lodging her complaint. The ISC team, recognising the urgency, swiftly engaged with the UNHCR protection focal and the CiC. Sensing the sensitivity of the case, the CiC expedited the approval process. The UNHCR registrar team visited Jornisha's shelter, collected her husband's information, and arranged a Moha ID for him.

Regular food support began arriving, but the absence of a ration card posed a challenge. The ISC team stepped in, providing a referral card monthly to ensure a smooth food supply for Jornisha's husband. The follow-up continued as the UNHCR registration team worked towards issuing an FCN card.

With gratitude in her heart, Jornisha returned, her smile conveying relief. "I am expressing my profound gratitude to AAB, for rapidly solving my problem and making my life a little bit easier. Now I got back my husband so I don't need anything; now I can die peacefully," she shared, acknowledging the vital role played by AAB and UNHC in providing the support she and her husband desperately needed.



Smiling Jornisha Begum

Restoration of a Pathway

Winding through the heart of Camp 11, a crowded trail serves as a lifeline for over 115 Rohingya and host community members each day. The pathway, marred by damage, posed risks, particularly for the disabled, older individuals, and children. Expressing their gratitude, a Rohingya woman living by the trail lauded the swift action of the Community Group under CBP for repairing the pathway and promptly addressing the community's concerns.

The urgency became apparent when a child from the host community suffered an injury due to the damaged pathway. Rohingya residents also faced challenges transporting heavy items like gas cylinders and rations, exacerbated during rainy days. During a block visit, Md. Khan of the Community Men Group identified the issue and proposed a solution, sparking a collective effort.

Recognising the importance, Community Group Members initiated the repair project after discussions and planning sessions. Collaborating with the host community, they worked together to mend the pathway, showcasing the power of unity in addressing shared challenges. Notably, the Community Group Members under CBP, unpaid volunteers dedicated to tackling challenges and protection risks in the camp, demonstrated their commitment to community welfare. In 2022, the focus of Community Group Members expanded to promote social cohesion and peaceful coexistence, addressing concerns about conflicts between the host and Rohingya communities. Acknowledging the pivotal role of such initiatives, a member of the host community emphasised, 'We all believe that such initiatives can develop the bond between Rohingya and the host community'.

Across the nine Rohingya camps, including Camps 8E, 8W, 9, 10, 11, 12, 26, 27, and NRC, 40 Community Groups with 800 unpaid volunteers are actively working to strengthen community resilience and empowerment under the AAB Community Groups, part of the CBP initiative.



Community Group, fosters social cohesion through the restoration of a pathway

Cake Festival : A Symbol of Social Cohesion

In the heart of Camp-12, a sweet aroma wafted through the air on June 6, 2022, marking a unique and heartwarming event – the 'Cake Festival' organized by AAB Community Groups, under CBP. This event aimed to transcend boundaries, fostering social cohesion and coexistence between the host and Rohingya communities.

Recognizing the concerning conflicts that arose after the Rohingya influx, AAB Community Groups took a remarkable step towards building trust, respect, and friendship. The festival, organized by the community youth girls and women groups, received support from the CBP, which provided some food materials for both the Rohingya and host communities. With a spirit of collaboration, they prepared a variety of cakes such as 'Choi Fakkon, Foni Pitha, Vath Pitha, Goja, and Dhup-Paich Pitha,' containing flavours from their respective cultures. Both communities gathered to taste the homemade treats, creating a shared experience that brought joy.

CiC Rabindra Chakma, representatives from ActionAid Bangladesh, and UNHCR, the president of the host community, site management representatives, and other guests graced the occasion. They shared positive remarks, acknowledging the significance of the program in fostering unity. CiC Rabindra Chakma commended on the initiative, stating, "CBP of AAB has set an example through this cake festival regarding establishing social cohesion and co-existence between the host and Rohingya community. This initiative is quite inspiring. Requesting all the actors to arrange this type of festival between two communities in the camp".

Following the festivities, women from both communities came together to plant trees, symbolizing the growth of a shared future. Tosmin, the community group member, expressed her emotions, saying, "In our home country, we used to bake these cakes and share them. After many years, we recreated the experience here in Bangladesh. We are pleased to have prepared these cakes for the neighbouring host community members living beside us". Nilufa, a woman from the host community, echoed similar sentiments, stating, "Today, the refugees extended an invitation to us, and they generously baked numerous cakes. We appreciate their gesture, and in the future, we commit to reciprocate and assist them whenever needed".

This program not only showcased the unity between the two communities but also highlighted the meaningful engagement of women. Both communities believe that this initiative is a powerful gesture of peaceful coexistence, paving the way for harmonious days ahead.

Cake Festival : A Symbol of Social Cohesion



Highlights from the Cake Festival

An Iftar Event in the Rohingya Camps

The Rohingya influx in 2017 left a lasting impact on the host communities in Cox's Bazar. Initially sympathetic, their humanitarian spirit faded with the negative repercussions, particularly on livelihoods, employment, land access, and the environment in Ukhiya and Teknaf. The resulting conflict became a pressing concern for the government, emphasising the need to bolster a sense of belonging, trust, and mutual respect between the host and Rohingya communities.

To address this, CBP organised a friendly iftar event in Camps 27, 11, and 12 with the host community as part of social cohesion and coexistence efforts. Camp 27 held the event at the mosque of block C8 on April 27, 2022, while Camps 11 and 12 arranged theirs on May 1, 2022, in the community centre and block, respectively.

In Camp 11, Sirajul Hoque, a community group member, took the lead, inviting people from the host community and treating them as guests. Bringing items like watermelon and chickpeas themselves, the participants totalled 52, with 20 hosts and 32 Rohingya. A Rohingya participant shared, "It is a kind gesture of social cohesion that will contribute to future harmonious habitation. It will strengthen our relationship and understanding of the host community".

Mohammad Soyod (42), a host community member who attended the iftar, expressed his sentiments, saying, "We are glad that individuals from the community group have invited us to participate in the iftar together. Similar to what they did for us, we hope to do something for them in the future." Impressed by the Community Group's work, four individuals from the host community joined as volunteers.

Both communities believe that this programme is a crucial step toward strengthening bonds for the future. The three pillars of CBP are actively working to foster faith and regard between the host and Rohingya communities in the camps.

An Iftar Event in the Rohingya Camps



A representation of social unity

Sylhet Flood Emerges in Rohingya Child's Painting

In Camp NRC, an aspiring artist named Robi Alam, just 11 years old, dreams of becoming a renowned painter. His parents arrived from Myanmar in 1994, settling in the Nayapara Registered Refugee Camp. Robi's artistic journey, however, began long before he can remember.

Passionate about painting, Robi's artistic talents flourished, earning him numerous prizes for his exceptional artwork on World Refugee Day. The accolades fuelled his ambition to pursue art. Despite the challenges and limited resources in the camp, Robi turned every opportunity into a canvas, expressing his thoughts, emotions, and feelings through his art. Reflecting on his creative process, Robi shared, 'Despite facing challenges, I seize every opportunity to translate my thoughts and emotions into art.'

One impactful moment that stirred his artistic soul occurred when he saw a news broadcast about a devastating flood in Sylhet, leaving millions homeless and desperate for food and water. The news struck a chord within Robi, evoking memories of the plight of his fellow Rohingya in 2017. Unable to sleep, he spent the entire night contemplating the situation in Sylhet and wishing he could stand beside the vulnerable people there. In the morning, he headed to the AAB community centre in NRC, determined to translate his emotions onto paper.

'Inspired by the resilience of the people in Sylhet, I began translating my feelings, emotions, and thoughts onto paper. Despite my wish to help, as a refugee without the power to make a difference, I express my solidarity through my sketches,' Robi expressed, turning his art into a powerful emblem of empathy and solidarity.



The Sylhet flood through the empathetic eyes of a Rohingya child

Rescuing Abducted Child from Human Trafficking

Human trafficking poses a discrete threat that has crept into the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar. Since the influx in 2017, the border area has become a hotbed for this illicit trade. The vulnerable conditions in the camps, marked by unemployment, poverty, insecurity, and inadequate access to livelihoods, make the refugees easy prey for traffickers. Recognising the severity of the issue, the Bangladesh government, NGOs, and international organisations have joined forces to combat human trafficking.

At the forefront of this battle is the Community-Based Protection (CBP) programme of AAB, with support from UNHCR. Their focus is on empowering the community to prevent human trafficking. They've trained 96 Community Outreach Members (COMs) volunteers and 780 Community Group volunteers working at the block and sub-block levels. These volunteers conduct awareness sessions on trafficking and missing child reunification, actively involving the community.

During a routine block visit, Md. Ismile, a dedicated COM volunteer from Camp 12, noticed a group of people engaged in an animated conversation. Sensing something amiss, he approached them and discovered they were distressed over a lost child. Growing suspicious, Md. Ismile delved deeper into the matter, suspecting human trafficking might be at play. A familiar face in the crowd confirmed his fears.

After gaining the trust of the concerned parents, Md. Ismile learnt the harrowing story of a 12-year-old child abducted after Eid ul-Fitr 2022. The distraught parent had kept it a secret, attempting to find the child independently. It was only after a month of despair that they discovered a neighbour had kidnapped and sold their child to settle a debt.

Swiftly, Md. Ismile accompanied the parents to the BLAST Legal Team. Through a joint effort with the Bangladesh Police, the child was rescued and safely reunited with the family. Overwhelmed with gratitude, the parents expressed, "I extend my heartfelt gratitude to COM volunteer Md. Ismile for the invaluable assistance in reuniting me with my child. I appreciate the efforts that brought my child back to me. My sincere thanks to CBP/ActionAid Bangladesh for their support".

CBP remains committed to creating a safe and secure environment for the Rohingya people, regularly conducting awareness sessions and providing support to combat the looming threat of human trafficking.

Rescuing Abducted Child from Human Trafficking



The son with his mother

“I feel proud to work as a humanitarian worker”

In Cox's Bazar, where the Rohingya camps stand as a testament to resilience, World Humanitarian Day was celebrated. Community-Based Protection (CBP), supported by UNHCR, orchestrated a celebration across camps 8E, 8W, 9, 10, 11, 12, 26, 27, and NRC on the 19th of August 2022. This day held a profound theme: “It Takes a Village,” acknowledging the collective effort needed to support those in humanitarian crises.

The date, chosen in remembrance, marks the tragic bombing of a UN conference centre in Baghdad in 2003, claiming the lives of Sergio Vieira de Mello, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and 21 other heroes in the field of humanitarian work. In Cox's Bazar, the emergency created by the Rohingya influx in 2017 brought forth a wave of dedicated humanitarian workers, both Bangladeshi and Rohingya, striving to ease suffering.

CBP seized the opportunity to honour their contributions through a series of activities. Awareness sessions, life stories, and experience sharing unfolded in the camps. A total of 227 individuals, spanning across different demographics, participated in 28 sessions. The discussions delved into the significance of the day, the history behind it, and the crucial role each person plays in upholding human rights.

Community members appreciated, stating, “They should spread positive messages globally to ensure humanitarian practises, and the world can support affected people in reclaiming their rights.” Two adolescent girls shared their feelings, saying, “We didn't know the importance of the day, but the session encourages us to work as humanitarian workers.” In the CBP programme, 899 unpaid volunteers, 134 paid volunteers, and 50 staff members are dedicated to improving the lives of vulnerable Rohingya refugees.



“Humanitarian workers should support and protect people in need with solidarity.”

Representation of Rohingya Culture Through Paintings

"I am Md. Aiyas, residing in Camp 11 at the Rohingya refugee settlement in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Since childhood, I aspired to become an artist. Sketching on any available surface was my passion. However, the 2017 genocide in Myanmar shattered my dreams, forcing my family to flee to Bangladesh.

Life in the camps brought its challenges, and I sank into depression. It was during this difficult period that I found solace as a COM volunteer with CBP, of ActionAid Bangladesh. Recognising my artistic talent, AAB offered support, rekindling my dream. I began portraying my life in Myanmar, the struggles in the camp, and the dreams and hopes of the Rohingya community.

The appreciation from AAB and UNHCR fuelled my determination to create even better artwork. I don't see myself solely as a refugee; I am a citizen of Myanmar. My ultimate goal is to return to Myanmar with full rights and dignity. On World Refugee Day, I sought to capture the culture, traditions, and persecution of the Rohingya people through my art.

These paintings also symbolise my vision of repatriation, depicting a future where I engage in daily activities independently and with dignity. I aspire to leverage my artistic talent as an asset for the Rohingya community. One of my greatest ambitions is to establish an art school in Rakhine, nurturing young talents who will become the world's best painters, representing Myanmar and Rohingya culture, tradition, and heritage globally"



Md. Aiyas depicts Rohingya culture through sketches

Sustainable Solutions and Protection for the Rohingya Community in Camps

