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Systematic Literature Review: 'Role of Listeners club in a Humanitarian Crisis situation' A Case study of Rohingya Camps, Bangladesh

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Abstract

Humanitarian emergencies, such as pandemics and natural disasters, have repeatedly exposed global vulnerabilities. While governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play critical roles in mitigating these crises, access to timely and accurate information is paramount. Such information enables affected communities to benefit from the assistance provided by humanitarian workers effectively. The 2017 Rohingya crisis is a significant example of such an emergency. Forced to flee persecution, over one million Rohingya people now reside in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, home to the world's largest and most densely populated refugee camps. Despite the efforts of donor organizations, the community remains dependent on external aid and continues to face multiple challenges. Effective communication is essential in this context to inform individuals about available assistance, ensure security, and dispel harmful rumours. This study employs a Systematic Literature Review to examine the role and significance of 'listener's clubs in disseminating information and countering misinformation within Rohingya refugee camps. Drawing on frameworks such as the Two-Step Flow Model, and the KAP Model and Humanitarian Communication model, the research explores the nature, impact, and relevance of listeners' clubs during various phases of the humanitarian emergency.

Keywords: Rohingyas, Humanitarian Emergencies, Information Communication Technology, Listener's club, Information hub, Systematic Literature Review, Mental Noise Model, Audio Platforms, Humanitarian Communication, KAP Model, Cox's Bazar.

Introduction

Humanitarian crises, driven by armed conflict, natural disasters, and forced displacement, affect millions of people globally, exacerbating widespread suffering and vulnerability(1, 2). Currently, nearly 80 million individuals are forcibly displaced(3), with one in every six children residing in

or near conflict zones(4). These emergencies may be triggered by both natural disasters-such as the recent earthquake in Syria and Turkey-and manmade or technological disasters, including the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, Yemen, South Sudan, and Syria (4).

Forced displacement can be either international, as seen with the influx of refugees into countries like Lebanon and Bangladesh, or internal, as evidenced by large-scale displacement in regions such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and, more recently, Cameroon (2).

Emergencies involving forced displacement and refugee populations are often marked by instability and unpredictability. Humanitarian organizations face significant challenges in determining how to deliver life-saving assistance to large numbers of displaced individuals(5).In such crises, humanitarian actors must adapt their responses to the evolving needs of affected communities while also fulfilling the commitments outlined in initiatives like the Grand Bargain(6).and the World Humanitarian Summit, particularly those related to accountability to affected populations.

Humanitarian emergencies, particularly those involving large-scale displacement, create environments of extreme vulnerability, psychological stress, and a need for effective communication and community support. One innovative method for addressing these challenges is through "Listeners' Clubs," which have gained attention for their potential role in fostering psychological well-being and social cohesion in such contexts.

With the help of Literature review of around 18 papers and 06 websites,the researcher aims to seek answers of three questions:

Research Questions

1. What is the role of Listeners clubs in establishing communication in the Rohingya camps in the Cox's Bazaar?
2. How is the creation of Listeners clubs go with the concept of Humanitarian Communication?
3. How as a platform of Communications, the Listeners clubs are contributing in curbing rumours and misinformation?

Theoretical Framework

The listeners clubs need to be looked at through the lens of Humanitarian Communication. Raymond, Card, and al Achkar (2015) authored an article titled "What is Humanitarian Communication?" for the European Interagency Security Forum, in which they outlined three key criteria that should define communication activities as humanitarian communication. These criteria, known as the Three "P's"-Populations, Principles, and Purposes-serve as foundational elements for effective humanitarian communication. "Populations" refers to both the crisis-affected people and the organizations working to assist them, who communicate with each other using information and communication technologies (ICTs). "Principles" encompass the four basic principles outlined in the NGO Code of Conduct: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. "Purpose" relates to communication efforts aimed at saving lives and preserving dignity.

Some researchers, such as Wilson, Moses, and Wilson (2019), emphasize the importance of establishing feedback mechanisms to create a two-way flow of information between humanitarian actors and affected communities. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2014), feedback mechanisms allow for effective monitoring and provide a way for communities to hold humanitarian organizations accountable. IOM has conceptualized a model of humanitarian communication, identifying two essential components: (1) taking into account the information needs and feedback from affected communities when developing an appropriate information response, and (2) providing communications services to humanitarian actors by disseminating assistance-related information to those communities (Wilson, Moses, & Wilson, 2019).

In their article Principles and Practice of Humanitarian Communication during and After Natural Disasters and Armed Conflicts, researchers identified three types of humanitarian communication: operational communication, beneficiary communication, and communication for development (C4D). Operational communication involves the exchange of information between humanitarian workers and key interlocutors, such as government officials, academics, or civil society representatives. Beneficiary communication encourages individuals in crisis settings to engage in two-way communication and provide feedback after receiving essential information. C4D focuses on fostering participation and promoting social change by utilizing interpersonal communication, community media, and modern information technologies. Its goal is to enhance community engagement, social mobilization, and behavior change (Wilson et al., 2019).

Radio and audio content, as a communication tool and the Listeners clubs as communication platform, encompasses both beneficiary communication and communication for development, making it, as this study's researcher believes, a valuable tool for humanitarian communication in the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Background of the Rohingya Camps in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh

In August 2017, more than 740,000 Rohingya refugees fled persecution and ethnic violence in Myanmar, crossing into Bangladesh in search of safety and assistance. Humanitarian agencies faced an unprecedented crisis, marked by both its scale and complexity(5). Initial assessments revealed numerous challenges. Language barriers prevented effective communication between the displaced population and aid workers, while cultural and religious restrictions further marginalized women and girls, limiting their mobility and access to essential services(8). The absence of reliable sources of information compounded these communication difficulties, and growing concerns over livelihoods, safety, and security heightened the distress within the affected communities. Humanitarian organizations, particularly Deutsche Welle (DW), Bangladesh Betar (the government-owned radio), and BBC Media Action, are producing audio content in the Rohingya language(9).

Definition and Purpose of Listener Clubs

What is a community listeners' club? A community listeners' club is "a group of men and women who wish to listen to radio programmes actively and systematically with a view to discussing the

content and above all putting into practice the lessons learned”. This is the definition agreed on by participants at a workshop organized in 2008 by FAO-Dimitra in Lubumbashi (DRC), in preparation for the creation of new clubs(10).

Listener clubs, called public listening groups, are groupings of community members within a settlement that regularly meet to listen to radio shows or other interventions and discuss the topics presented in the broadcast. They serve as platforms for communities to express their information needs, feedback, and reflections from the content they have consumed.

Each listeners' club tends to be defined based on the composition of the group. A listeners' club can be a group of neighbours, schoolgirls, or religious leaders who come together to listen to a particular show and discuss the topic with one another. Inspired by the radio clubs established in the 1990s, today's community listener clubs have evolved far beyond simple collective listening. They now serve as vital platforms for fostering dialogue and empowering rural communities(10).

These clubs provide spaces that encourage mobilization, communication, experience-sharing, collaboration, and, most importantly, action among both men and women involved in development. Community rural radio has become the preferred medium for disseminating information and facilitating communication, often complemented by mobile phones. As a result, listener clubs have become catalysts for exchanging experiences, voicing opinions on the information shared, and making collective decisions on how to respond and take action.

Whether composed of women, men, or both, listener clubs encourage members to voice their needs and expectations related to daily life, while radio serves as a medium to provide responses—either through expert commentary or by broadcasting discussions that emerge within the clubs. In this way, community or rural radio becomes a medium created by and for local people.

The focus is not on knowledge being transmitted in a "one-way" or "top-down" manner from a media outlet or institution to the community. Instead, knowledge emerges from the exchange of ideas among participants or from discussions led by the community itself. As a result, community listener clubs differ from traditional 'radio clubs,' which often have a higher male participation and lack meaningful interaction with the radio content, functioning more as fan clubs rather than spaces for collective engagement and dialogue.

Importance of Listener Clubs in Humanitarian Emergencies

Poor and marginalized communities are often overlooked by policymakers and development implementers in developing countries. Thus, governments and other stakeholders may not be aware of their views, aspirations, and requirements. The participatory approach is considered an important tool for including the voice of the poor and marginalized in decision-making.

In the context of humanitarian assistance, the establishment and support of Listener's Clubs at the local community level, or at least within the shelters, is of paramount importance. Listener Clubs in the humanitarian emergency context can help mobilize community participation, listen to the suffering and aspirations of the affected population, express local needs and experiences from the field, and make informed statements. They can alert those who are in a position to respond to the

affected populations in a timely and effective manner. It can also gather information about community views that go beyond simple news concerns, relevant opinions, comments, and evaluations.

Case Study: The Rohingya Refugee Crisis and Cox's Bazar

The Rohingya refugee crisis, one of the most significant humanitarian emergencies of the past decade, has drawn global attention to the challenges faced by displaced populations in camps. As highlighted in the UNHCR 2019 year-end report, the arrival of over 855,000 refugees in the Cox's Bazar settlements has significantly impacted the surrounding host communities, resulting in various environmental and socioeconomic challenges. Cox's Bazar, home to a population of 2.29 million, is one of Bangladesh's most impoverished and vulnerable districts, already facing critical levels of malnutrition, food insecurity, and health concerns, with poverty rates exceeding the national average.

The Rohingya depend completely on humanitarian aid for their protection, food, water, shelter, and healthcare needs. They reside in overcrowded, temporary shelters in Cox's Bazar camps and on the island of Bhasan Char. Given that Bangladesh ranks third globally among countries most affected by natural disasters, the Rohingya refugees face significant risks from weather-related hazards, including cyclones, flooding, and landslides(22).

The refugee influx has intensified pressure on national systems, particularly health services, and has strained the host communities, further undermining food security, escalating nutritional challenges, and driving up the cost of both basic food and non-food items.

As noted by Hansrod (2018), Radio Naf, originally a small station serving the Teknaf fishing community, has evolved into a vital source of broadcasting and information dissemination for a country grappling with a severe humanitarian crisis. Located in southeastern Bangladesh, Radio Naf began focusing on the needs of Rohingya refugees in August 2017, following the large influx of individuals fleeing genocide in Myanmar. Hansrod also highlighted that not all camps in Cox's Bazar receive radio signals, prompting Radio Naf to establish 22 listener clubs. These clubs consist of diverse groups-comprising 20 men, women, youth, and elderly individuals-who are tasked with sharing the broadcasted information with their families and neighbours.

The mental health needs of the Rohingya are profound. A study by Husain et al. (2019) found that refugees in Cox's Bazar are at heightened risk for depression, PTSD, and anxiety disorders. The trauma of violence, coupled with the ongoing uncertainty of their status, leads to an increased need for both mental health care and social support. Many Rohingya refugees have limited access to formal mental health services, making community-driven approaches essential.

Various NGOs operating in the refugee camps have recognized the importance of community-based mental health strategies. For example, UNHCR and Save the Children have introduced community-based psychosocial support programs, including the formation of Listeners' Clubs. These clubs have proven effective in fostering community resilience, offering safe spaces for refugees to express their trauma, and promoting mental well-being through group cohesion.

A report by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC,2018) highlights the role of peer support networks in Cox's Bazar, noting that listeners' clubs are instrumental in helping refugees cope with the trauma of displacement. Ahsan et al. (2020) also found that such programs have contributed to improved mental health outcomes among Rohingya legal refugees, as they reduce feelings of isolation and increase a sense of agency within the community.

Despite the successes of listeners' clubs in addressing mental health needs, there are challenges associated with their implementation in a complex humanitarian context like Cox's Bazar. Somasundaram et al. (2015) argue that listeners' clubs often face limitations due to resource constraints, lack of formal training for peer supporters, and difficulty in reaching marginalized groups within the refugee population. The success of these clubs also depends on maintaining confidentiality, managing the psychological burden of listeners themselves, and ensuring that the emotional needs of the participants are adequately addressed.

Furthermore, Brett et al. (2014) suggest that listeners' clubs need to be integrated into broader mental health frameworks and coordinated with other humanitarian efforts, including medical, , and education services, to be truly effective. The ongoing monitoring and evaluation of such programs are crucial to ensure that they adapt to the evolving needs of the community.

To enhance outreach and deliver critical life-saving messages on healthy behaviours, available assistance, and services, UNICEF partnered closely with radio organizations. As part of this effort, UNICEF distributed 3,000 wind-up radios through local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community leaders, and imams. These radios were provided for use in learning and service centres, child-friendly spaces, and among adolescent groups. The outreach targeted an estimated 1.2 million refugees and host community members, with a special focus on reaching 3,950 girls and boys through 158 adolescent radio listener clubs(11).

Shongjog serves as a reliable online repository, offering development practitioners and humanitarian workers the opportunity to download and repurpose relevant audio-visual and multimedia content produced by various agencies across multiple sectors, including health, nutrition, WASH, education, child protection, and disaster risk reduction. The radio programs, initially produced by Bangladesh Betar, DW Akademie, BBC Media Action, Internews and Radio NAF are available in downloadable podcast/MP3 through the 'Listen Again' feature on the Shongjog platform(12).Each program download also includes topic-specific guidelines in both English and Bangla, which can be used by discussion facilitators during radio listener group meetings in the camps and surrounding host communities. The Listen Again service of Shangjog included AraFoygam-weekly audio and discussion guide from BBC Media Action, ArraKissa (Our story) –three seasons of radio drama focusing on gender-based violence , child marriage and Mental health, Voice of Palong- audio programme from Radio Naf and DWA, Bala-Bura-Archive narrowcast programmes previouslyproduced by Internews, BBC Media Action worked with UNICEF, IOM, Bangladesh Betar, Radio Naf and the CXB Communication with Communities Working Group and produced shows Beggunor Lai & Shishur Hashi to help provide lifesaving information to Rohingya and host communities across Cox's Bazar.

Listeners Clubs/Groups and Communication

1. Listeners' Clubs as a Mechanism for Social Support and Psychological Well-being

Listeners' Clubs, also known as peer support groups, are informal, community-driven platforms designed to provide emotional and psychological support to individuals in distress. These clubs often involve trained volunteers or community members who listen to the stories of their peers, offering empathy, comfort, and a sense of solidarity. The idea behind such clubs is that active listening can facilitate emotional healing, social bonding, and resilience in crisis situations.

Gureje et al. (2008) note that social support networks, such as listeners' clubs, can mitigate the negative effects of trauma by offering safe spaces for individuals to express their feelings and concerns, reducing isolation, and promoting collective coping mechanisms. Moreover, the approach emphasizes the importance of culturally relevant methods for mental health intervention, something that is particularly relevant in the Rohingya context, where cultural and linguistic barriers may hinder the effectiveness of traditional Western mental health services.

In the context of refugee camps, listeners' clubs offer an alternative approach to mental health care by involving local community members as active agents in alleviating distress (19). assert that community-based mental health interventions, such as peer-support groups, are particularly effective in low-resource settings, where formal mental health infrastructure is limited. These interventions can provide ongoing, accessible support and can be adapted to the cultural sensitivities and needs of the population.

2. Listeners' groups a platform for Effective two-way communication

Listener groups in the Rohingya camps are crucial for fostering two-way communication by not only providing information but also creating an ongoing dialogue where community members can share feedback, concerns, and suggestions. This dynamic interaction ensures that humanitarian programs remain responsive, relevant, and effective in meeting the needs of those affected.

For example, in some camps, listeners of the audio drama series *Aa'rar Kissa* (Produced by BBC Media Action) were encouraged to organize their own community-based discussions on gender equality and mental health, where they could discuss the content of the dramas and offer practical suggestions for improving support services. This bottom-up approach to communication empowers refugees to take a more active role in shaping the humanitarian response.

3. Listeners clubs an effective medium to curb rumours

When COVID-19 reached Bangladesh, it was accompanied by a wave of misinformation and rumors. During a pandemic, rumors can be particularly dangerous, and the risk of their spread was especially high among the Rohingya population. Within the crowded conditions of the camps, a variety of rumors quickly circulated about the virus, including misconceptions about its transmission and causes. Some believed that consuming certain types of meat or meat products

could lead to infection, while others thought that the virus could be spread through biting or scratching.

Many Rohingyas also avoided seeking medical care, fearing that if they were infected, security forces might shoot and kill them. In addition, some refugees found comfort in the belief that COVID-19 was a divine punishment for the suffering the Rohingya community had endured. These harmful beliefs contributed to a general reluctance to seek help and a climate of fear and confusion, as noted by researchers from BBC Media Action and Translators Without Borders (2020).

To strengthen the community-led approach and effectively implement Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), both national and international organizations are prioritizing Communication with Communities (CwC) activities through community leaders. Small group sessions are being conducted at distribution points, community centres, religious settings, and radio listening groups to raise awareness and encourage long-term behaviour changes. Trained volunteers are also facilitating household-based communication, ensuring that women and children are included in the dialogue.

Contextualizing top-down risk communication strategies to incorporate the community's voice is crucial for effective engagement. The community-led approach has demonstrated considerable success, as it engages individuals who are familiar with local rumors and understand which demographic groups should be targeted. Additionally, the shared linguistic and cultural context makes these messages far more impactful than broad, impersonal communication methods. The increased effectiveness of this approach has led agencies to expand CwC activities.

4. Listeners clubs to nurture trust amongst humanitarian aid providers and the receivers

Listener clubs/groups in the Rohingya camps foster trust by creating spaces for open, transparent communication and by providing reliable information in a way that resonates with the community's lived experiences. Here are two key examples of how these groups build trust among the Rohingya refugees:

Listener groups provide a platform where Rohingya refugees can engage directly with humanitarian organizations and share concerns or experiences in a safe, non-judgmental environment. This openness encourages participants to trust the organizations providing information, as they feel their voices are heard and their needs are considered. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, listener groups facilitated discussions where refugees could ask questions about the virus, its prevention, and available health services. When rumors circulated—such as the belief that security forces would shoot anyone who sought medical help—these groups were crucial in dispelling these myths by providing accurate, culturally appropriate information directly from trusted sources. As participants received clear and reliable guidance, their trust in both the humanitarian agencies and the process of seeking help grew stronger.

5. Listeners clubs to generate collective efficacy

The benefits of listeners' clubs cannot be overstated. These platforms not only promote mental health but also build social cohesion, empowerment, and resilience. MacGregor et al. (2018) argue that such community-based interventions are particularly valuable in humanitarian settings because they promote a sense of ownership and control among refugees, which can contribute to long-term recovery and resilience.

As expressed by one of the women listeners of the show 'ShishurHashi', "When I heard about safe water treatment from the radio programme and practiced that, I found that my children stopped getting sick. I even shared the knowledge with few more ladies living in my vicinity".

6. Providing Feedback on Humanitarian Aid

Listener groups also serve as a key feedback mechanism for evaluating and improving humanitarian responses. As participants engage with humanitarian messages and services, they often provide real-time feedback on their experiences, concerns, and suggestions. This helps aid organizations better understand the community's immediate needs and challenges. For instance, after engaging with content related to gender-based violence or child marriage, listeners often discuss the barriers they face in accessing support services and voice concerns about gaps in available resources, such as counselling or legal support.

Humanitarian workers can then use this feedback to fine-tune their interventions. For example, if listeners report difficulties in accessing health services or safe spaces, this information is channelled back to the organizations managing the camps, which can lead to improvements in service delivery or the establishment of new programs to meet these needs.

As reported in one of the reports published by UNICEF, "Through the guidelines available on the Shongjog website, the listeners clubs provide feedback on the radio programmes, as well as information on specific issues in everyday life. The Common Service Consortium, comprised of BBC Media Action, Internews and Translators without Borders, analyses the feedback collected from the field and publishes snapshots of the data in What Matters, a bi-weekly bulletin to assist the humanitarian response in better planning and programme implementation"(11).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed highlights the significant role that listeners' clubs can play in addressing the psychological and social needs of populations affected by humanitarian crises. In the context of the Rohingya refugee crisis in Cox's Bazar, such clubs provide an important mechanism for community support, healing, and resilience. While challenges exist, particularly in terms of resources and integration with broader health systems, the potential of these clubs to alleviate mental health distress, reduce isolation, and promote social cohesion remains a powerful tool in humanitarian work. In a way these listeners clubs are acting as a bridge between the humanitarian agencies providing the aid, the Bangladesh Government and the affected Guest and host communities. Also, these clubs not only encourage two-way communications, but it is building 'trust' and curbing rumours by addressing queries. Thus, doing beneficiary and

operational communication along with Communication for development, serving population, purpose and principles as described in Humanitarian Communication Model.

Further research is needed to evaluate the long-term impacts of listeners' clubs and to explore strategies for improving their sustainability and effectiveness in crisis settings.

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