

 Bangladesh

Together we are stronger

Strengthening trust between refugee and host communities

By Kanij Fatema Jerin, Protection Officer at Oxfam



Religious leaders attending a 'Gender in Emergency' training with Oxfam, August 2019. Photo by Dina Chakma, Oxfam's senior protection associate.

Rohingya Refugee Camp 27 is in Jadimura, Teknaf, where refugees have been living with the host community for three years. One of the major protection issues here was conflict between refugee and host community members.

Oxfam's protection team worked to promote peaceful coexistence through different programmes. Oxfam identified through community consultations that religious leaders are key focal points for both refugee and host communities for all kinds of issues. Religious leaders – especially imams – are treated with great respect.

Oxfam started to work with religious leaders from mid-2019. Over 18 months, Abdul Mojid,¹ an active and dedicated imam from the refugee community, attended lots of capacity-strengthening activities with Oxfam. He said: **'Oxfam is the organisation that identified religious leaders as key community**

¹ Name has been changed to protect the person's identity.

leaders and treated [us] respectfully, the same as people in the community do. All the capacity-strengthening activities have helped us to make community people aware in a better effective way’.

Religious leaders from both communities attended meetings and training sessions together peacefully, and agreed that, in religion, there is no difference between natives and refugees. As humans, all are equal, and everyone should have the right to live in peace.

All the religious leaders were asked by Oxfam to disseminate the protection-related information they received from different organizations and agencies during prayers. It was thought that this would help make people aware of protection risks and motivate them to follow the instructions needed to keep them safe.

The dissemination of key messages during prayers has helped the community during difficult situations. For example, in August 2019, a host community leader was killed by a group from the refugee community, who were later killed by the police. This caused tensions between host and refugee communities. In this context, religious leaders from both communities disseminated messages promoting peaceful coexistence. They clarified that the incident had been perpetrated by individuals, and that neither community was responsible for it. Thus, religious leaders used their influence to ensure people’s safety during a time of heightened tensions, and simultaneously strengthened trust between their communities.

People’s safety is the main issue. After attending the related capacity-strengthening session, Abdul Mojid and other leaders suggested organizing activities involving other members of the community to make them aware about their safety and rights.

Abdul Mojid says he feels blessed to be part of Oxfam religious leaders’ group, because he found all the activities were practical and effective. The other religious leaders are also happy to be involved. They hope to have a peaceful life for both host and refugee community people with trust and respect to each other.