

Survey of humanitarian staff in Bangladesh

March 2019



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Introduction

This report on the views of humanitarian staff in Bangladesh is part of a project to understand how people affected by crises and humanitarian field staff perceive the impact of the Grand Bargain commitments.

Humanitarian staff were surveyed using an online survey completed by 96 staff members of international and national organisations, as well as UN agencies. The survey was live for three and a half months in the latter half of 2018.

The research is a joint effort by Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Secretariat with financial support from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Bangladesh is one of the seven countries covered by this research. The others are Afghanistan, Uganda, Haiti, Iraq, Lebanon and Somalia.

Executive summary

This summary covers the main findings of humanitarian staff survey, with responses to the full set of questions included in subsequent sections. The first sets of responses are aligned with two of the objectives of the 2018 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis. The last three relate to broader themes of the Grand Bargain: reporting, localisation and the nexus between development and humanitarian aid.

Provide timely lifesaving assistance and protection as well as improve the living conditions of Rohingya refugees

- While only 24% of Rohingya feel their needs are met, 70% of humanitarian staff believe the needs of affected people are covered by the aid provided. Staff who provide aid or services to both Rohingya and host communities are more positive about the impact of their work, with 77% responding that people's needs are covered, compared to 55% among those who only serve Rohingya communities
- Humanitarian staff are confident that the aid reaches those most in need, with 86% responding positively.

Well-being and dignity

- Seventy-five percent of humanitarian staff feel that staff in Bangladesh treat affected populations with respect.
- Sixty percent of staff believe agencies take corrective action in project implementation based on feedback from affected people.
- The majority of staff (85%) say their organisation systematically collects the views of affected people during the design and implementation of a programme. A notable 92% of those who collect the views of affected people feel their organisation regularly uses the collected data to inform or adjust programming.
- Eighty-four percent of staff are convinced that Rohingya will receive a response if they make a complaint to their organisation.

Throughout this report, references are made to Rohingya data. A full report including the views of both Rohingya and humanitarian staff can be found here: groundtruthsolutions.org/our-work/tracking-the-grand-bargain-from-a-field-perspective/.

More recent findings from Rohingya and host communities in Bangladesh can be found here: groundtruthsolutions.org/our-work/feedback-rohingya-bangladesh/.

Reporting and programmatic flexibility

- Just over half (56%) of staff feel time spent on reporting is 'mostly' or 'very' appropriate, although an almost equal number (55%) feel reporting requirements from different donors are insufficiently harmonised. Staff also mention a need to allow for more contextualisation in reporting.
- Opinions among staff on programmatic flexibility are split, with roughly half (51%) feeling that humanitarian organisations working in Cox's Bazar have the flexibility to adjust their projects and programmes when conditions change. Some mention that flexibility often depends on the Bangladeshi Government's policies and regulations, in addition to those of the donors.

Localisation

- Fifty-four percent of staff, most of whom work for international agencies, feel local and national aid providers receive sufficient support in Bangladesh. However, roughly one-third of staff do not think local organisations in Bangladesh have the capacity to deliver high-quality assistance.
- Staff who work in organisations delivering aid to both host and Rohingya communities are more positive about local capacity to deliver assistance than those only involved in programming targeting Rohingya.
- Staff believe a combination of local and international organisations are best placed to provide aid in Bangladesh (78%), as opposed to international or local organisations individually. There is a sense that local organisations are able to provide contextual knowledge and skills, while international organisations bring greater experience in handling large-scale responses involving international funding and humanitarian standards and frameworks.



Camp 2E in the Kutupalong-Balukhali 'mega camp', October 2018
Rebecca Hetzer (GTS)

Humanitarian-development nexus

- Staff see an imbalance in funding between emergency relief and durable solutions, with a majority of respondents (72%) in favour of investing more in durable solutions. There is also a sense that humanitarian and development actors could work together more effectively, with 52% expressing doubts as to the effectiveness of existing cooperation between humanitarian and development organisations in the area.
- Less than half (44%) of staff believe cash programmes in Bangladesh contribute to better outcomes than other kinds of aid, with some raising issues around corruption, increased vulnerability or misuse of cash. Proponents of cash programming believe it would boost the local economy, allow for greater choice and mitigate the current coping mechanisms of selling aid items for cash in informal markets. Despite some scepticism as to whether cash programmes contribute to better outcomes, 70% say their organisation has increased the share of cash-based programming in the past year.

Survey data - Humanitarian staff

Reading this section

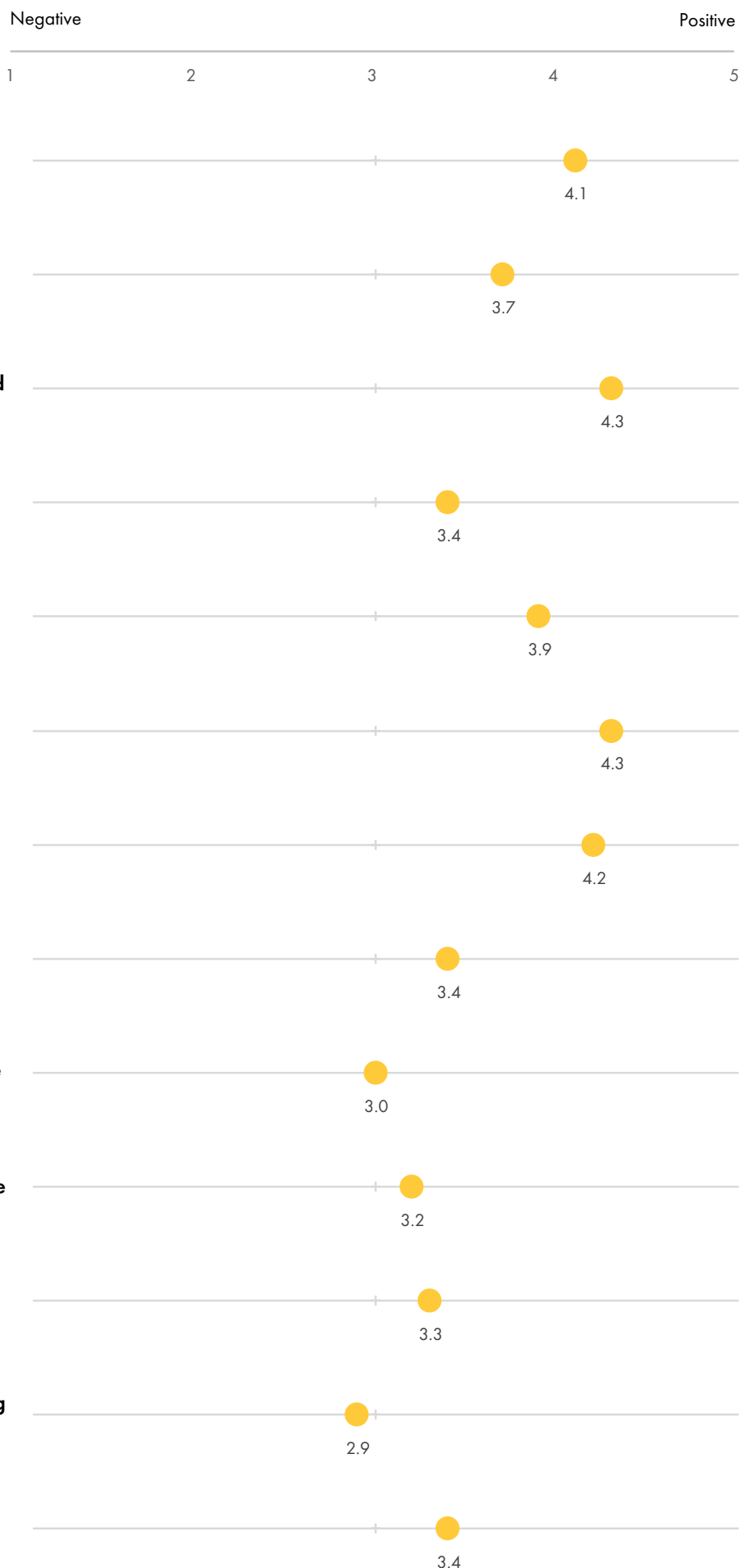
The following sections use simple bar charts for both open and closed questions. Responses to closed questions are reported using a Likert scale from 1–5. The mean score is also shown. The bar charts for closed questions show the percentage of respondents who selected each answer option, with colours ranging from dark red for negative answers to dark green for positive ones. The analysis includes any significant difference in the perceptions of different demographic groups. It does not, however, show the full breakdown of responses according to these categories.

For open questions, the percentage and frequency with answers pertaining to a particular question do not always total 100% where respondents are given the option to provide multiple answers.

Sample of the humanitarian staff survey

Data was collected between 1 August and 15 November 2018 using an online survey from 96 humanitarian staff members working in Bangladesh for UN, international agencies and local organisations. Organisations participated in and distributed the online survey among their staff. For more information on the sampling approach, see the [Annex: Notes on methodology](#).

Overview of findings



Do you feel reporting requirements from different donors are sufficiently harmonised?

2.6

Are there sufficient coordination efforts between organisations working here?

3.2

Do humanitarian and development actors work together effectively in Bangladesh?

3.2

To what extent does multi-year funding contribute to better results?

4.3

Do you feel safe in the area where you work?

4.0



85%

of staff say their organisation systematically collects the views of affected people during design and implementation of programme.



82%

of staff think joint donor field visits are better than individual ones.



76%

of staff say their organisation regularly conducts joint need assessments with other organisations.



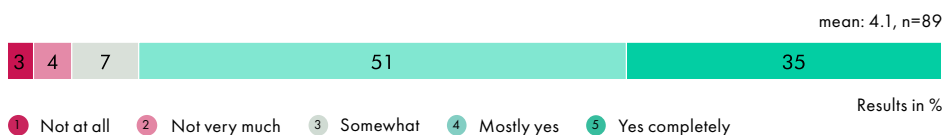
51%

of staff say their organisation shares logistical assets with other humanitarian organisations.

Survey questions

Q1. Fairness

Does aid provision go to those who need it most?



Twenty percent of humanitarian staff at organisations solely targeting Rohingya populations do not believe that aid provision goes to those most in need, while all staff who work with both Rohingya and host communities believe aid goes to those most in need.

Organisation works with Rohingya and host communities mean: 4.2, n=52



Organisation only works with Rohingya communities mean: 3.9, n=35



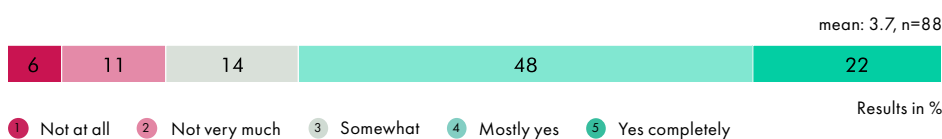
Results in %



Most agencies provide support only to geographically immediate host communities to the Rohingya camps. However, the environmental, financial, infrastructure and social impacts affect people across the whole district, particularly the extreme poor who are almost as vulnerable as the Rohingya.

Q2. Relevance

Does the aid provided cover the most important needs of affected people?



Again, those providing aid or services to both Rohingya and host communities are more positive about the impact of their work, with 77% responding that people's needs are covered, compared to 55% among those who only provide aid or services to Rohingya communities.

Organisation works with Rohingya and host communities mean: 3.9, n=52



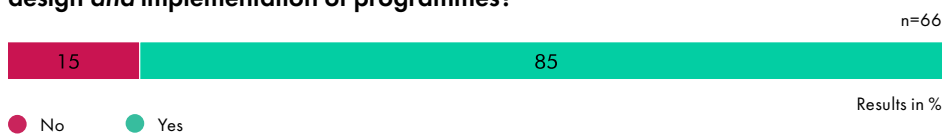
Organisation only works with Rohingya communities mean: 3.4, n=34



Results in %

Q3. Participation during design and implementation

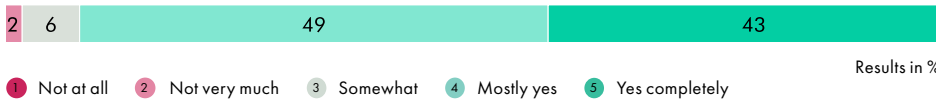
Does your organisation systematically collect the views of affected people during design and implementation of programmes?



Q4. Use of data to inform programming

Does your organisation regularly use data on the views of affected people to inform/adjust programming?

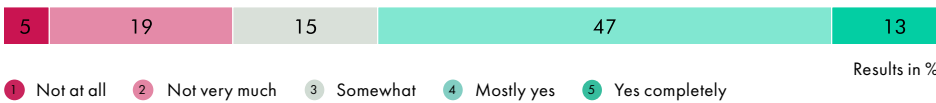
mean: 4.3, n=51



Q5. Corrective action

Do agencies take corrective action in project implementation based on feedback from affected people?

mean: 3.4, n=78



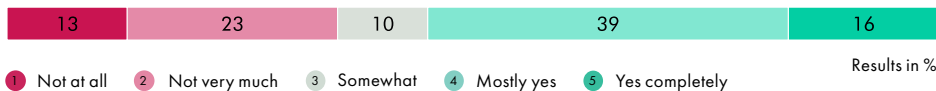
Organisation works with Rohingya and host communities

mean: 3.6, n=45



Organisation only works with Rohingya communities

mean: 3.2, n=31



Often agencies are too busy trying to implement, meet donor deadlines and milestones that they do not have the space to think about changing course. The larger the programme, or organisation, the harder it is to change course, even if there is evidence to suggest a change is needed.



It could be better by increasing the number of agencies contributing data to the collective feedback analysis initiative, *What Matters?*. Hold agencies to account – at sector level – for how they have adapted in response to feedback.

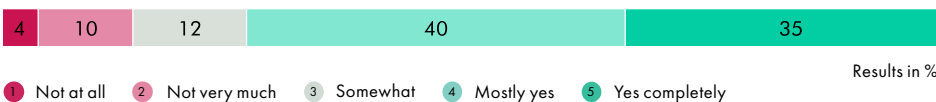


Feedback is welcome but not always actionable because of pre-agreed donor requirements.

Q6. Respect

Do humanitarian staff in Bangladesh treat affected people with respect?

mean: 3.9, n=83

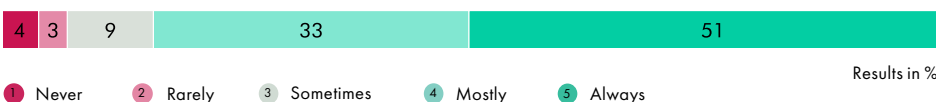


Staff are slightly more negative than Rohingya, of whom 8% responded negatively, compared to 14% among staff.

Q7. Complaints mechanisms

If people make a complaint to your organisation, will they get a response?

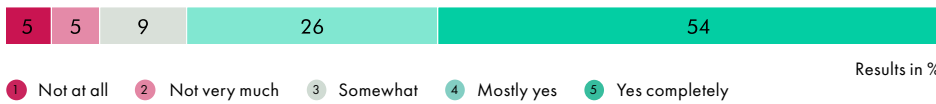
mean: 4.3, n=78



Q8. Reporting mistreatment

Would you feel comfortable reporting instances of humanitarian staff mistreating affected people?

mean: 4.2, n=76



Have you reported instances of mistreatment?

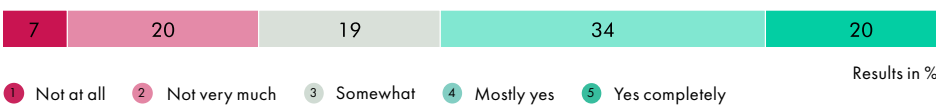
n=71



Q9. Localisation

Do local and national aid providers receive sufficient support in Bangladesh?

mean: 3.4, n=70



“

There are considerable resources diverted to managing the government's requirements and processes, which are extremely lengthy and time-consuming. There is a lack of localisation of aid delivery and a high number of international organisations and staff which should have been localised.

“

Before commencing activities, donors and international NGOs need to assess whether a local partner can effectively deliver the services required and prioritise them. They need to refer to the Grand Bargain and uphold those obligations. And donors, in particular, need to express this priority in their funding allocations.

Q10. Local capacity

Do local organisations in Bangladesh have the capacity to deliver high-quality assistance?

mean: 3.0, n=85



“

I think they have the knowledge, skills and local links to deliver assistance very effectively; but they are constrained and frustrated because they have to work within an international system that they are not familiar with.

Organisation works with Rohingya and host communities

mean: 3.2, n=53



Organisation only works with Rohingya communities

mean: 2.8, n=31



Results in %

Q11. Aid providers

Who is best placed to provide aid in Bangladesh? (n=89)

78% A combination of local and international organisations

16% International organisations

7% Local organisations



International NGOs theoretically have the capacity – they should be tapping into international expertise – and can bring in the funds and logistics. Local organisations have the relationships, local knowledge, cultural understanding and local staff.

Q12. Cash programmes

Do cash programmes in Bangladesh contribute to better outcomes than other kinds of aid?

mean: 3.2, n=62



Results in %

1 Not at all 2 Not very much 3 Somewhat 4 Mostly yes 5 Yes completely

Has your organisation increased or decreased the share of cash-based programming in the past year? (n=40)

∨ **8%** Clearly decreased

∨ **2%** Decreased a little

= **20%** Stayed the same

∧ **42%** Increased a little

∧ **28%** Clearly increased

Q13. Flexibility

Do humanitarian organisations working here have the flexibility to adjust their projects and programmes when conditions change?

mean: 3.3, n=73



Results in %

1 Not at all 2 Not very much 3 Somewhat 4 Mostly yes 5 Yes completely



It could be improved by developing a system where humanitarian aid can be approved through a local government entity rather than the NGO Affairs Bureau in Dhaka. That way the local authorities have more understanding and can liaise with local actors. Right now, there is a big disconnect.



It is very donor dependent. Mostly, the lack of flexibility lies with the government FD7 approvals that are rigid and must stay exactly the same, down to the unit price of a bar of soap. Deviating from that causes negative repercussions.

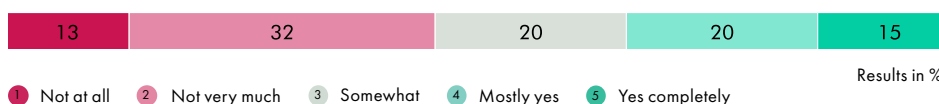


The organisations have flexibility but the government and its representatives may not always reflect this or allow it.

Q14. Durable solutions

Is there an adequate balance between funding for emergency needs and funding for durable solutions?

mean: 2.9, n=71



Results in %

The majority (72%) of those who think there is an inadequate balance believe more funding should go towards durable solutions.

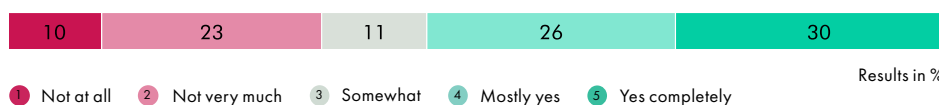


Construction with permanent materials needs to be allowed in camps so funding can be channelled to areas other than maintenance of buildings that are easily destroyed in a cyclone. Formal employment and education opportunities need to be allowed and provided so there are opportunities for the Rohingya to build a life for themselves and support the local economy.

Q15. Reporting time

Do you feel the amount of time you spend on reporting is appropriate?

mean: 3.4, n=81



Results in %



We are accountable to donors just as we are accountable to the communities with whom we engage. It is a challenge, but it is crucial to provide timely reports on how resources are being spent just as it is critical to be on the ground to monitor and gather the information required by donors.



My colleagues sometimes have to comb through 25 pages of questions for a single donor. It takes valuable time away from the operational needs at hand. The other reporting we contend with is reporting to the government every fortnight or monthly. This is time-consuming in its frequency.

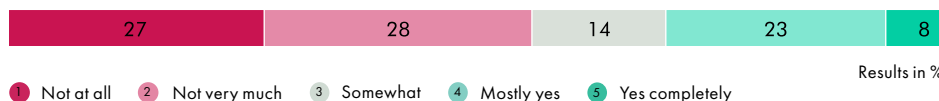


We spend a lot of time reporting. We should be smarter as an agency and donors should move to unified regulations and templates in order to save time and allocate more time to reach an impact on beneficiaries.

Q16. Reporting requirements

Do you feel reporting requirements from different donors are sufficiently harmonised?

mean: 2.6, n=64



Results in %

Q17. Donor visits

Are joint donor field visits better than individual ones?

n=55



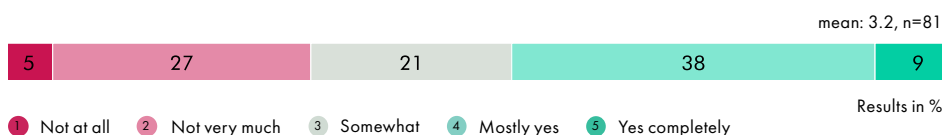
Results in %



Joint donor visits are more efficient and less intrusive to the communities with whom we work. They also keep everybody on the same page.

Q18. Coordination

Are there sufficient coordination efforts between organisations working here?



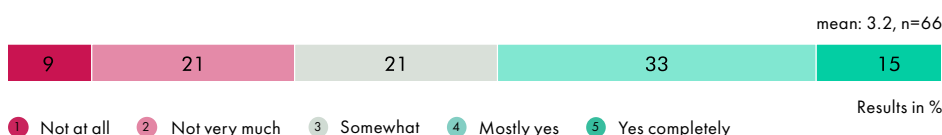
Sentiments around coordination are mixed – while some staff praise coordination efforts and bodies, including the Inter Sector Coordination Group, LogCluster and various working groups, others believe there is a climate of competition between organisations, leading to a lack of communication and duplication of efforts.



Camp coordination meetings need to be attended by staff that have some decision-making power. Field-level staff need more decision-making power, as management level staff can't attend each camp meeting.

Q19. Humanitarian-development nexus

Do humanitarian and development actors work together effectively in Bangladesh?



There should be a platform for discussing development issues related to the Rohingya crisis.



Agencies could bring in a development team to work alongside their emergency response teams.

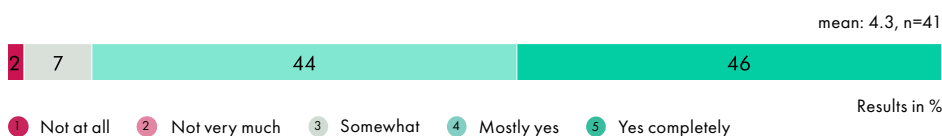
Q20. Funding

Does your organisation obtain multi-year funding?



Follow-up question asked to those who responded yes to the previous question:

Does multi-year funding contribute to better results?



Q21. Joint needs assessments

Does your organisation regularly conduct joint needs assessments with other organisations?



Q22. Logistical asset sharing

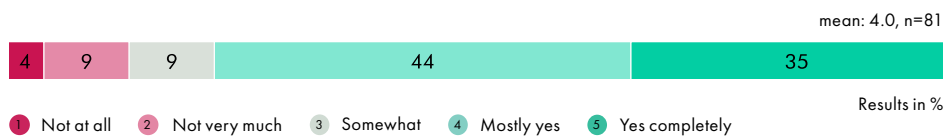
Does your organisation share logistical assets with other humanitarian organisations?



Those who share resources with other organisations mainly share vehicles, materials and equipment, office space and staff. Several believe it would be helpful if organisations shared security, or at least standards and analyses relating to security.

Q23. Safety

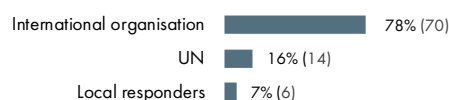
Do you feel safe in the area where you work?



Demographics

The graphs below depict the demographic breakdown of the 96 respondents in the field staff survey. Each graph includes percentages, as well as the frequency in parentheses.

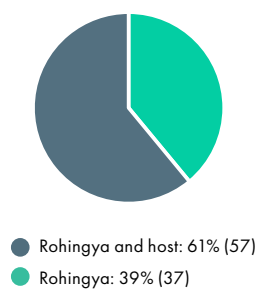
Type of organisation



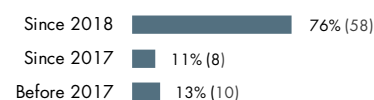
Role of staff member



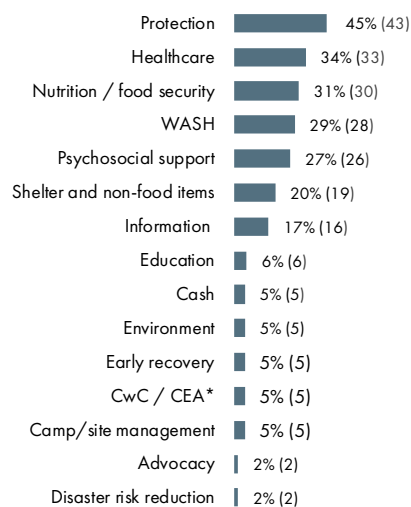
Target communities of aid/services



Time working on the response



Types of services provided



*CwC: Communicating with Communities
CEA: Community Engagement and Accountability

Note: Percentages do not total 100% because respondents were able to choose multiple answers.

Annex: Notes on methodology

Sampling methodology

Coordination groups, UN agencies, international NGOs, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and local/national organisations were approached to participate in the survey, employing a snowball sampling approach to disseminate the survey among staff and other organisations in working in Bangladesh. Staff from 32 organisations participated in the survey.

Question formulation

Questions for both the affected people and staff survey were formulated using the Grand Bargain commitments as a framework. The Grand Bargain has described the current aid system as a supply-driven model, which is dominated by providers.¹ We have looked to see whether a shift has occurred from this supply-driven model to one that is more demand-driven, with the aid system becoming more responsive to the people it set out to serve.²

- 1 "The Grand Bargain – A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need". Istanbul, Turkey, 23 May 2016. P.2
- 2 Ibid.

Field staff survey: matrix of Grand Bargain commitments and GTS question themes

	2. Localisation	3. Cash based programming	4. Reduce management costs	5. Improve needs assessments	6. Participation	7. Multi-year planning and funding	8. Reduce earmarking	9. Harmonise and simplify reporting requirements	10. Engagement between hum. & dev. actors
Fairness				X	X	X	X		
Safety									
Management of aid						X			
Reporting requirements			X	X				X	
Coordination			X						
Durable solutions							X		X
Perceptions of refugees					X				
Cash programmes		X							
Flexibility						X	X		
Reporting time								X	
Humanitarian development nexus									X
Participation					X				
Local capacity	X								

Data disaggregation

Data is disaggregated by which communities the organisations serve and whether logistical assets are shared with other organisations. The analysis in the report includes any significant difference in the perceptions of those categories. It does not, however, show the full breakdown of responses according to these categories. The sample size is too small to draw conclusions based on type of organisation, role of staff or time working in Bangladesh.

Language of the survey

This survey was conducted in English and Bangla.

Data collection

Data was collected between 1 August and 15 November 2018 using an online survey tool from 96 humanitarian staff members working in Bangladesh for UN agencies, international NGOs and local organisations. Organisations participating in the survey distributed the survey online to their staff.

Challenges and limitations

Low response rates and high drop-off rates. Responses were low and several reminder emails were sent in order to reach response figures which could be deemed statistically significant. In order to mitigate high drop-off rates, where respondents started but did not complete the survey, the questions were changed from mandatory to optional to allow staff to skip questions they felt were not relevant to them. The survey was kept open for longer than anticipated in order to reach a sufficient sample size.

Self-selection bias. Self-selection bias is applicable to any kind of social science research where participation is voluntary. Hence, the realised sample for this project is limited to humanitarian staff working in Bangladesh who received the survey link and who consented to partake in the survey. We have no reason to believe that respondents differed systematically from non-respondents, but the risk of such systematic deviations are important to keep in mind when interpreting the results.

For more information about Ground Truth Solutions surveys in Bangladesh, please contact Kai Hopkins (Senior Programme Manager – kai@groundtruthsolutions.org) or Rebecca Hetzer (Programme Officer – rebecca@groundtruthsolutions.org).



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