

Rethink Reframe Redefine Co-Creation and Storytelling

Testing the Contributor Centred
Storytelling methodology with UNHCR
Author: Jess Crombie

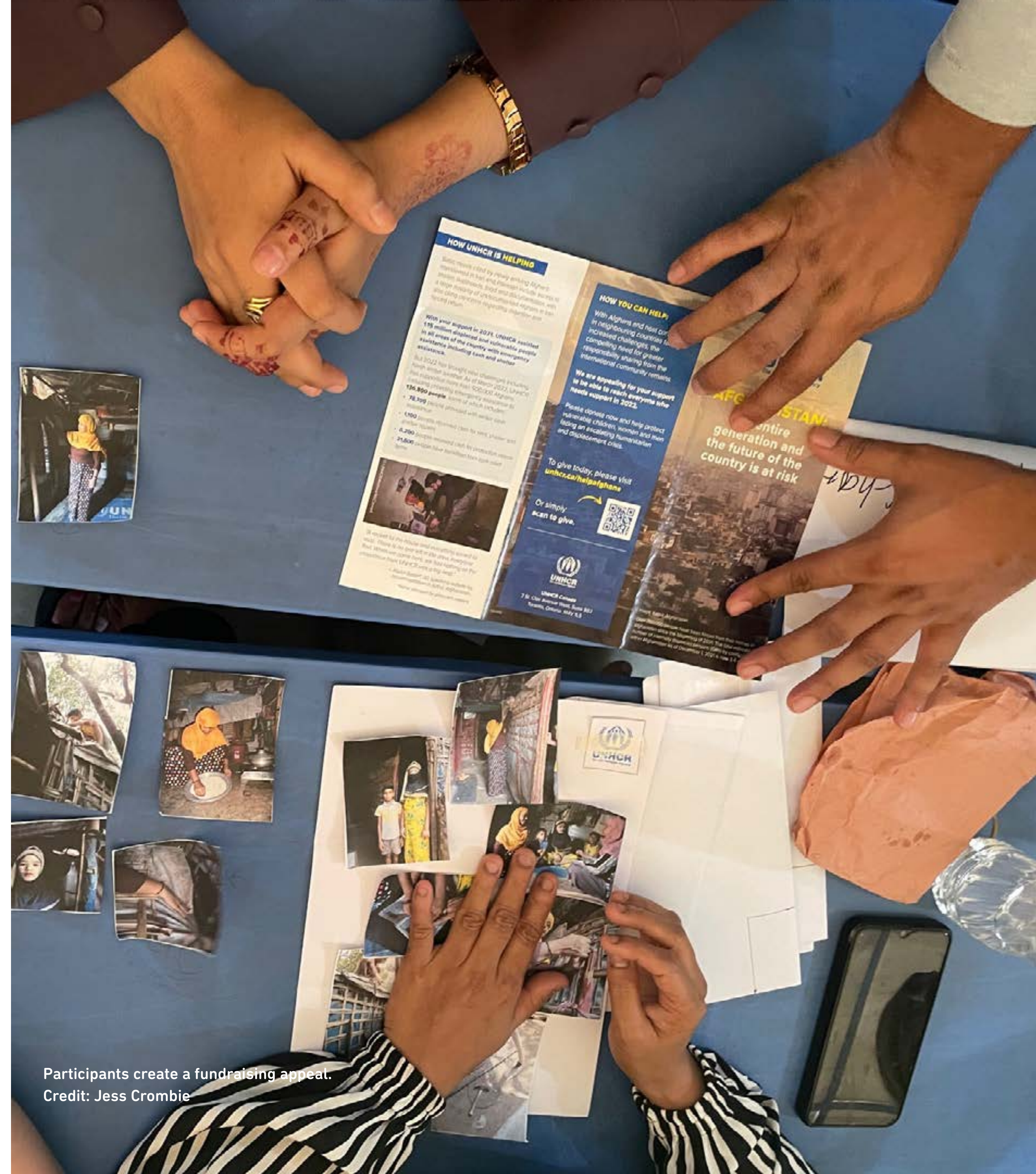


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Participants create a fundraising appeal.
Credit: Jess Crombie

Introduction

Introduction

What is Contributor Centred Storytelling?

Contributor Centred Storytelling (CCS) is an approach designed by Jess Crombie to provide a sustainable way for the development and humanitarian sectors to create fundraising materials in partnership with affected populations.

It is rooted in participatory practices and existing models of content production widely used across the sector. It has been developed to be a practical and implementable model, designed to provide a way of working that shifts narrative power from humanitarian sector staff to affected populations.

This study is part of the testing, learning and evaluation process in the design of this model of working.



Credit: Kamrul Hasan/UNHCR.

Introduction

Why do we need Contributor Centred Storytelling?

Criticism and discussion about humanitarian and development representation has continued for almost as long as there has been representation of this kind. Lilie Chouliaraki, who has written extensively in this area, sums up this decades old debate when she writes that:

“Humanitarian communication seems to be under a constant threat of delegitimization. From the early ‘shock effect’ images denounced for dehumanising the sufferer, to ‘positive imagery’ campaigns accused of glossing over the misery of suffering, to the more recent critiques of the commodification of solidarity, no manner of representing distant others as a cause of public action seems to do justice to the moral claim of suffering.”¹

In the last five years there has been a significant shift in awareness from humanitarian organisations about the impact of their narratives upon the people depicted, and people who may be linked to them by association. This was catalysed by the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, the subsequent growth in awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement, scandals such as the [Comic Relief/David Lammy row of 2019](#) and a significant rise in external scrutiny in this area from organisations such as [Charity So White](#), and [Africa No Filter](#).

1 Chouliaraki, L. (2010). Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian communication beyond a politics of pity. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 13(2), p107

2 Warrington, S. & Crombie, J. (2017) *The People in the Pictures: vital perspectives on Save the Children’s image making*. Save the Children UK.

3 Warah, R. (2016). *UNsilenced: Unmasking the United Nations’ Culture of Cover-ups, Corruption and Impunity*. Authorhouse. P37.

4 Ademolu, E. (2021). Seeing and being the visualised ‘Other’: humanitarian representations and hybridity in African diaspora identities. *Identities*, 28:2, 203-223.

5 Girling, D., & Adesina, D. (2024). *Charity Representations of Distant Others: An analysis of charity advertising supporting international causes in UK national newspapers*.

However, it is an irony that the extensive academic and media discourse on visual (mis)representation has failed to seek out and include the views of those who have been (mis)represented. *The People in the Pictures* was a study carried out in 2017 by Jess Crombie and Siobhan Warrington which spoke to 205 individuals and their families who had featured in Save the Children’s fundraising and communications materials. The study sought out individual’s motivations for sharing their stories, how they found the process and their opinions on their final portrayals. It was, at the time, unique in its scope as an international research project that privileged the individual in the story’s experiences of, and opinions on, humanitarian image making – and it remains the largest piece of research of its kind.

The study shared multiple experiences and opinions. In Zaatari refugee camp for Syrian people in Jordan which, due to its visual drama and proximity to the safety of Amman, has been a popular location for film crews and photographers, a young woman expressed her rejection of being produced by another; “I want to take the photos, not be an object.”² Her realisation that her role was as mute object is profound, but not limited to her. In other similar studies other story ‘subjects’ have communicated similar unease:

“I was outside my 100-square-foot house washing dishes, looking at utensils with longing because I hadn’t eaten in two days. Suddenly a White woman was taking my picture. I felt like a tiger in a cage. Before I could say anything, she had moved on.”³

And this sense of not being presented in a way that represents your lived experience, or in a way over which you have no control is also

communicated by diaspora audience groups, who may not be in the stories themselves, but who feel the impact of these repetitive narratives:

“We brown skinned folk identify ourselves, albeit a grossly misshaped version of who we think ourselves to be. We know what they are saying about Blacks, about Africans, that we are nothing more than beggars, that we are the lowest of all the low and that’s racist, without a doubt it is. It’s hard to digest all these charity pictures because how do you reconcile with them when we are the very people they are racially caricaturing?”⁴

While these quotes can be disheartening for those in the sector producing and using stories, they are also important to hear. Because while we see plenty of positive internal practice shifts enacted – more equitable story production consent processes, and more hiring of local multimedia talent, for example – the change to narrative output is now at a point of plateau. This is for three reasons.

Firstly, while internal working policies may have shifted, this has not been carried out in a way that changes who has the power to make editorial decisions; this power has been retained by the fundraising and communications offices based largely in Europe and the USA.

Secondly, the content that is going out into the world (notable exceptions being the majority removable of images of White people cuddling Black and Brown children, and the classic crying child ‘flies in eyes’ images⁵) has remained mostly unchanged, due the dominant fundraising strategies following the ‘donor-led’ model. In the donor-*led* model, decision making

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Why do we need Contributor Centred Storytelling?

is steered by donor responses to previous campaigns, which results in a perpetuation of existing narratives and a lack of innovation in the method of creating the product. A donor-*leading* model, in contrast, *leads* the donor from where they are (often in the role of saviours) to where we now want them to be (taking action from solidarity and recognising the active role of those being supported), and provides opportunities for education along the way.

Lastly, these discussions and changes have largely been carried out privately, within organisations. Neither the need for change, nor the positive changes that have been implemented so far, have been communicated to donors and audiences beyond sector media. This is a problem inherent in the 'donor-led' model and a critical missed opportunity to engage and inform audiences.

This plateau however, provides an opportunity for us as a sector to reflect on how we make larger, more fundamental changes that shift power – in terms of who is able to influence humanitarian and development narratives, and therefore change audience perceptions.

Towards an audience-leading model

As a sector we are starting to recognise that our narratives have and continue to shape our audience's understanding of the world. Psychologist Jerome Bruner explained that:

“We organise our experience and memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing and so on.”⁶

Unlike other verifiable shared forms of knowledge, like scientific discovery, narrative is personal, hidden and subject to each individual's reading of the world. We 'produce' our understanding based on our lived experiences and how we remember them, these become our personal stories, our way of understanding our place in the world. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall explained that:

“Meaning does not have to inhere *in* things, in the world. It is constructed, produced. It is the result of a signifying practice – a practice that *produces* meaning, that *makes things mean*.”⁷

The stories we produce as a sector don't just engage, but also inform, educate and in some ways create the world as understood by our audience. And they don't just do this once, these narratives are told repetitively, which embeds them as both 'truth' but also as 'normal' and accepted in the minds of audiences to the point that they prefer these stories as they feel reassuringly familiar. This is known as the 'mere exposure effect' (as developed by psychologist Robert Zajonc) a theory which proved that repeated exposure to similar stimulus increases not just familiarity but also influences preferences towards the familiar.

The ability to create truth, and then to influence audiences to prefer to see this version of the truth places the development and humanitarian sectors in a powerful position, but this power has not always been recognised. The 'From Tick Box to Turning Point' report argues that:

“The stories we produce as a sector don't just engage, but also inform, educate and in some ways create the world as understood by our audience”

“Accountability is ultimately about power. Although humanitarian actors have tended to shy away from discussions of power and politics, characterising them as 'entangled' or 'too difficult', power is at the heart of accountable relationships and cannot be ignored when considering accountability of humanitarian agencies to people affected by crisis.”⁸

The act of creating communications materials is intrinsically bound up in these complicated power dynamics. While it is a structure that we are often reluctant to name explicitly, understanding the process of story production as a triangle of power, with different actors holding different amounts, can be helpful to understand how it operates in this space.

⁶ Bruner, Jerome. "The Narrative Construction of Reality." *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1991): 1–21, p4

⁷ Hall, S (1997). *Representations: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practises*. London: Sage. P24

⁸ Doherty, J (2023). *From Tick Box to Turning Point: Getting Accountability Right for Improved Humanitarian Action*. ALNAP. P31.

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Why do we need Contributor Centred Storytelling?

On page 8 is the traditional narrative power triangle. In this triangle the more active you are, the more powerful you are. There are two actors with active roles, and one with a passive role. The sector makes the editorial decisions so has the greatest amount of power, and the audience impacts the stories told through their response to those stories, so also holds substantial sway. The contributors to the stories (the subjects or beneficiaries), do not hold power as while they are depicted in these stories, and while their real voices and testimonies may be included, they are framed by the editorial choices of the sector; asked to answer pre-defined questions in order to fulfil a predefined brief. In the majority of current story production processes contributors are not asked to influence what story is told and how, their role instead is to be a 'case study' or 'example' of a pre-defined editorial problem.

The Contributor Centred Storytelling methodology proposes a new narrative power triangle, (see page 8):

In this triangle, the sector is still a power actor, as its individuals still have ownership of the channels and means of production, but the power to impact the narrative has been shared. The audience or donors (who traditionally impacted the narrative through their action or inaction) still has power to impact stories though measured responses to content, albeit a lesser amount. The greatest change is with the contributors – this group now impacts narratives by being facilitated to share their choices and ideas about the editorial focus, and by signing off materials when they are initially gathered and later released to audiences.

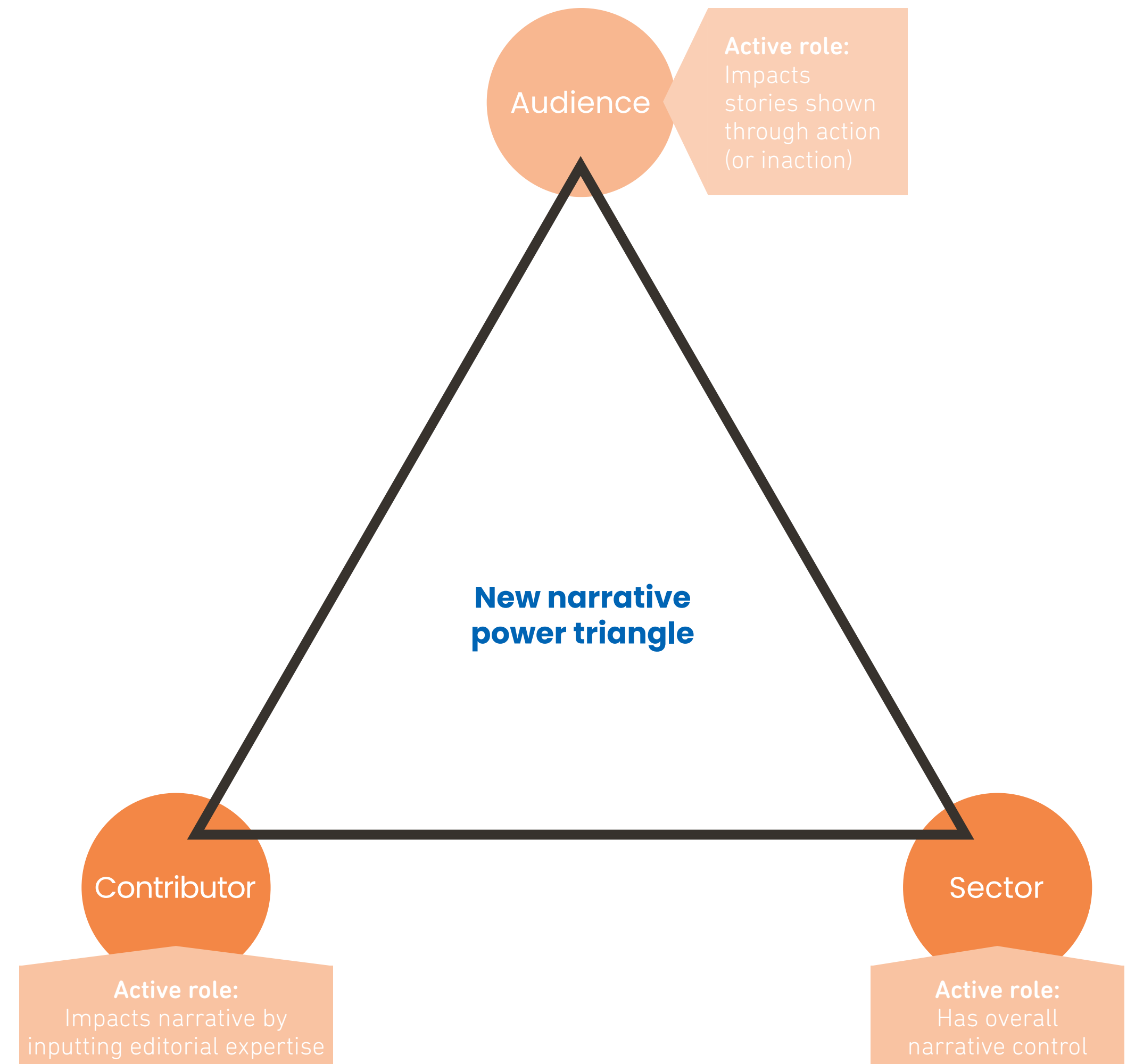
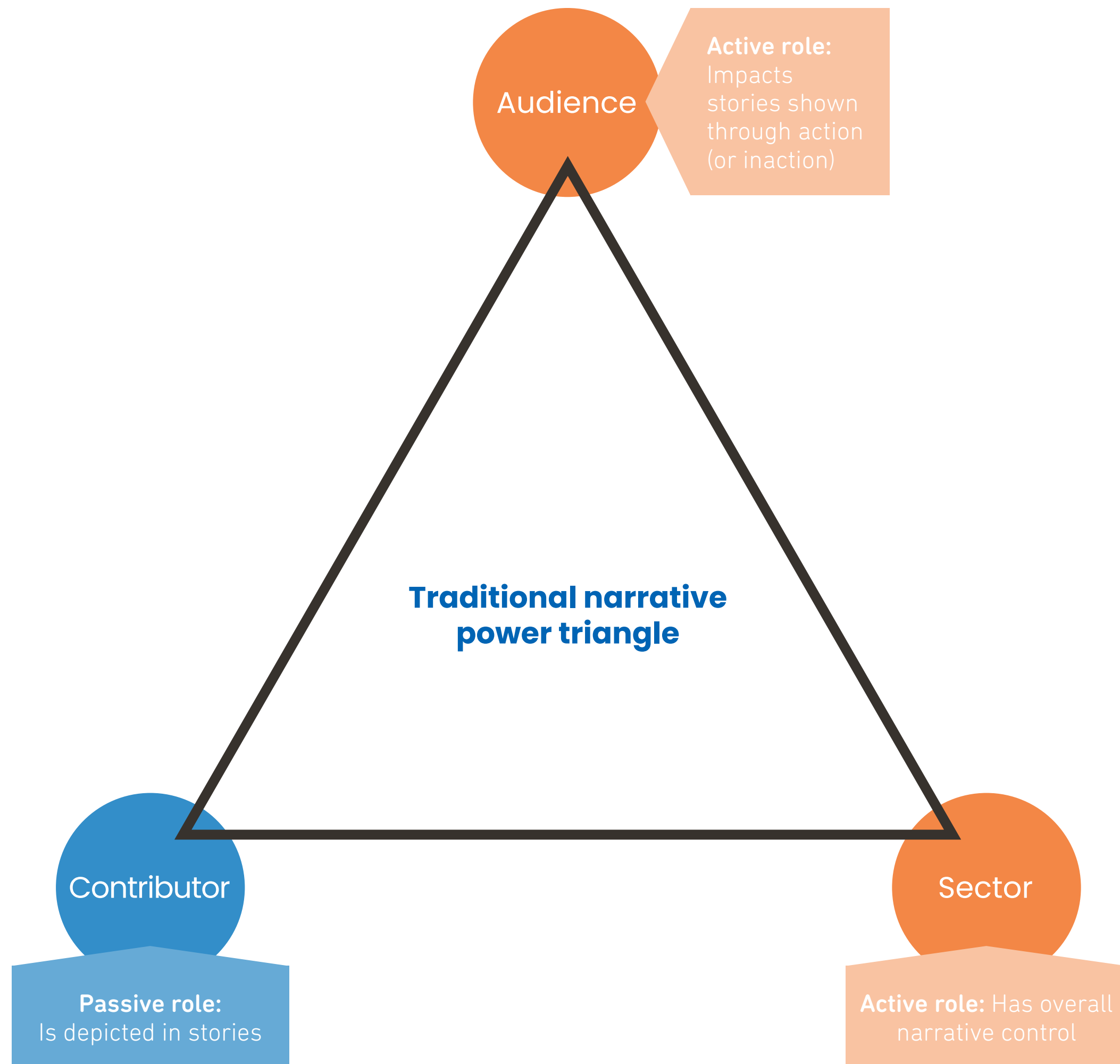
This shift in power is what is enacted through the methodology tested in this study. In this model the contributor becomes the Content or Creative Director, the sector becomes the facilitator, and the audience becomes the recipient of that story.

We move to a space where audiences receive more authentic and engaging narratives, but also where the stories that audiences see and hear are the version of events that those with lived experience of that event wish to communicate. The truth as they have experienced and see it.

“The greatest change is with the contributors – this group now impacts narratives by being facilitated to share their choices and ideas about the editorial focus, and by signing off materials when they are initially gathered and later released to audiences”

Introduction

Why do we need Contributor Centred Storytelling?



Introduction

UNHCR: a case study in Contributor Centred Storytelling

UNHCR are taking pioneering and brave steps to attempt to move past the plateau described in the Introduction with a series of projects designed to understand and change who has the power to create narrative. This study is just one of the projects that demonstrates their ongoing focus and investment in refugee-led communications and fundraising materials.

The team leading this study were inspired to undertake this work after being made aware of Crombie's previous research project *Who Owns The Story?* study carried out between Amref Health Africa, UAL and UEA.⁹ It was almost a year in the planning, and all of those within UNHCR who championed this project deserve appreciation.

This study was initiated by Owen Fenn, a fundraising and community development professional working at UNHCR Canada, alongside Sheetal Puri, who has since left UNHCR but was instrumental in the setting up of the project. It was supported by Diana Ruano Ortiz, the Head of Fundraising Innovation at UNHCR, who helped to bring in partners and widen the scope of the project across the organisation. The workshop and fundraising test were supported and delivered by UNHCR staff Pablo Amos, Protogene Ndwanaye, Megan Ritch and Rohan Stritch.

The project was designed and run by Jess Crombie, the originator of the Contributor Centred Storytelling methodology, a narrative ethics specialist and a researcher from the University of the Arts London. We are grateful to UNHCR's support and funding for this study, and for their enthusiasm and excitement in working with this study to live out their commitment to share narrative power.

Owen Fenn from UNHCR Canada, who spearheaded this research collaboration explained why this test is so important:

"Many INGOs have carried out a 'fundraise at any cost' approach over the past decades, which has likely been damaging to the populations they work for. Some have and still do treat their service users as commodities. You can still visit the websites of INGOs and find a child to 'sponsor', choosing their age and nationality. When the vast majority of organisations' marketing budgets are spent on fundraising activities, it is integral that organisations reflect on the impact their portrayals may have on these populations. That is to say, if an INGO continues to portray their 'beneficiaries' as helpless, or without agency in their fundraising materials then that's the vast majority of the media that the public engage with. Fundraising impacts public perception and as a sector we must be more responsible.

"It is also imperative from a fundraising perspective to assess the way that we are representing the people we work with and for. Implementing new ways of fundraising like the approach used here helps us to establish different relationships with donors. Instead of trying to solicit a donation by making the donor feel guilty through using sad imagery and making them the 'hero', we are paying refugees a wage to work as experts by experience and have a direct conversation with the donor and articulate their needs. Although in the short term this may be less financially beneficial to the organisation, it likely establishes a longer-term relationship with the donor and appeals to different types of donors."


Diana Ruano Ortiz, from the UNHCR Global Fundraising Innovation team who was also instrumental in realising this research, supported this position:

"It works from a business sense, and from a new audience perspective, it's ethically right – it ticks all the boxes. It's a really practical way for UNHCR to walk the talk."

This 'walking the talk' is core to creating change. A project like this, which challenges accepted ways of working, adds risk to financial bottom lines, and inevitably raises uncomfortable questions about status quo and power dynamics, takes bravery and tenacity – but without work of this kind, much needed change does not happen.

⁹ Crombie & Girling (2022). Who Owns The Story? Live financial testing of charity versus participant led storytelling in fundraising.

Research objectives and methodology



Research objectives and methodology

This report details phase 1 of this study, which took place in May 2023 in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh.¹⁰

The intended outcome of phase 1 was to facilitate participants from the Rohingya community living in Cox's Bazar to create a fundraising appeal for existing donors in the form of a direct mail letter, accompanied by an information insert, designed envelope, and email.

The district of Cox's Bazar hosts the world's largest refugee settlement made up of 33 separate camps hosting approximately 994,124¹¹ Rohingya people in a very small and congested area. Rohingya people are a Muslim ethnic minority group who have lived for centuries in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar – formerly known as Burma. Despite living in Myanmar for many generations, Rohingya people are not recognised as an official ethnic group and have been denied citizenship since 1982, making them the world's largest stateless population. As a stateless population, Rohingya families are denied basic rights and protection and are extremely vulnerable to exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence and abuse, and have suffered decades of violence, discrimination and persecution in Myanmar.

Some of the residents in the camp have been there since birth, but a majority arrived in 2017. In August of that year, a wave of violence broke out in Myanmar's Rakhine State, entire villages were burned to the ground, thousands of families were killed or separated, and a huge number of human rights violations were reported. Following this more than 742,000 people – half of them children – were forced to seek refuge in Bangladesh.

This study was made possible firstly and most importantly by the creativity, hard work and enthusiasm brought to the project by our participant group: Mohammed Hussein, Minara Islam, Khaleda Begum, and Mohammed Salim Khan. These four individuals live as refugees from Myanmar's Rohingya community in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

¹⁰ Phase 2 is scheduled to take place in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya in mid-2024 and a follow up report will be published in 2025.

¹¹ Population figure as of 31 August, 2024 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/111124>

Research objectives

There were two primary objectives for this work:

1a. To create a model of fundraising material production which is refugee led.

1b. To create a model of fundraising material production which is sustainable for UNHCR and can be scaled into day-to-day content production.

And one secondary objective:

2. To evaluate audience responses – both financial and emotional – to fundraising materials which are refugee led.



Credit: Kamrul Hasan/UNHCR.

Research objectives and methodology

Methodology for the primary objectives

In her seminal essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak', Indian postcolonial academic Gayatri Spivak linked the ability to speak – in the sense of communicating your choices and wishes and preferences – to power. She describes two types of representation happening *to* the people who have less power, rather than *with* them, "representation as 'speaking for' as in politics, and representation as re-presentation, as in art and philosophy"¹². In Niger, many research participants to *The People in the Pictures* shared the Hausa proverb, "a song sounds sweeter from the author's mouth"¹³ to communicate their preferences for speaking for themselves as well as being able to *author* their own story – to represent themselves.

The Contributor Centred Storytelling (CCS) methodology is rooted in this idea of voice as power and is designed to shift editorial power – it is more than just having your quotes or images included in storytelling, it is about the power to make decisions about all parts of the narrative.

Such co-creation, by its very nature, requires the sharing of *control* over narrative. This can feel daunting, and risky. But to claim to be co-creating stories we must share power, as co-creation is equitable and not tokenistic. It prioritises the process as well as, and sometimes more than, the final product, and establishes and recognises the capacity, skills, ability and interests of everyone involved.

¹² Spivak, G. C. (2010). *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press). Morris R, C. & Spivak GC. *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*. New York: Columbia University Press. P70

¹³ Warrington, S. & Crombie, J. (2017) *The People in the Pictures: vital perspectives on Save the Children's image making*. Save the Children UK.



Participants and facilitators listen to the workshop introduction together.
Credit: Kamrul Hasan/UNHCR.

Research objectives and methodology

Methodology for the primary objectives

The working process involves five stages. These are carried out by a working team:

Working team:

- Participants: people with lived experience of the story topic who have been supported by the funding organisation.
- Facilitators: staff from the funding organisation (in this case UNHCR), staff from the local office/implementing partner.
- External specialist support (as needed): such as translators, camera people, photographers.

Five process stages:

1. Understanding and setting the parameters of the project.

In this stage we establish ourselves as a working group. This includes getting to know each other: our skills, our experience, our preferences, but also discussing and agreeing on everyone's roles and responsibilities. In this stage we also share and discuss data about the audiences who will view this appeal and the channels on which the appeal will be launched so that all members of the working team have access to the same information and knowledge.

2. Defining the story focus.

This stage is about handing over the process to the participants and starting to explore and develop their ideas about the story topic, which locations might communicate it well, who we might speak to and when we might photograph and/or film. This stage is worth taking time to develop

as it is the foundational idea upon which the content and appeals are laid.

3. Producing story materials.

This is when production happens – taking photos, filming, interviewing individuals, laying out designs and more.

4. Producing finished pieces of content.

This process is carried out partially in the workshop setting, and partially afterwards, led by the facilitating team but with significant input from the participant team.

5. Disseminating the content and sharing results.

This stage is carried out by the facilitating team once all content has been signed off by the participant team. Results from the materials – financial and engagement – should be shared back with the participants within an agreed time period.

Participants lead decision making, and are supported by facilitators, during all five stages.

There is one parameter put in place in this process:

- That the story told must be about the funding organisation's work. Although which part of that work can be decided by participants.



Credit: Kamrul Hasan/UNHCR.

Research objectives and methodology

Methodology for the secondary objective

To conduct a blind A/B test where donors would receive either the fundraising appeal created by participants to the project, or the standard appeal created by UNHCR.

Donors would be divided in this way:

- Canada (letter and email): 50/50
- USA (email only): 50/50

Three months after receiving the letter or email donors were sent a survey asking a series of questions to glean qualitative data from their responses.



“Many volunteers do not have proper equipment”

A volunteer trained by Mohammed Salim Khan is fighting a fire in Camp 11 in March 2023.

Photo by: Mohammed Salim Khan

“Cox’s Bazar is hosting nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees, in the largest refugee camp in the world”



Community leader passes information to members of the refugee community. Photo by: Mohammed Salim Khan



A fire training demonstration in a refugee camp, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. Photo by: Mohammed Salim Khan

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Participant reflections

Participant reflections

“I am the person who has experienced it, I am the person who has lived this life. It is more meaningful if I share my history.”
(Participant 4)

Before we share the results of the test, we wish to share these reflections from the participants – which were shared at the end of the workshop in individual conversations between the lead facilitator Jess and the participants. A series of eight questions were asked around the topics of motivations, the process, and feelings at the end of the workshop. It is worth noting that these responses were taken after a fun and busy workshop, and by the lead facilitator, which may reflect the overall positive nature of the answers and a power dynamic that prohibited more critical reflections.

This feedback has been incorporated into the methodological development below.

Names have not been attributed to individual participants for reasons of protection.

Motivations to take part in this project.

When asked about why they took part, and why they think sharing stories is important, the participants communicated that:

¹⁴ Warrington, S. & Crombie, J. (2017) *The People in the Pictures: vital perspectives on Save the Children's image making*. Save the Children UK.

“It's important to share stories because they (the donors) don't know what is happening around here, they cannot see, by sharing our stories they will be aware of our situation and how we are coping in everyday life.” (Participant 1)

“The story I have written I have experienced it myself; I have the experience for five years so I can relate how important it is to let the world know.” (Participant 3)

“It is important to tell a story because we are getting services, this is not enough, we want more services. The more people who know our stories the more they can help.” (Participant 4)

These responses demonstrated that the individuals who took part wanted to share what is happening in Cox's Bazar refugee camps, and that they want to share their own stories as they “have experienced it” personally. There is also, quite naturally, an awareness that there is a transactional nature of sharing stories – by telling the world what is happening the support that is desperately needed might come more quickly.

Wanting to tell the world your story yourself was the strongest motivation, a finding that is reflected in other similar studies such as *The People in the Pictures*¹⁴. Participant 1 communicated that they could not see how ‘outsiders’ could possibly communicate their experiences effectively: “The people coming from outside, they don't know the feeling inside us, it's important to share the stories by ourselves so that they can share clearly the feelings.” Participant 2 echoed this when they said: “The way I will share my feelings, no one else will be able to describe it”. And participant 3

“For individuals who have experienced trauma and who have been subjected to such serious human rights abuses, the ability to create your own narrative, to write your own truth into the world, is not just a feeling, it is also about survival through the knowledge of your ongoing struggle – for you and those you know and love”

built on this by sharing their awareness that others telling your story can change how it is received: “I am directly sharing my history, I can feel the same feelings the way I am telling it to you. If that comes thorough someone the emotion changes so we can't feel the way you're telling it.”

These motivations to share your experiences in your own way did not just reflect feelings. There was also concern that if others shared your story, they might misrepresent what had happened. Participant 2 shared an experience of being interviewed about the Myanmar government attacks in 2017:

“The way I said ‘they killed our people’ they (the foreign media) changed it... It's important that I tell the story because I know the details of the crimes, instead of knowing it generally, I want them to know the details of our situation. It is also important for the next generation that we write it in history for future generations.”
(Participant 2)

Participant reflections

For individuals who have experienced trauma and who have been subjected to such serious human rights abuses, the ability to create your own narrative, to write your own truth into the world, is not just a feeling, it is also about survival through the knowledge of your ongoing struggle - for you and those you know and love.

The process of creating the fundraising materials.

The workshop itself was largely a positive experience for all the participants:

"I really enjoyed it, because we have open communication, with the translator – we communicate very openly. I have had experiences before in other organisations, where it was not very friendly. Here we sit together and be friendly... it's very open for all of us." (Participant 2)

"I liked learning the process of writing history, before if someone asks for a story, we just shared information, here we learned how to tell the details of how to do storytelling, with information and pictures as well as writing." (Participant 1)

"I felt very happy because by making a group and analysing my experience I get to know my knowledge." (Participant 4)

These quotes reflect a satisfaction with the process, which was designed to create a space of openness and teamwork. More profoundly however, what we also see here is a sense of learning not just how to communicate your personal lived history, but also getting to know and understand that your lived experience IS history and relevant not just to you, but to the outside world as well.



Participants practise interviewing a facilitator.
Credit: Kamrul Hasan/UNHCR

Participant reflections

“All the participants enjoyed the group work, finding the feedback from the other participants especially important: “Before I was so convinced that I was going to write one way, and then when I shared with the group, I got lots of feedback that helped me to change” (Participant 2).

There was also a lot of enthusiasm for some of the more technical aspects with the cameras, which reflected the participant criteria – which included people with multimedia experience or enthusiasm. We had a professional photographer with us for one day, and working with him was a highlight: “I especially enjoyed the photography skills workshop with the photographer... the photos, the eye contact...we learned so much” (Participant 4).

While power dynamics were always present, it was positive to hear that some of the ‘ways of working’ decisions that the group identified during stage 1 (setting parameters) had helped to mitigate these at least in some ways:

“The best part I felt is that you didn’t feel like our boss, pressuring us to do things – but this hasn’t happened, instead you supported us, you have meshed with us, you were so friendly, you have treated us and supported us. You have given us opportunity to explain ourselves.” (Participant 5)

There were no negative comments, but feedback did include a request for more time. Participant 1 said “it would be better if we could have two or three days more. So that we could do with more time”. And participant 3 reflected on the pace: “you have a plan and you have to deliver it, every night you are planning and you are thinking about how to do it, but a little slower would be better”.

All the group also communicated that “it would be really good if UNHCR could do this type of workshop more regularly and with more people. Maybe it could happen twice a year with more people. Because here we are only few participations, with ten people we could have ten stories, we could share more of what happens here” (Participant 2).



The process of photographing the chosen story topics.
Credit: Jess Crombie

Research results

Primary objectives: results and reflections

This section of the report details the successes and challenges around the two primary objectives:

1a. To create a model of fundraising material production which is refugee led.

1b. To create a model of fundraising material production which is sustainable for UNHCR and can be rolled out into day-to-day ways of working.



Participants and facilitators discuss safeguarding considerations during the workshop.
Credit: Kamrul Hasan/UNHCR.

Results

1a. To create a model of fundraising material production which is refugee led.

The process of planning, preparing, and delivering this project has provided learnings about what worked and can be maintained, and where there is a need for change and redesign.

This test demonstrated that story production and fundraising that is refugee led is achievable. Being able to prove that story production led by those with lived experience is not only possible but also preferable is a significant finding in the ambition to shift the power and localise all elements of humanitarian action.

For the refugee participants, this model was a more positive way of working for everyone involved. The participants reflected that they are simply better placed to relate the story of what is happening to them: “the story I have written I have experienced it myself; I have the experience for five years so I can relate how important it is to let the world know.” But more seriously they also recognised that by sharing their experiences themselves they are able to counter false or fake narratives: “The way I said ‘they killed our people’ they (the foreign media) changed it... It’s important that I tell the story because I know the details of the crimes, instead of knowing it generally, I want them to know the details of our situation. It is also important for the next generation that we write it in history for future generations.”.

1b. To create a model of fundraising material production which is sustainable for UNHCR and can be rolled out into day-to-day ways of working.

Often the testing phase requires the greatest financial investment and, as we expected, this model currently requires more resources than traditional models of fundraising material production. While it is moving towards being scalable, it is not currently a process that could rolled out into day-to-day operations, however with the implementation of the changes outlined in the Methodological Development section below this is certainly achievable.



Credit: Kamrul Hasan/UNHCR.

Research results

Researcher analysis

These reflections are divided into themes – Planning vs Reality, Context and Logistics and Power Dynamics. There is a lot of detail in this section of the report, but these considerations are important – the actions taken in story production will dictate not just the quality of the stories, but also the ability for power dynamics to be truly tested, and for participants involved to action their power to make narrative choices.



The team working together during the workshop.
Credit: Kamrul Hasan/UNHCR.

Context and logistics



The rooftops of the camp housing Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Credit: Jess Crombie

Internal processes.

UNHCR is a large and complex organisation delivering support to refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced people and stateless people in over 130 countries. The setup of the project necessitated a process of communicating the aims and gaining buy-in across multiple stakeholders from UNHCR's global fundraising team, UNHCR Canada, senior global fundraising leadership, the Asia programmatic delivery senior leadership and the Bangladesh country team. All these stakeholders were positive, excited and encouraging about the project and keen to help make it work, but this process was also slow and sometimes confusing. This is not unusual in the sector but is a logistical challenge which needs considering and building into the planning process for work of this kind which at this current time falls outside of 'business as usual'.

Local knowledge and support.

When selecting the location for this phase 1 test, we detailed this set of criteria:

- Who had the time and resources to host this project (primary).
- The existence of a communications team in the country programme to help support the set up and delivery (primary).
- A location that had not been recently communicated about to existing donors (secondary).

And/or

- A location that donors had some existing knowledge about (secondary).

While the core delivery team in UNHCR Canada and Copenhagen designed the project and navigated the various stakeholders internally, the Bangladesh UNHCR team were the ones who needed to undertake the crucial work to set up the project and seek out the participants. This took significant effort and resources on their part, when they were already busy with their core work delivering humanitarian support, especially as this context had particular and specific challenges.

UNHCR works closely with local partners, including Bangladesh government agencies, to support both infrastructure and individuals in the camps. It is important to note though that while the camps are hosting and providing a place to stay, refugees are subject to multiple challenges. Limitations for refugees relevant to this project were restrictions on using or owning mobile phones or cameras, and not being able to carry out paid work beyond limited opportunities offered by humanitarian agencies operating in the Rohingya camps.

Alongside negotiating life in the camp there are also weather-related issues to contend with. In May 2023, just before the workshop was due to start, Cyclone Mocha struck Bangladesh and Myanmar. It was the most severe storm to hit the region in many years and caused flooding, destruction of homes and multiple injuries. It meant that the workshop was delayed by a week but was also a serious reminder of the precarity of life for refugees living in Cox's Bazar.

The UNHCR Bangladesh team were excellent when supporting with these challenges – helping the researcher to understand the complex issues facing both UNHCR and refugees in Cox's Bazar and inputting creative

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solutions and ideas for the process. They were also excited by this approach, which helped with buy-in across the Bangladesh UNHCR staff body. The support and input of local staff in this way of working is crucial to delivering not just a successful project in terms of the stories told, but also one which supports both staff and participants to deliver in ways that are comfortable and appropriate for them, and that ensures strong aftercare and engagement after the project is finished and the rest of the delivery team have left.

Language.

There were multiple language barriers involved in this specific location, some of which we anticipated, but not all. Within the participant group we had four spoken languages – Bangali, Burmese, English and Rohingya. Each participant spoke each language to a different level of fluency based on whether they were born in Bangladesh or Myanmar, and when they had arrived in the camp. This made communication challenging and was further complicated by the fact that Rohingya is not a written language.

The UNHCR Bangladesh team sought out and hired three interpreters to support the workshop, who often had to translate across multiple languages, or have multiple translations happening simultaneously. While the level of fluency across languages was impressive, it meant that working was sometimes slower than we had anticipated and that it is highly possible that nuances were lost in the translation process. It also created a barrier to the more informal communication that can be so helpful when creating a team working environment. Over lunches and breaks for the group to chat informally the translators had to keep working, and when they needed a break there was a noticeable split in the room where people gravitated towards others with whom they shared a language.

While this problem is hard to overcome, as we would not want to discriminate against participation based on language, it is also important to note who is in the room and take care that there are always groups of people that share a common language to help the free flow of both formal and informal communication.

Trauma informed story production.

The individuals taking part in this workshop had all experienced trauma to varying degrees. One participant shared a story, and a video, which showed her young cousin dying from a gunshot wound during the attacks of August 2017 in Myanmar, which has caused her to move to Cox's Bazar. Others shared harrowing stories about their own experiences, and those of their families.

Due to the nature of humanitarian work, but also the time spent as a working team growing close and sharing personal stories, it is likely that the sharing of experiences of trauma will be a common factor amongst future participants. In this test the lead researcher was trained in and had experience of trauma informed story production, and so was able to support the rest of the team in this way of working. It would however be important for the future that all team members taking part in this type of work are trained in trauma informed story production as well as safeguarding specifics for the context in which the process is being carried out.

Payment for labour.

In a project which is about acknowledging the various roles and areas of expertise that all members are bringing to the process, paying everyone for their labour is equally important. The rates for participants in this test were set in line with the volunteer incentive framework for Rohingya refugees, a document outlining standard hourly and daily rates for refugees engaged by humanitarian organizations to work inside the camps. The incentive framework is approved by the Government of Bangladesh, which otherwise does not permit the refugees to work.

Participants were informed of the rate, time commitment and agreed to the licensing of their images and stories at the outset. At the end of the five-day workshop, they received the agreed payment alongside a contract and receipt recognising their labour and the sum that they had received.



Writing copy. Credit: Kamrul Hasan/UNHCR.

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Power dynamics

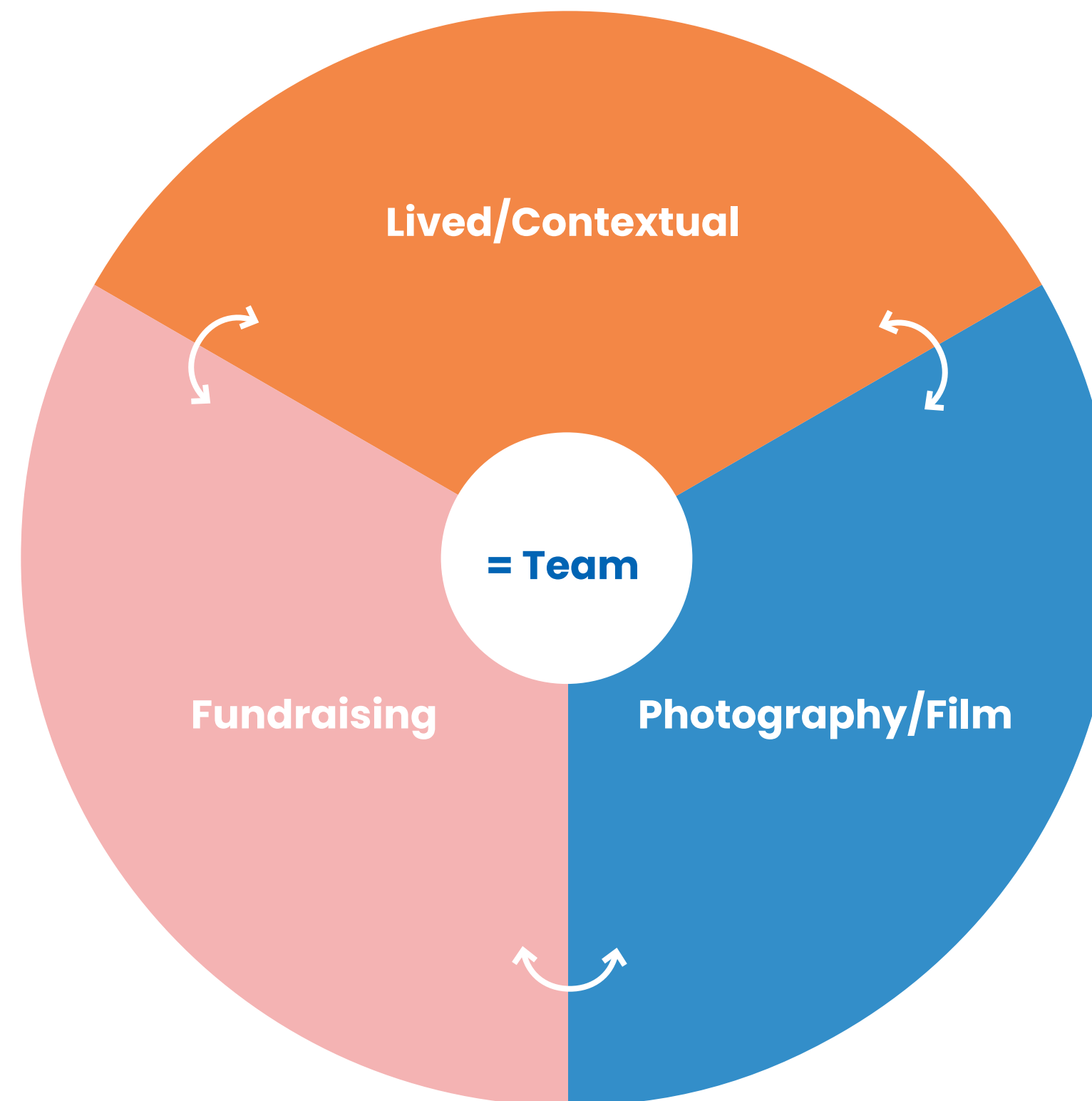
Underpinning this work is power. Who traditionally has it, who doesn't, how the sharing of it happens or doesn't, how it plays out in interpersonal relationships during the process, and who controls editorial decisions to create finished fundraising materials. It is always present and alongside what story to tell and how, should be the key consideration during any story production process.

The roles and responsibilities of the workshop team.

Uneven power dynamics are always present for this type of work due to the fact that the organisation facilitating the story production process is also providing most of what the participants need to live - shelter, food, medical aid and more.

One of the crucial elements therefore of this way of working is as a team defining the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved. This is best communicated firstly by saying what this process is not - a training - and then what it is - a team of people coming together to share their various areas of expertise. This diagram was used to communicate the main regions of expertise coming together, but also that while individuals may have their core area of knowledge, they are also likely to bring other information that they can utilise:

Areas of expertise



“It (power) is always present and alongside what story to tell and how, should be the key consideration during the any story production process”

In this test, the 'fundraising' parts of the team were careful not to dominate the 'lived/contextual' knowledge that the participants brought by sharing information about what works or doesn't work with their donors. However, there may be an opportunity for more knowledge sharing from the fundraisers and the photography and film team, not to dominate, but to contextualise and share expertise to help the participants make more informed choices about what story they choose to tell and how.

This careful balance is worth outlining in detail in the workshop within the framework of this being a space of sharing expertise and valuing all knowledge equally.

How power was revealed in the workshop process.

The facilitator to participant ratio created an unhelpful power dynamic. In the workshop there were four participants, but due to the translation and individual story needs there were ten people in facilitator roles (4 facilitators, 1 photographer, 2 UNHCR Bangladesh support staff, and 3 interpreters). The project was designed so that everyone joined in all the activities to mitigate an 'us and them' power dynamic being the dominant feature of the workshop, and the interpreters were all also individuals from the Rohingya community, but it still meant that the facilitator group was the dominant one in the room. It is impossible to quantify exactly the results of this, but we can surmise that being in a significant minority to a group of people who already hold power that you do not - the ability to leave the refugee camps, move to other countries, communicate in English and more - could affect the participant's ability to feel powerful in this scenario.

Research results

Power dynamics

“The process of editorialising the materials created and turning them into finished fundraising materials is where the power lies when it comes to creating narrative”

Language and who people could communicate directly also became a place where power was enacted. The interpreters we had with us were all excellent, hardworking and helped to interpret not just words but also context and history. They were all from the Rohingya population, which meant that they too had lived experience of being refugees and wanted to share this at times in the workshop. This manifested as them sometimes interjecting with their own stories, or contradicting participants when they were meant to translate verbatim. It was also not always clear when they were communicating their own experiences, or the experiences of the participants. There was a mild tension around this, as they were in the workshop in the role of interpreters and not participants and were being paid more than the participants (due to the payment restrictions for Rohingya refugees). On day 2 of the workshop, we attempted to mitigate this by requesting that translators tell us when they wanted to share their own ideas and reminding them that their role was to prioritise the voices of the participants, but we were not always fully confident that this is what happened. This was a difficult balance to negotiate, as we did not want to silence their voices, but also needed to prioritise those of the participants.

Gender was an anticipated power dynamic, especially as the Bangladesh team had shared that the community with whom we were working is traditionally patriarchal. This was revealed in a variety of ways.

There were two female participants, one was a women’s rights campaigner and more outspoken, the other however was shy and quieter, allowing

men to dominate the group conversation. Recognising this, the facilitators decided to change the working process to enable 1:1 participant to facilitator working, rather than whole group working. We noticed that when given time and space to reflect away from the group dynamics, both women developed clear ideas about what they wanted to say, and what story they were keen to tell so this was a helpful intervention. We noted through the process that all participants felt more comfortable being partnered with facilitators with whom they shared a gender, so we maintained this way of working with all except one of the participants.

We also noticed that the female translators, despite being in a position of some power, deferred to the male participants. One of the male participants was a confident English speaker, had previous experience as a photographer in a professional capacity and was a friendly but also quite a dominant character in the workshop environment. One of the female interpreters always looked at him when she was translating into Rohingya, which encouraged him to correct her translations, which he did with greater frequency as the days went on. It was impossible to tell if these corrections were necessary, but it again underpinned the uneven gender dynamics in the room.

Outside of the workshop setting we also saw gender power enacted. To take part in the workshop the female participants were unable to decide for themselves and instead needed the consent of their husbands and in-laws. We also heard during the workshop that there was fear from the women and their families that if women were to take part in a project it might cause rumours to exist about them that could hurt their ability to make a good marriage (if they are not already married – as was the case with one female participant and both female interpreters).

Race was also present as a dominant power dynamic, most noticeably in that the facilitator team was 70% white. This dynamic, which was named by all at times in mostly jokey ways (comments about spicy food and white western palates) revealed itself most notably in group dynamic behaviours as a subtle deference between the participants and the facilitator team.

These power dynamics were context specific but are not unusual. They were addressed during the preparation process in full and through detailed conversations with participants (and their families where appropriate), but also during the workshop – by maintaining open and explicit dialogue.

Editing and finalising story materials.

The process of editorialising the materials created and turning them into finished fundraising materials is another space where the power lies when it comes to creating narrative – the dominant stories that shape our audience’s understanding of the world and which represent the people and contexts featured.



Envelope designs take shape. Credit: Jess Crombie

Research results

Power dynamics

“It is a truism that knowledge is power, and so some of the gaps in knowledge experienced by the participants could well have been felt as disempowering. Transparency is key to changing this – the good news as well as the bad – so that the whole team is aware of the parameters throughout”

In this test, one of the days was spent turning the materials created by the participants into finished content. As previously mentioned, this required design work from the participants, but these rough designs were then shared with a professional designer in Canada who worked up drafts overnight for input by the participants the next day. This process worked well, with participants able to see their designs in the professional format during the workshop. After the workshop the participants were sent the final designs via WhatsApp and email and were able to input any changes at that point in a process with several stages of input, so we were confident that all content released had been agreed and signed off by the participants themselves.

This back and forth after the workshop is time consuming, and reliant on either a local staff member bringing physical copies, or a way to communicate digitally, but is a crucial part of the process of sharing power.

During the editorial process, power was also shared during a decision about which of the four finished appeals (one created by each participant) was to be used in this pilot with live audiences. In this test it was decided through a vote: on the last day each member of the team (participants and facilitators) had one vote for the appeal that they felt would best work as a fundraising appeal for audiences. The result was a draw between two participants and so the UNHCR Bangladesh office were given the final deciding vote on which should be shared externally.

This process went well in this instance and was celebratory and positive, but still felt unnecessarily competitive with a risk of leaving participants feeling disappointed at the end of the workshop. It also left UNHCR with four fundraising appeals, but only the potential to use one for the main appeal, which added additional pressure on the fundraising team, which wanted to support this way of working, to find places to utilise the other four appeals content.

The decision to work in this way was to provide participants with the ability to entirely own the personal story preferences, however for future tests we will shift to a process where participants work as a team on one story topic – that they have selected – to give greater breadth to the story, but also to eliminate the competitive element and create a truer team working experience.

Power and expectation.

At the start and throughout the workshop process, the facilitators outlined the post-production timings for the whole project – and we were confident that this was understood by all. We also ended the workshop by setting up a WhatsApp group for the whole participant and facilitating team to be used for communicating next steps, sharing materials, and gathering inputs from participants during the editing process.

Communications directly after the workshop were frequent and allowed participants to input meaningfully throughout the final editing stages. This was due to one member of staff being given the task of seeking sign off and inputs on the final fundraising materials. However, once this task was finished, and without clearly planned out next steps, or a named individual from the facilitating team leading the ongoing communications, these dwindled. While this is natural after the main work has been carried out, and while everyone was still regularly updated, participants did on occasion ask what was happening and were not always clear on outcomes and next steps.

Alongside this was a discussion about the financial results of the materials themselves, and whether the funding raised would be visible to participants. All the individuals taking part were highly motivated by the idea that they would be able to raise funds for work that they knew was sorely needed within their communities. But a year after the workshop, none were clear what had been raised or where it had been spent. This was not due to UNHCR staff hiding this information, but more that fundraising of this type is restricted only at a country level (meaning that the money raised must be spent in Bangladesh) and therefore tracking it is very challenging.

It is a truism that knowledge is power, and so some of the gaps in knowledge experienced by the participants could well have been felt as disempowering. Transparency is key to changing this – the good news as well as the bad – so that the whole team is aware of the parameters throughout.

Planning vs reality.

One of the biggest challenges in this way of working is the lack of control. There are many variables involved in the process – not least the participant preferences and choices – which mean that while it is possible to plan, it is necessary to expect – and be able to react to – the unexpected. It is also necessary to reflect on the process each time you run it, tweaking and improving it to help iterate and pivot to the various locations, contexts and people that are involved.

Multiskilled storytellers.

One of the core decisions that we made during the planning process for this phase 1 model was that in this methodology, participants would be asked to input as multiskilled storytellers – selecting the story, writing the copy, taking the pictures, and designing the appeals. While this was a very creative and often fun process, it had four main implications that impacted on the overall objectives of the project.

Research results

Power dynamics



Interview practice during the workshop. Credit: Kamrul Hasan/UNHCR

1. Participants needed training in specialist skills.

While some of the participants had previous photography experience, not all did, and none had design or copywriting experience. This meant that the relationship between the facilitators and the participants at times felt like a teacher/pupil relationship – an exchange which is predicated on uneven power dynamics in terms of who is the knower and giver of information and skills and who is the recipient. This decision meant that the participants, while able to control some parts of the process, were still in a less powerful trainee-type role for some of the workshop.

2. Process felt rushed.

Due to the decision to ask for participant input as full range storytellers, there was a lot to do in the time allocated to the work. As a team we were constantly working against the clock. We had to deliver a significant amount of planning, story production, design work and written copy in

only five days. This reduced the chances for participants to consider and communicate their choices and preferences, and for everyone to review and engage with the story and editorial choices made during the process.

3. Quality of content.

This process was rooted in participatory practice, which was one of the main reasons for deciding that participants should take their own images and create their own designs. However, this had an impact on the quality of the finished content, as none of the participants were professionals in design and only one was a professional photographer. The impact of this was felt in the quantitative results as lower income, particularly in emails, as the key design drivers that fundraisers use – where to place logos, key headlines etc – weren't known to the participants and therefore weren't employed. While the motivation of this decision was based in a desire to hand over all elements of editorial decision making, the end result may have been to disadvantage the test but also to undermine the participants being able to share their stories in the most effective and engaging way, thus inadvertently inhibiting their ability to share their lived experiences effectively with audiences.

4. Limited to photography.

The process was designed to produce photography but not film. This was a decision made for reasons of time, and the ability for participants to take their own images; photography is an easier skill to learn to do in a short time than film making. However, film content is an important part of fundraising, and this did limit the amount that this content could be shared on social media and therefore potentially the financial gain of the project. As this work is for fundraising purposes, not being able to produce film content was a drawback.

Participant selection.

The project was designed for five participants, each communicating their own individually chosen story. The method of selection was one that we discussed at length and was steered by the Bangladesh team.

The criteria were:

- individuals who wanted to communicate what they were experiencing
- individuals keen to learn new skills
- those who could give five days of their time
- adults
- a mix of ages
- a mix of genders.

We wanted people to self-select, and discussed various methods of doing this, from asking individuals to send in video applications, or voice applications, or social media posts. The initial idea being that we would take whoever applied and draw names at random. However, these methods would have necessitated UNHCR advertising the project publicly which caused two concerns for the Bangladesh office. Firstly, that we might be inundated with too many applicants and that UNHCR Bangladesh staff wouldn't have the time to sort through them, and secondly that this would have drawn attention to the project from government authorities who might feel concerned about what the refugee participants would communicate and intervene or even block the project from happening.

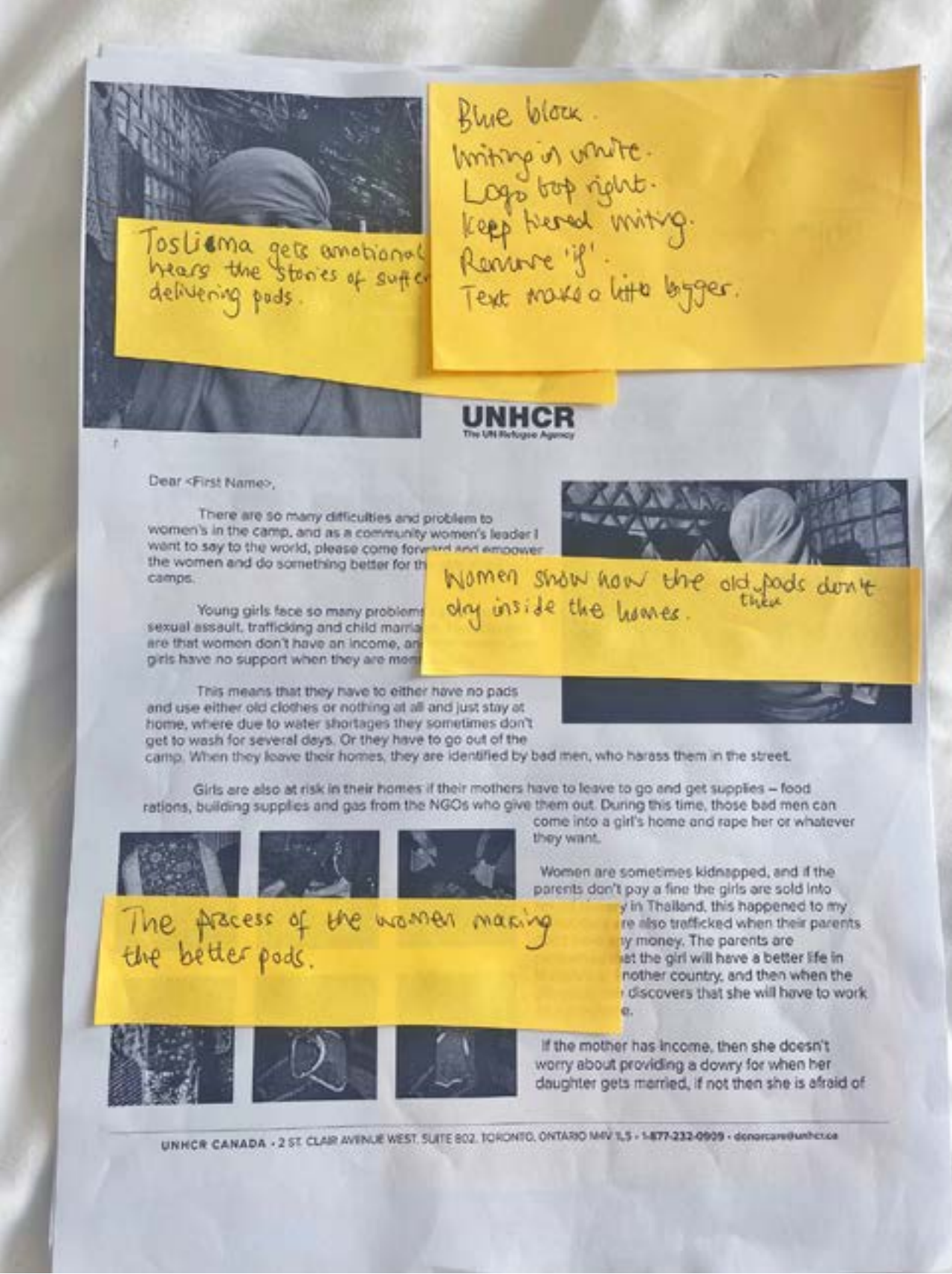
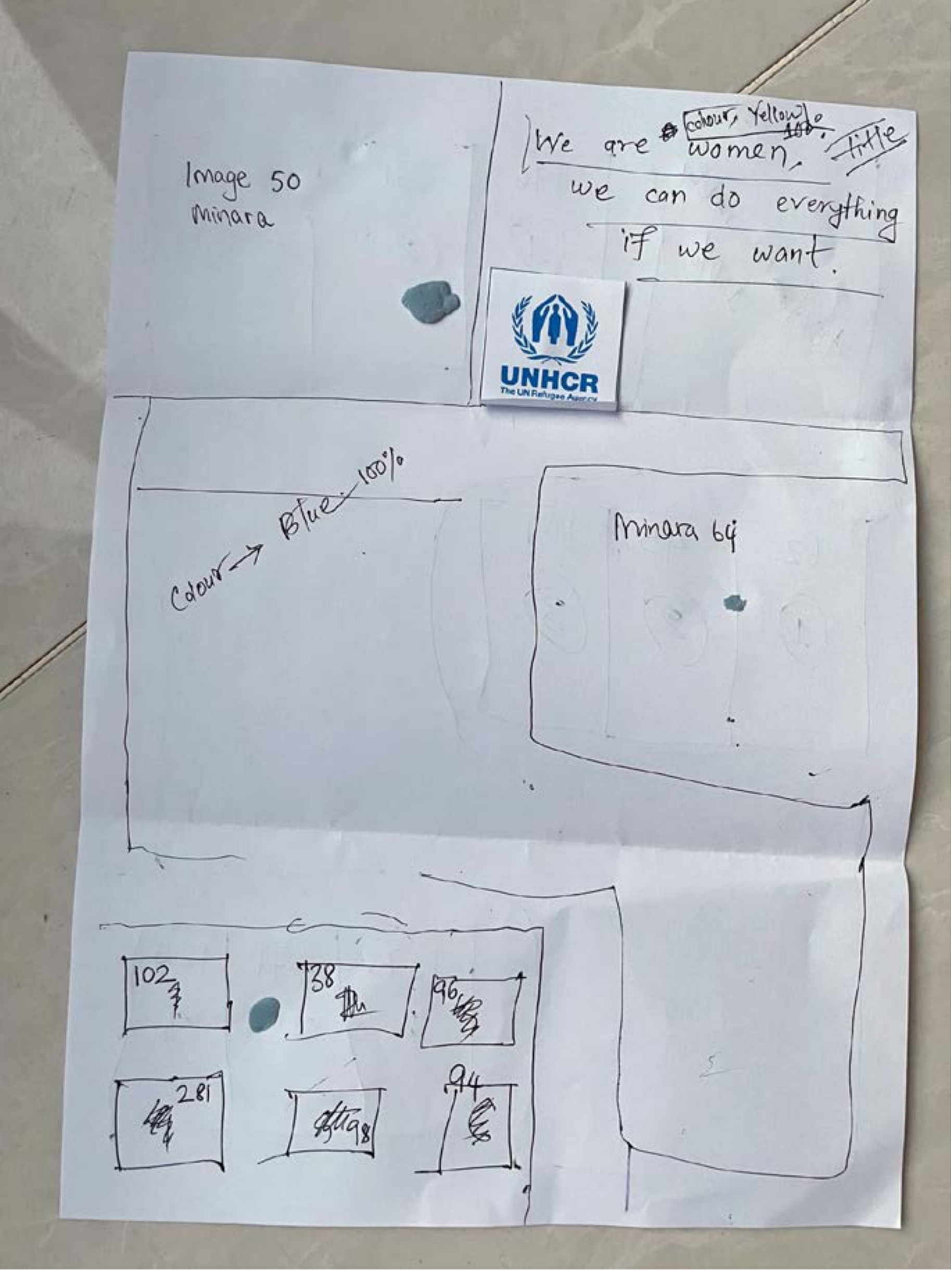
After much discussion, we settled on a process where the Bangladesh team used their networks to seek out and select participants. The team did a good job of ensuring that the participants held a mix of experience in terms of photography and storytelling. Some participants had previously worked as photographers and artists in specific projects UNHCR had been involved with, and some were new to this way of working. The disadvantage of this was not reaching individuals who might not have had contact with UNHCR before, but the advantage was that they were able to ensure that half of the participants were women. Due to cultural norms around gender, UNHCR staff had been concerned that women might not put themselves forward and apply to be participate, so this allowed for that gender balance to be carefully set at the start of the project.

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Power dynamics

There was one lesson however from this process. While a key criterion was that all participants were adults, we later learned that the age of a fifth participant was not accurate and that while she had communicated that she was an adult, she was in fact a minor. This was mitigated by subsequently obtaining consent from her guardian and in discussion and agreement with this individual and her guardian, removing her and her work from any future steps in the project. We were pleased to hear directly from the individual and her guardian that the project had been a fully positive process for her, but it is a lesson learned and we will change working processes going forward to carry out two separate checks on the paperwork of all individual participants, including this report.

Lastly, and inevitably, given the instability of life in a refugee camp, the day before the workshop was due to start one of the original participants communicated that she couldn't be with us for two of the five days. The Bangladesh team had someone in mind as a backup, but it was a good reminder of the need for flexibility in group numbers.



Participants design the letter layout and then feedback after a professional designer had set the images and copy in place. Credit: Jess Crombie

Research results

Power dynamics

Individual vs group stories.

The project was designed so that each individual participant could select a story topic that felt important to them and produce their own separate fundraising appeal. This had both benefits and drawbacks.

Benefits:

- Participants could create a story that felt important to them personally.
- Participants could learn how to take photographs and how to use a camera.
- Participants could be given a camera which they could keep at the end of the project (in this project we provided a simple Canon IXUS).

Drawbacks:

- We ended up with four fundraising appeals. This meant that we had to devise a way of selecting whose appeal would be sent to donors – as we only had space for one appeal in this test. We carried out a vote at the end of the workshop by the whole project team. This was a flawed process that we do not wish to repeat.
- It is resource heavy to produce four appeals. Due to the language and literacy issues outlined above, each participants needed 1:1 support during most of the stages two – four, which in this scenario was manageable, but which might make future processes too expensive to be feasible.

These reflections are designed to share a transparent process that will help others wishing to work in this way to witness the positives but also the challenges that we experienced, they have all guided the methodological changes that we will take forward in phase 2.



Editing imagery for the design phase. Credit: Jess Crombie

Research results

Secondary objective: results and reflections

This section of the report details the core results, reflections and recommendations on the secondary objective:

2. To evaluate audience responses – both financial and emotional – to fundraising materials which are refugee led.

Participant-led Direct Mail fundraising appeal, front page.

Rohingya refugees train the community to fight fires and floods.



By Mohammed Salim Khan

Dear <First Name>,

My name is Mohammed Salim Khan and I have been working as a trainer of Rohingya Site Management Volunteers for five years on emergency preparedness response, including fire safety and flood safety. UNHCR is helping to support the refugee volunteers, but I feel that more help is needed.

We live here with few resources, and are surviving with the limited food and items that humanitarian agencies are able to provide. Since we are living our lives in this way, when a fire or a flood happens then everything we have is gone. Fire and flood prevention is really important for us.

Fire fighters and photographers in the camps are the most at danger as they are covering these emergencies on the frontline, every time they happen. With support, community leaders can play an important role during fires and floods by helping community members to learn about how to stay safe.

When refugees try to take photographs to help cover emergency stories of fires and floods they are in danger. Sometimes they try to get in front of the fire and get burned or inhale smoke. In the camps there can be many people taking photographs, including community members taking evidence for the organizations they volunteer with and some professionals taking photographs as freelancers. I know the risks because I am also a photographer documenting this refugee life. My goal is for future generations to know about these fires.



Mohammed Salim Khan conducting a flood training with volunteers from different camps. Photo by: Zomir Hossain



A three-wheeler carrying fire fighting equipment including a hose pipe and generator. Photo by: Mohammed Salim Khan



Professional photographers working in the camp also need fire safety equipment. Photo by: Mohammed Hossain

In the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, the shelters are very congested and made with bamboo and tarpaulins, with nearly 1 million people living here. If a fire breaks out in one shelter, it will spread to the next ten shelters. In order to stop the spread, the Rohingya Site Management Volunteers need to go to the last house in a row, and take the shelter down, so that the fire stops. When the volunteers go to remove the last shelter, the shelter owner usually does not agree because they do not have knowledge about fire. If I am able to train the community leaders that would help because people listen to them.

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Results

- Donors are equally likely to give to refugee-led fundraising appeals in some, but not all markets. We do not have the data to show why this is the case at this stage.
- A significant minority of donors (35%) stated that they were more likely to donate to an appeal created directly by refugees.
- A majority of donors (65%) said that seeing an appeal created directly by refugees made them equally likely to donate.
- Donors did appreciate seeing stories told by refugees, even if it did not always affect their motivation to give.

Quantitative data.

Country & channel	Donor split	Control appeal & Donor split	Participant appeal & Donor split
Canada Direct Mail & Email	50% control 50% participant	Cad\$: 107,461.50 50/50	Cad\$: 126,216.00
USA Email	50% control 50% participant	US\$: 5,289.00	US\$: 2,686.00

- While in Canada the combined income of Email and Direct Mail (made up of a combination of lower and mid-income donations) was slightly higher for the participant pack than the control, when the data was drawn apart, the Email participant appeal performed less well than the control.
- In the USA (Email only) the participant pack raised almost 50% less than the control.
- In the USA the participant email did however have a higher open rate.
- Across the board, incomes for both the Control and Participant appeals were slightly lower than in previous comparable appeals. This is a trend we see across the sector and is not thought to be significant in this study.
- This appeal was launched in a busy media environment and did not benefit from being timely (eg. an appeal to a recent humanitarian event), or from a country and situation that is regularly discussed in the media.

Qualitative data.

We sent a short survey to all donors on the database, both those who did donate and those who did not. These surveys were sent out between three and four months after the original appeal, due to not wanting to undermine the 'blind' element of the test, but this meant that response rates were low.

People who donated:

In the USA there were no responses from individuals who donated.

In Canada only three people who donated answered the survey. While these results are too small to be useful, the topline findings were:

- Seeing a story created by a refugee made them feel "equally likely" to donate.
- When asked about why they were inspired to donate, this was an equally between making a difference to UNHCR/seeing Salim (the participant featured in the appeal) taking positive steps to help himself/didn't notice anything different.
- 2/3 said that this story did not make them feel differently about refugees.
- All said that this story did not make them feel differently about UNHCR's work.

People who did not donate:

In the USA seven individuals answered this survey. While again this is too low a number to be useful, the topline results were:

- These respondents said that seeing a story created by a refugee made them feel 71.5% more likely to donate and 28.5% equally likely to donate.
- Relevant free text comments included:

"I plan to donate once per year because I want to help people who have been forced from their homes and live with so little. I support a variety of causes that are important to me."

In Canada 208 people answered this survey. Topline results were:

- Seeing a story created by a refugee made them feel 35% more likely to donate and 65% equally likely to donate.
- Relevant comments included:

Comments that represent the majority of donors:

"I donate to UNHCR once a year (as with most of my donations). I appreciate stories like this, but it will not change my donation timeline."

Research results

Results

“After I donated, it feels like the requests for more donations come more and more frequent. That make me feel uncomfortable.”

Comments that represent the minority of donors:

“First person stories have real power. Not “flies in the eyes” but stories that reflect the outcomes of giving.”

- Without the accompanying qualitative survey information from those who donated it is very hard to deduce personal motivations for that group.
- From those who didn't donate but did complete the survey, we can see in two of the markets (Canada and USA) that hearing directly from an affected individual made people feel more likely to donate.
- A minority of donors communicated that they liked seeing stories that do not communicate stereotypes.
- A minority of donors communicated that people want to support refugees anyway, and the stories that are told are irrelevant to whether they will donate.



“Many volunteers do not have proper equipment”

“Cox's Bazar is hosting nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees, in the largest refugee camp in the world”



Community leader passes information to members of the refugee community. Photo by: Mohammed Salim Khan



A fire training demonstration in a refugee camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Photo by: Mohammed Salim Khan



“I have been working as a trainer for 5 years. I have trained volunteers in 33 camps in fire fighting and flood prevention.”

I would like to share with the world community that Rohingya refugee photographers are trying to show more about their lives through exhibitions in different places. A group of us have already shared our work for an exhibition that UNHCR organized called Kutupalong Exhibition on the theme of Rohingya women's empowerment. We also contribute to UNHCR's social media.

Our hope is to share the reality about our refugee life. As a refugee this is hard to do with limited tools but we have been doing our level best to continue showing our experience. **This is our Rohingya community and the world should know about our lives.**



A community leader that Salim has trained on flood and fire safety measures. Photo by: Mohammed Salim Khan

Mohammed Salim Khan has been capturing the lives and emotions of his community who have been fleeing violence and persecution in Myanmar for decades. His photos have appeared in Bangladeshi and international media, as well as international exhibitions.

Participant-led Direct Mail fundraising appeal insert

Research results

Researcher analysis

The results of this test were impacted by a variety of factors, some within and others outside the control of the team. These reflections are organised into analysis of each of these factors and are followed with a section titled 'Methodological Developments' suggesting changes to be made for phase 2.

'Refugee centric' over 'donor centric'.

This phase 1 test was released as a 'blind' A/B test – donors were not told that they were taking part in a test at any stage until they received the survey. This was a deliberate decision to understand whether donors would respond differently to content created by refugee participants, or indeed even notice the difference.

The results of this test demonstrated that while a minority of donors did notice, the majority did not. However, this also didn't affect their propensity to give. This last metric therefore gives us an opportunity to try something new by creating 'refugee centric' rather than 'donor centric' materials. The principle of donor centricity is to give donors what they say they want, but the results of this study have shown us that donors do not always notice when we give them something different, and that it doesn't affect their reasons for giving. Therefore, we can prioritise refugee centricity – sharing stories that refugees want to see out in the world, without worrying we are risking donor engagement.

What we are starting to observe in the sector is a trend towards communicating change to donors explicitly. Both Chance for Childhood's #overexposed campaign and MSF's anti-racism video are examples of

organisations communicating their concern over how their stories have been told in the past, and their ambition to tell more equitable stories that better represent the people they serve. They have asked their donors to come with them on that journey, and their donors have responded positively. This is an interesting potential route to explore in the next stage of this study.

Tailoring content to a variety of donors.

In this test we focused on producing a direct mail pack with the participants creating every element, as detailed above. This pack was designed to target the lower cash gift individual giving donation base. In a more standard UNHCR process, content would be gathered that was in-depth enough, but also broad enough, to be turned into fundraising products for a wider variety of donation bases – low, but also middle and even high.

Going forward, we will look at an amended methodology which facilitates participants to be 'directors' as well as 'creators', providing specialist support for them to work alongside, (photographers, filmmakers etc), to allow for the production of story materials which have greater flexibility and breadth – so that they can be deployed in a wider variety of ways. Participants will therefore be able to produce content that can have greater financial impact because their stories can work harder for more income by being deployed across a variety of donor groups.

Better financial results will also mean a higher likelihood that Contributor Centred Storytelling will be mainstreamed fully into UNHCR's working processes and influence the wider sector to make similar changes to their story production.

“Therefore, we can prioritise refugee centricity – sharing stories that refugees want to see out in the world, without worrying we are risking donor engagement. What we are starting to observe in the sector is a trend towards communicating change to donors explicitly”

Test, learn, iterate, build.

UNHCR invests in fundraising innovation, a set of work led by UNHCR's global fundraising team, and this test fell under that remit. UNHCR's partner offices are the locations from which the fundraising materials are sent to donors, and therefore this was a collaboration between the global fundraising team, but also the fundraising offices in Canada (who instigated this project) and the USA who came on board latterly.

The principles of testing, learning, iterating and then building were the foundations of this piece of work, but we would suggest starting with fewer partners for the first phase, and building to a greater number for future phases. This is partly to mitigate risk – fewer partners, less risk – but also because the variety of different timelines and fundraising content needs was a challenge, and also time consuming for the staff from the global fundraising team and Canada leading the test.

Difficulty gathering qualitative data.

Because the survey was sent several months after the fundraising materials were shared, we received very little qualitative data, which meant that personal motivations, that we know are so important in individual giving fundraising, were unknowable. In the future we will build the qualitative part of the study into the donor journey.

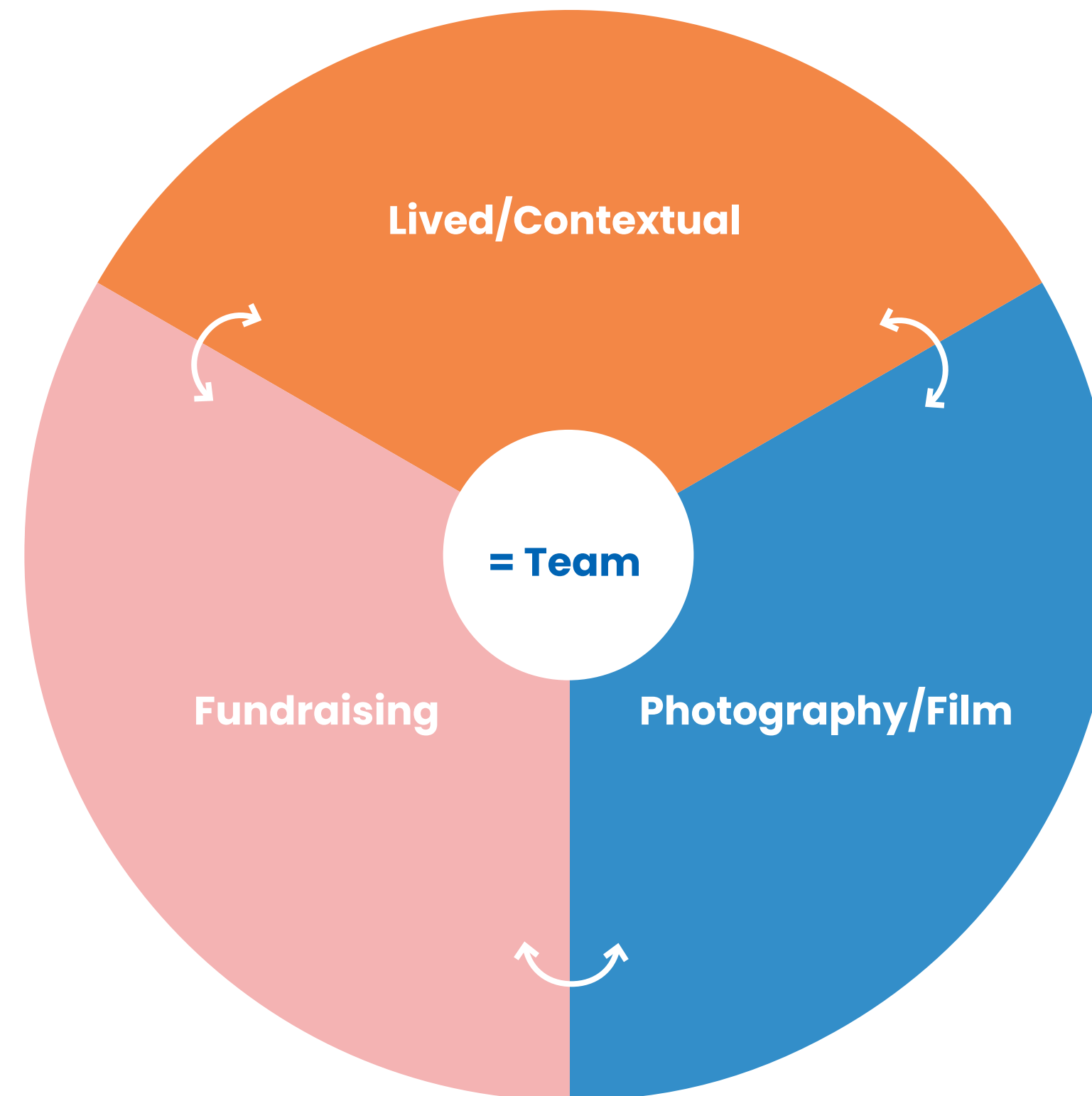
Research results

Methodological development for Phase 2

These recommendations are designed to develop the Contributor Centred Storytelling methodology. We will continue with the core value that editorial decision making should be led by those with lived experience of the topic being communicated about. But rather than facilitating participants to be photographers, designers and writers, this new process will facilitate a knowledge exchange between different areas of expertise. Participants will bring their own communications experiences, alongside their lived expertise and this will be paired with specific areas of knowledge from story production (photography, film making etc) to fundraising. Together this team will create a 'content pack' which details the narrative priorities and provides audio-visual materials that can be used for multiple pieces of content.

For our donors, they will be told that these materials have been created directly by refugee participants, and that we are working in this way to try and change power structures around who can impact narrative and our understanding of the world.

These developments are designed to improve the process and will be enacted in a workshop in Kenya in mid-2024 to create a fundraising appeal to be released in 2025.



Developments for objectives 1a and 1b

Systematise the process by creating supporting documents that guide:

- a) Expectations.
- b) Timelines.
- c) Roles and responsibilities.

These will apply to all facilitating team members and any partners, and will help to set and manage expectations, but also monitor working practices during the content creation process.

Participant briefing to make explicitly clear that funding from this project will not directly benefit participants individually. This message to be repeated before, during and after content creation.

Planning process to prioritise Country Office staff in the design process.

Setting up a regular meeting between the core project design team, and including Country Office representation, will help to deliver a context specific process that works for participants.

Recognise the need for a **maximum 1:1 facilitator to participant ratio**.

In phase 1 we had double the number of facilitators to participants, this embeds existing imbalanced power dynamics. In phase 2 we will maintain a maximum ratio of 1:1, with a view to having fewer facilitators than participants in the future.

Facilitator team elements. The skills needed to run these workshops successfully include the list below. These roles may be doubled up by one person:

a) **A trained facilitator.** Facilitation is a skill, and for this to have real future scope it is important that the pool of trained individuals able to run these workshops is widened. This can be carried out through a training programme, and a buddy/mentor system for those who have been in this facilitator role to support those who are new.

b) **A fundraiser.** As outlined above this role is a part of the venn diagram of expertise needed.

c) **A content producer.** In the new model we will have professional photographer(s) and filmmaker(s) on board as part of the team, and recommend an experienced content producer joins to help support the gathering of quality story materials, but also to manage the important and time-consuming post-production process after the workshop.

d) **Professional photographer/filmmaker.** In the new role of 'director' the participants will be working with a professional audio-visual team who will help them to produce the images, footage and interview transcriptions necessary for the various finished materials to be created.

Undertake a risk assessment after participant selection has been carried out. While risk analysis was carried out in phase 1, this needs to be more robust to protect both participants and the hosting country office. This must include clarity of safeguarding processes and procedures, how to report concerns, and details of whom participants can contact for future support.

All staff carrying out story production with refugee communities to be trained in **trauma informed interviewing and story production**.

Facilitators should also be clear on how to access **emotional support** for themselves if needed.

A shift in the role of the participants from content *creators* to content *directors*. The workshop process will be redesigned to focus on delivering story materials as part of a multiskilled team. The role of participants is to provide lived expertise of narrative and context, and to do this by choosing and defining the narrative and then directing the other skilled individuals. This means bringing in professional photographers and filmmakers to work alongside the facilitating and participant team.

From finished fundraising appeal to story package. In phase 1 we asked participants to create a finished fundraising appeal. Phase 2 will instead support participants to define the narrative (what story to be told, how, by whom), and then direct content creation to create a 'story package' – a set of materials which, by following the detailed narrative preferences, editors can use to create finished fundraising materials. This process is dependent on all finished materials created using this content being signed off by participants immediately following the test and in the future.

One story for all. Participants will decide and agree on one core narrative topic (rather than several separate ones). This will allow for several positive benefits:

- a) The whole team to work on the same story, developing it more fully and producing the content in a richer and more contextually full way.

Research results

Developments for objectives 1a and 1b



Credit: Kamrul Hasan/UNHCR.

- b) We will have time to produce both film and photography content as we can divide into teams and share the workload.
- c) We can discard the uncomfortable 'vote' process which means that everyone gets to input into the final materials.

Whole team learning. In the test 1 process, participants and translators were not included in the daily feedback meeting, predominantly due to time and travel logistics. However, in phase 2 we will implement two end of the day debrief meetings:

- A short 15-30-minute reflection session with both participants and facilitators. This session will ask everyone to recall the actions taken that day, and how it felt – including capturing concerns as well as what everyone enjoyed.
- A longer facilitating team debrief, which focuses on structured discussion around these areas:
 - a) Facilitator roles – what is working/what needs amending.
 - b) Power dynamics – what is working/what needs amending.
 - c) Time – what is working/what needs amending.
 - d) Whether there are any safeguarding or general concerns for anyone involved. This is also a moment for individuals to share if they are feeling that they need support.

One of the facilitating team to be allocated the role of 'participant liaison' and given a mandate to communicate a minimum of once a month in the year following the workshop. This timeline and named individual will be communicated with the participants during and after the workshop. This communication will include updates on how content has been used and the ongoing liaison for sign off from participants.

Research results

Developments for objective 2

Test, learn, iterate and then build.

- Trial this way of working further with one fundraising office initially to learn and develop clear guidance and ways of working, which can then be rolled out to additional international partners.
- Create a checklist of expectations and responsibilities for all partner offices so that all are clear what is needed and expected before, during and after the test, which will need to be signed and agreed to before committing to be a part of the test.
- Develop a core base of story content, which can be utilised by partner offices with the non-negotiable proviso that all ways of using these stories are reviewed and approved by the people who created this content – the workshop participants.

From donor centricity to refugee centricity. Communicate to donors the objective of this work alongside fundraising – to change story production methods to reflect participant choices and preferences, localise communications and create more equitable representations.

Broader content creation for a wider variety of markets and audiences. Rather than asking participants to work on a one-off fundraising product, facilitate the project so that you are working together to create a content pack – with audio-visual materials, test and a story framework guiding the editorial process – that can be utilised in a broader way and perform better against financial key performance indicators (KPIs).

Greater focus on qualitative data gathering. As part of the donor journey for further engagement, send out the surveys and/or a thank you message within seven days for digital assets and 21 days for offline assets.



Credit: Kamrul Hasan/UNHCR.

Conclusion

We know that fundraising content does much more than raise money – it also impacts wider world narratives and donor opinions – impacts that have long lasting results. UNHCR also know this, which is why they are seeking to transform their model of working into one that prioritises the voices and choices of refugees and educates donors to think differently about the people they seek to support.

Working in partnership to develop this methodology has been an adventure – and like any adventure there have been moments of peril as well as moments of triumph. UNHCR should be commended for their transparency and willingness to share their successes and their challenges with the sector in this way, and for their determination to keep on trialling and trying until they have a model that does deliver against all our objectives. This was not an easy model to design, and what has been outlined here is not perfect, but what we hope it does provide is inspiration and evidence that it *is possible* to work in a different way.

As a sector we know now that we have a responsibility to the people that we tell stories about and with – not just to raise money and engage audiences in their lived experience, but also to understand that it is a necessity to do that without stereotyping, othering and perpetuating racism. Having a platform on which to communicate is a privilege, and is power, and we wish to share that privilege as fully as we possibly can.

For any organisation considering working in this way we say go for it! Start small, test and learn, and don't give up when you hit the bumps. Bringing together and equally valuing expertise areas – lived experience, fundraising and storytelling – is the key to new model of story production and storytelling that will ultimately benefit everyone involved.

UNHCR is seeking to transform their model of working into one that prioritises the voices and choices of refugees and educates donors to think differently about the people they seek to support”

Artworks



Participant appeal

Letter copy and design:

Rohingya refugees train the community to fight fires and floods.



By Mohammed Salim Khan

Dear <First Name>,

My name is Mohammed Salim Khan and I have been working as a trainer of Rohingya Site Management Volunteers for five years on emergency preparedness response, including fire safety and flood safety. UNHCR is helping to support the refugee volunteers, but I feel that more help is needed.

We live here with few resources, and are surviving with the limited food and items that humanitarian agencies are able to provide. Since we are living our lives in this way, when a fire or a flood happens then everything we have is gone. Fire and flood prevention is really important for us.

Fire fighters and photographers in the camps are the most at danger as they are covering these emergencies on the frontline, every time they happen. With support, community leaders can play an important role during fires and floods by helping community members to learn about how to stay safe.

When refugees try to take photographs to help cover emergency stories of fires and floods they are in danger. Sometimes they try to get in front of the fire and get burned or inhale smoke. In the camps there can be many people taking photographs, including community members taking evidence for the organizations they volunteer with and some professionals taking photographs as freelancers. I know the risks because I am also a photographer documenting this refugee life. My goal is for future generations to know about these fires.



Professional photographers working in the camp also need fire safety equipment. Photo by: Mohammed Hossain



Mohammed Salim Khan conducting a flood training with volunteers from different camps. Photo by: Zomir Hossain



A three-wheeler carrying fire fighting equipment including a hose pipe and generator. Photo by: Mohammed Salim Khan

In the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, the shelters are very congested and made with bamboo and tarpaulins, with nearly 1 million people living here. If a fire breaks out in one shelter, it will spread to the next ten shelters. In order to stop the spread, the Rohingya Site Management Volunteers need to go to the last house in a row, and take the shelter down, so that the fire stops. When the volunteers go to remove the last shelter, the shelter owner usually does not agree because they do not have knowledge about fire. If I am able to train the community leaders that would help because people listen to them.

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When emergencies will happen next is uncertain. Many shelters are in danger in the 33 camps in Cox's Bazar, with many fires each year. For example, earlier this year in Camp 11, where over 30,000 people live, around 3000 shelters burned down. From that fire, 16,000 people were affected and 155 facilities damaged. Refugees are then homeless and have to live with neighbors until repairs can be done.

Each camp has around 100 site management volunteers, with one third being women. Tools are provided by UNHCR including throw bags with rope for floods, and water bags and spray for fire. Some site management volunteers use three-wheeler fire trucks with hoses and pumps, but more training, equipment, helmets, safety gear and safety shoes are needed.

As a fire and flood safety instructor myself, and also a photographer, I believe people around the world need to know about this dangerous situation. Only Rohingya Site Management Volunteers have fire safety equipment but more community members need support. We used to only have fire extinguishers and hurt ourselves a lot. I would like to request for your support with more equipment and training to help keep the Rohingya community safe.

Sincerely,

MOHAMMED SALIM KHAN

Mohammed Salim Khan



Fire drill demonstration and training for volunteers. Photo by: Mohammed Salim Khan

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Artworks

Participant appeal

Insert:



“Cox’s Bazar is hosting nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees, in the largest refugee camp in the world”



Community leader passes information to members of the refugee community. Photo by: Mohammed Salim Khan



A fire training demonstration in a refugee camp, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. Photo by: Mohammed Salim Khan



“I have been working as a trainer for 5 years. I have trained volunteers in 33 camps in fire fighting and flood prevention.”

I would like to share with the world community that Rohingya refugee photographers are trying to show more about their lives through exhibitions in different places. A group of us have already shared our work for an exhibition that UNHCR organized called Kutupalong Exhibition on the theme of Rohingya women’s empowerment. We also contribute to UNHCR’s social media.

Our hope is to share the reality about our refugee life. As a refugee this is hard to do with limited tools but we have been doing our level best to continue showing our experience. **This is our Rohingya community and the world should know about our lives.**



A community leader that Salim has trained on flood and fire safety measures. Photo by: Mohammed Salim Khan

Mohammed Salim Khan has been capturing the lives and emotions of his community who have been fleeing violence and persecution in Myanmar for decades. His photos have appeared in Bangladeshi and international media, as well as international exhibitions.

Artworks

Participant appeal

Email:



Dear Darien,

My name is Mohammed Salim Khan, and I am a Rohingya refugee living in Bangladesh. I have been working as a trainer of Rohingya Site Management Volunteers for five years on emergency preparedness response, including fire and flood safety. [UNHCR is helping to support the refugee volunteers, but I feel more help is needed.](#)

In the camps in Cox's Bazar, the shelters are very congested and made with bamboo and tarpaulins. With nearly **1 million refugees living here**, if a fire breaks out in one shelter, it will spread to the next ten shelters. To stop the spread, the volunteers have to go to the last shelter in a row and take the shelter down. When the volunteers go to take down the last shelter, the owner usually does not agree.

With fires each year, many shelters are in danger in the 33 camps in Cox's Bazar. Earlier this year in Camp 11, where over 30,000 people live, around 3,000 shelters burned down. Refugees are then homeless and have to live with neighbors until repairs can be done. Each camp has around 100 site management volunteers, and nearly 1/3 are women.



When emergencies will happen next is uncertain. We live here with few resources and survive with the limited food and items that humanitarian agencies are able to provide. Since we are living our lives in this way, when a fire happens then

Left & centre, USA.
Right, Canada.



Dear Darien,

As I shared with you before, as a fire and flood safety instructor myself, and a photographer, I believe people around the world need to know about the dangerous situation Rohingya refugees are facing in Cox's Bazar. There are many people taking photographs in the camps, including community members taking evidence for the organizations they volunteer with and some professionals taking photographs as freelancers. **I know the risks because I am also a photographer documenting this refugee life.**

Firefighters and photographers in the camps are the most at danger as they are covering these emergencies on the frontline, every time they happen. When refugees try to take photographs to help cover emergency stories of fires and floods, they are in real danger. Sometimes they try to get in front of the fire and get burned or inhale smoke. My goal is for future generations to know about these fires. [You can help us stay safe.](#)



PLEASE HELP SALIM AND HIS COMMUNITY →

I want to share with the world community that Rohingya refugee photographers are trying to show more about their



Fires and floods in refugee camps cause widespread devastation.

Dear <Supporter>,

As I shared with you before, as a fire and flood safety instructor myself, and a photographer, I believe people around the world need to know about the dangerous situation Rohingya refugees are facing in Cox's Bazar. There are many people taking photographs in the camps, including community members taking evidence for the organizations they volunteer with and some professionals taking photographs as freelancers. **I know the risks because I am also a photographer documenting this refugee life.**

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Salim on assignment for a documentary about refugee life in the world's largest refugee camp. Photo by: Abu Raihan Tonmy

PLEASE HELP SALIM AND HIS COMMUNITY

I want to share with the world community that Rohingya refugee photographers are trying to show more about their lives through exhibitions in different places. A group of us have already shared our work for an exhibition that UNHCR organized called Kutupalong Exhibition on the theme of Rohingya women's empowerment. We also contribute to UNHCR's social media. **Our hope is to share the reality about our refugee life.**

As a refugee this is hard work to do with limited tools, but we have been doing our level best to continue showing our experience. **This is our Rohingya community, and the world should know about our lives.**

[Please help to safely equip Rohingya volunteers so we can protect our communities and share our experiences with the world.](#)

Thank you,



Artworks

Participant appeal

Envelope front and back:

Please help to make sure the Rohingya community is safe from fire and flood

"It is our most burning concern"



Image right: Women volunteers participating in flood training in Camp 8W, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Photo by: Zomir Hossain

in a refugee camp and have never seen my home country or village." — Salim

UNHCR Canada: 2 St. Clair Avenue West, Suite 802, Toronto, Ontario M4V 1L5



Photo by: Abu Raihan Tommy

Salim on assignment for a documentary about refugee life in the world's largest refugee camp.

Artworks

Control appeal

Letter copy:

Dear <Salutation>,

In Bangladesh, people are taking stock of the damage and destruction that this year's monsoon season has caused.

I'm writing to ask if you can help people who have already gone through so much rebuild their lives.

As you may know, there are close to a million Rohingya refugees living in the Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh. Rohingya people have been subject to persecution at home in Myanmar going back more than 40 years.

They have also experienced several waves of displacement. The largest was in 2017 when violence erupted in Myanmar and more than 770,000 Rohingya people were forced to flee to Bangladesh in fear for their lives. They joined the existing population of Rohingya refugees who were living in camps established in the 1990s.

The camp infrastructure had to rapidly expand to accommodate the new arrivals. People have been living in densely populated refugee camps ever since — wanting, but not able, to return home.

Daily life is hard for the Rohingya people, many of whom depend on humanitarian aid to help to cover their daily needs. Refugees and local host communities face the yearly challenge of monsoon rains and flooding.

Without adequate support, preparation and reinforcement of shelters, they are at risk of losing their homes and possessions, and in the most extreme cases, losing their lives. The annual cyclone and monsoon seasons are increasingly unpredictable, and there have also been fires and outbreaks of disease. As the climate crisis deepens, these devastating weather events will become more severe and more common — putting people's lives at risk.

The Rohingya people are resilient, but they urgently need help.

By supporting UNHCR, your kindness and compassion reaches people when they're most vulnerable. Please, if you can, continue your recent support for people who are facing long-term displacement. With a gift of <XXX>, <XXX> or even <XXX>, you could help people impacted by the monsoon rains by providing them with emergency core relief items, as well as longer term support to rebuild their lives.

For many Rohingya refugees, this is now their sixth year in displacement. Others were born in Bangladesh and have spent their whole lives in the camps. Over the years, they have been at the heart of work to improve living conditions. With your support, many have trained to work as voluntary health workers, teachers and even emergency first responders.

Imam, who lives with his wife and three daughters, arrived in Bangladesh in 2018. Since then, he has experienced the damaging impact of the annual monsoon season.

"The situation in the camp becomes very dangerous," he explains. "Shelters are flooded. There are landslides and, sometimes, even larger structures like learning centres or medical facilities collapse. People become afraid."

As a UNHCR supporter, you've helped Rohingya refugees like Iman take active steps to protect themselves and others.

"We are trained on how to rescue people trapped by floods or at risk of drowning, and we can provide people with First Aid," explains Iman, who has become a team leader.

Right now, as monsoon season draws to a close, the teams are ready. *"We can assist when infrastructure is damaged, rehabilitate houses, and evacuate people to safer places."*

<FirstName>, refugees like Iman are doing everything they can to keep their communities safe, but they can't do it alone.

Please send a gift of <XXX>, <XXX> or <XXX> that could help people rebuild their lives after the monsoon rains.

Right now, urgent action is needed to reach those who have been affected by the monsoon, and ensure they have access to essentials such as clean water, food and shelter. With your support, people can begin to repair their shelters, community facilities, and the camps' water and sanitation systems.

Iman is leading the way. *"We work with the community as if each person were a member of our own family, our brother, sister, mother, or aunt,"* he explains. This is exactly the approach Rohingya families will need when they can finally return home. Until then, it's vital they're safe, and able to live dignified lives alongside their hosts in Cox's Bazar.

Thank you for your support.

Rema Jamous Imseis
UNHCR Representative in Canada

P.S. Our teams on the ground urgently need to reach Rohingya people who are most at risk during and after monsoon season. Please help provide emergency essentials, including food, water and shelter, as well as longer-term support to rebuild their lives.

Artworks

Control appeal

Direct Mail Insert:

HOMES, HEALTH AND LIVES HIT HARD



Bangladesh. Rohingya refugees repair damaged shelters in Kutupalong camp. © UNHCR/Saikat Mojumder

SUPPORT REQUIRED

In 2023, UNHCR is working to provide aid to over **960,000** Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, as well as host communities.

There are five strategic objectives for the year ahead in coordination with our partners in the region.

With your support, UNHCR can help:

-  Work towards the voluntary return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar
-  Strengthen the protection of Rohingya refugees and enable an environment respectful of their well-being and basic rights
-  Deliver lifesaving assistance
-  Support host communities
-  Increase disaster risk management and combat the effects of climate change

To donate, please visit unhcr.ca/monsoon Or simply scan the QR code



Cover image: A Rohingya man prepares bamboo to repair shelters in the Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh after monsoon rains and strong winds caused flash floods and landslides. © UNHCR/Amos Halder 12895IN1



AS MONSOON SEASON ENDS... ...REBUILDING MUST START



A Rohingya man carries bamboo to be used to repair shelters in Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, after monsoon rains and strong winds caused flash floods and landslides. © UNHCR/Amos Halder

A HISTORY OF THE ROHINGYA CRISIS

The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic minority from Myanmar and the largest identified stateless population in the world. They've faced violence, persecution and displacement for over 40 years.

Bangladesh is home to more than **960,000** Rohingya refugees. Over 930,000 live in Cox's Bazar district, which is home to the world's largest refugee camp.

It's been six years since the 2017 wave of violence in Myanmar forced the largest exodus of Rohingya people to Bangladesh, leaving their homes in search of safety. Now, close to **one million** refugees live in camps in Cox's Bazar, where they face new threats. In March 2023, a fire destroyed 3,000 shelters. Shortly after, Cyclone Mocha made landfall in the region, where close to **40,000** Rohingya refugees had their shelters damaged or destroyed. Following this, the onset of monsoon season saw heavy rains leading to the damage of shelters, roads and camp infrastructure. **Each monsoon season brings with it the risk of the Rohingya people once again losing their homes.**

You can help people rebuild.

UNHCR is on the ground working with the Rohingya people and other key organizational partners to coordinate humanitarian response. **As monsoon season comes to an end, the needs do not.** Urgent support is required to ensure the communities and the people within them are able to rebuild. Please make a gift today to help provide essential supplies to repair damaged shelters, as well as camp infrastructure including roads, bridges, and water and sanitation systems.

With your support, UNHCR can also provide longer-term support to enable the Rohingya people to live dignified lives in safe conditions as their time in displacement continues. The Rohingya people are at the heart of this work with many working as volunteer health workers, teachers and emergency first responders.



Timeline of the Rohingya Crisis:

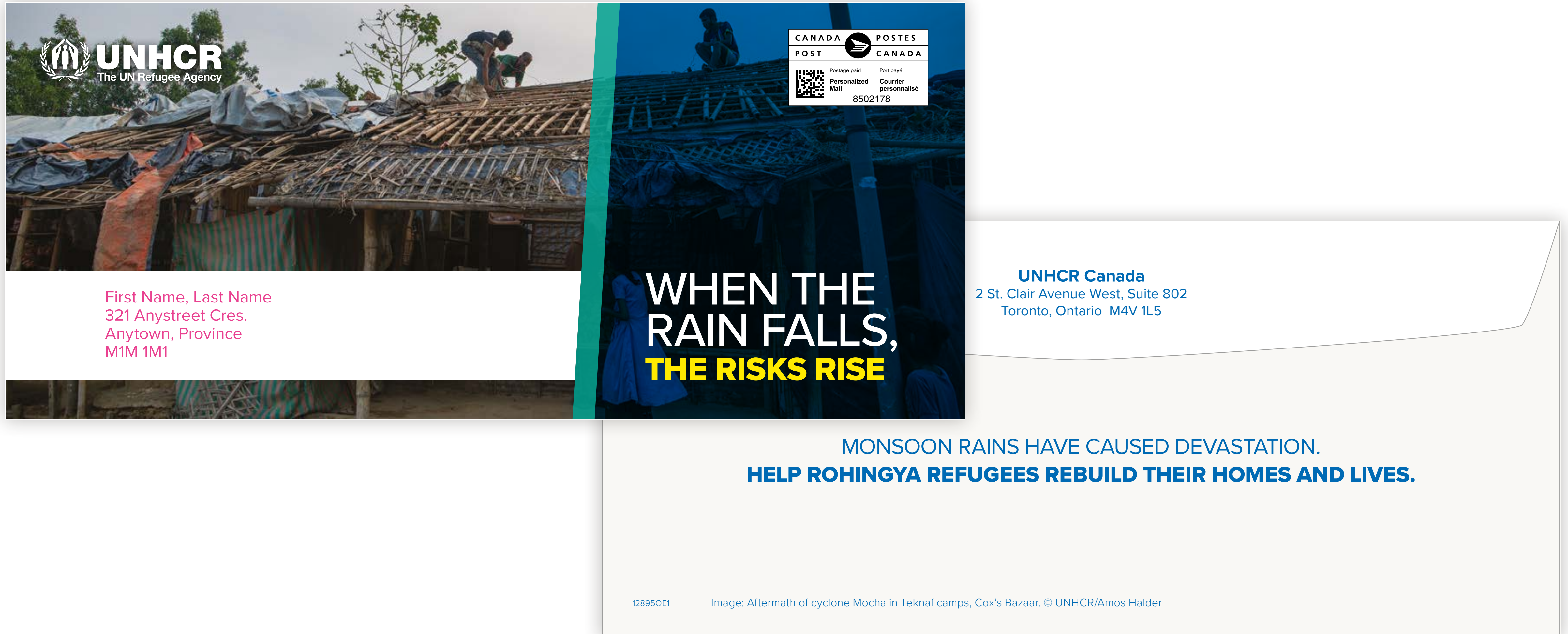
- EARLY 1990s** Persecution of the Rohingya people in Myanmar forces them to begin fleeing.
- AUGUST 2017** Violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State forces over 770,000 Rohingya to flee, marking the largest exodus of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh.
- SEPTEMBER 2017** UNHCR declares the Rohingya crisis an emergency.
- JULY 2018** Monsoon storms cause flooding and landslides in Rohingya refugee camps throughout Bangladesh.
- APRIL 2019** UNHCR starts registering Rohingya refugees, giving many people their first identity documents.
- APRIL 2020** COVID-19 presents another threat to Rohingya refugees and host communities.
- MARCH 2021** As many as 48,000 Rohingya refugees lose their shelters in a fire which devastates part of the Kutupalong camp.
- MARCH 2023** A massive fire went through Rohingya refugee camps leaving **thousands** homeless.
- MAY 2023** Cyclone Mocha hits Bangladesh and Myanmar, where large Rohingya populations are living. Shelters and community facilities are destroyed. Emergency preparations and mobile health teams were dispatched immediately in Cox's Bazar.
- PRESENT:** This year, Rohingya refugees have already had to endure fires, a cyclone and monsoon season. **The need to rebuild has never been more urgent.**

Aftermath of cyclone Mocha in Teknaf camps, Cox's Bazar. © UNHCR/Amos Halder

Artworks

Control appeal

Envelope front and back:



Artworks

Control appeal

Email:



Dear Darien,

My name is Mohammed Salim Khan, and I am a Rohingya refugee living in Bangladesh. I have been working as a trainer of Rohingya Site Management Volunteers for five years on emergency preparedness response, including fire and flood safety. [UNHCR is helping to support the refugee volunteers, but I feel more help is needed.](#)

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With fires each year, many shelters are in danger in the 33 camps in Cox's Bazar. Earlier this year in Camp 11, where over 30,000 people live, around 3,000 shelters burned down. Refugees are then homeless and have to live with neighbors until repairs can be done. Each camp has around 100 site management volunteers, and nearly 1/3 are women.



Dear Darien,

As I shared with you before, as a fire and flood safety instructor myself, and a photographer, I believe people around the world need to know about the dangerous situation Rohingya refugees are facing in Cox's Bazar. There are many people taking photographs in the camps, including community members taking evidence for the organizations they volunteer with and some professionals taking photographs as freelancers. **I know the risks because I am also a photographer documenting this refugee life.**

Firefighters and photographers in the camps are the most at danger as they are covering these emergencies on the frontline, every time they happen. When refugees try to take photographs to help cover emergency stories of fires and floods, they are in real danger. Sometimes they try to get in front of the fire and get burned or inhale smoke. My goal is for future generations to know about these fires. [You can help us stay safe.](#)



All emails from USA

Executive summary

Executive summary

Methodology and objectives

Contributor Centred Storytelling (CCS) is an approach designed by Jess Crombie to provide a sustainable way for the development and humanitarian sectors to create fundraising materials in partnership with affected populations.

It is rooted in participatory practices and existing models of content production widely used across the sector. It has been developed to be a practical and implementable model, designed to provide a way of working that shifts narrative power from humanitarian sector staff to affected populations.

It is not finalised, and this study is part of the testing, learning and evaluation process in the design of this model of working.

In her seminal essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak', Indian postcolonial academic Gayatri Spivak linked the ability to speak – in the sense of communicating your choices and wishes and preferences – to power. In her definition, having a platform on which to communicate and then – crucially – being heard, is a key descriptor of power. She describes two types of representation happening *to* the people who have less power, rather than *with* them: "representation as 'speaking for' as in politics, and representation as re-presentation, as in art and philosophy"¹⁵. In Niger, many research participants to *The People in the Pictures* shared

the Hausa proverb, "a song sounds sweeter from the author's mouth"¹⁶ to communicate their preferences for speaking for themselves as well as being able to *author* their own story; represent themselves.

The CCS methodology is rooted in this idea of voice as power and is designed to shift editorial power – it is more than just having your quotes or images included in storytelling, it is about the power to make decisions about all parts of the narrative.

Because of this, true co-creation requires the sharing of narrative control. This can feel daunting, and risky. But to claim to be co-creating stories we must share power, as co-creation is equitable and not tokenistic.

It prioritises the process as well as, and sometimes more, than the final product and establishes and recognises the capacity, skills, ability and interests of everyone involved.

The working process involves five stages. These are carried out by a working team, which is commonly made up of people with lived experience of the story topic who have been supported by the funding organisation, staff from the funding organisation (in this case UNHCR), and staff from the local office/implementing partner.

Five process stages:

1. Understanding and setting the parameters of the project.

In this stage we establish ourselves as a working group. This includes getting to know each other: our skills, our experience, our preferences, but also discussing and agreeing everyone's roles and responsibilities. In this stage we also share and discuss data about the audiences who will view this appeal and the channels on which the appeal will be launched so that all members of the working team have access to the same information and knowledge.

2. Defining the story focus.

This stage is about handing over the process to the participants and starting to explore and develop their ideas about the story topic, which locations might communicate it well, who we might speak to and when we might film. This stage is worth taking time to develop as it is the foundational idea upon which the content and appeals are laid.

3. Producing story materials

This is when production happens – taking photos, filming, interviewing individuals, laying out designs and more.

4. Producing finished pieces of content.

This process is carried out partially in the workshop setting, and partially afterwards, led by the facilitating team but with significant input from the participant team.

5. Disseminating the content.

This stage is carried out by the facilitating team once all content has been signed off by the participant team.

¹⁵ Spivak, G. C. (2010). *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press). Morris R, C. & Spivak GC. *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*. New York: Columbia University Press. P70

¹⁶ Warrington, S. & Crombie, J. (2017) *The People in the Pictures: vital perspectives on Save the Children's image making*. Save the Children UK.

Research objectives

This project, which set out to test the CCS methodology in partnership with UNHCR, had two primary objectives:

1a. To create a model of fundraising material production which is refugee led.

1b. To create a model of fundraising material production which is sustainable for UNHCR and can be scaled into day-to-day content production.

And one secondary objective:

2. To evaluate audience responses – both financial and emotional – to fundraising materials which are refugee led.

Research objectives & results summary

Objectives 1a and 1b:

1a. To create a model of fundraising material production which is refugee led.

The process of planning, preparing, and delivering this project has provided learnings about what worked and can be maintained, and where there is a need for change and redesign.

This test demonstrated that story production and fundraising that is refugee led is achievable. Being able to prove that story production led by those with lived experience is not only possible but also preferable is a significant finding in the ambition to shift the power and localise all elements of humanitarian action.

For the refugee participants, this model was a more positive way of working for everyone involved. The participants reflected that they are simply better placed to relate the story of what is happening to them: “the story I have written I have experienced it myself; I have the experience for five years so I can relate how important it is to let the world know.” But more seriously they also recognised that by sharing their experiences themselves they are able to counter false or fake narratives: “The way I said ‘they killed our people’ they (the foreign media) changed it... It’s important that I tell the story because I know the details of the crimes, instead of knowing it generally, I want them to know the details of our situation. It is also important for the next generation that we write it in history for future generations.”

1b. To create a model of fundraising material production which is sustainable for UNHCR and can be rolled out into day-to-day ways of working.

Often the testing phase requires the greatest financial investment and, as we expected, this model currently requires more resources than traditional models of fundraising material production. While it is moving towards being scalable, it is not currently a process that could be rolled out into day-to-day operations, however with the implementation of the changes outlined in the Methodological Development section below this is certainly achievable.

Objective 2:

2. To evaluate audience responses – both financial and emotional – to refugee-led fundraising materials without communicating to the donor that they are refugee-led.

- Donors are equally likely to give to refugee-led fundraising appeals in some, but not all markets. We do not have the data to show why this is the case at this stage.
- A significant minority of donors (35%) stated that they were more likely to donate to an appeal created directly by refugees.
- A majority of donors (65%) said that seeing an appeal created directly by refugees made them equally likely to donate.
- Donors did appreciate seeing stories told by refugees, even if it did not always affect their motivation to give.

Methodological development and next steps

These steps outlined are developed from the learnings that have emerged from the phase 1 test. They were not implemented in this test, but they will be included in the process and implemented of the phase 2 test, to happen in 2024-25.

Story production process:

Planning & preparation:

- Define roles and responsibilities for all individuals involved in the process. This ranges from workshop facilitators to fundraisers sharing the content with donors.
- Train all facilitators in their role and responsibilities, including awareness of power dynamics and ethical story production principles.
- Bring the local implementing country office in at the earliest stage of planning to help define the parameters.
- Carry out a safeguarding Risk Assessment process.
- Train all facilitators in trauma informed story production.

Content creation:

- Technical expertise (photographers, filmmakers, designers, fundraisers etc) to be brought in as part of the project design to create a multi-skilled team of complementary expertise areas.
- Produce multiple materials around one story chosen by the refugee team, and then created as a group as part of a five day production process.
- Participants paid a wage to fulfill the role of Content Creators.
- Boundary setting and exploration of power dynamics to take place at the start of the workshop, and throughout.
- Daily formal reflection to be built into the process.

Post-production:

- Continuation of organised and regular communications between the UNHCR team and the refugee team.
- Feedback on funding from the UNHCR team to the refugee team – money raised and where it went.

Fundraising appeal test:

- Appeal to include a communication to donors that this is a new working method and a part of UNHCR's shifting the power project.
- Create a broader content pack containing associated stories and angles that can be utilised for multiple audiences and appeals.
- Test, learn, iterate with a small number of UNHCR fundraising partners, and then build the audience base globally once the methodology is more established and evidenced.
- Send the qualitative survey out within 7 – 21 days of the appeal (when it is still fresh in the donor minds) to generate a set of qualitative data to assess their emotional response to the appeal.

Conclusion

As a sector we know now that we have a responsibility to the people that we tell stories about and with – not just to raise money and engage audiences in their lived experience, but also to do that without stereotyping, othering and perpetuating racism. Having a platform on which to communicate is a privilege, and is power, and we wish to share that privilege as fully as we possibly can.

UNHCR should be commended for their transparency and willingness to share their successes and their challenges with the sector in this way, and for their determination to keep on trialling and trying until they have a model that does deliver against all our objectives. This was not an easy model to design, and what has been outlined here is not perfect, but we hope it does provide inspiration and evidence that working in a different way is possible.

For any organisation considering working in this way we say go for it! Start small, test and learn, and don't give up when you hit the bumps. Bringing together and equally valuing expertise areas – lived experience, fundraising and storytelling – is the key to new model of story production and storytelling that will ultimately benefit everyone involved.



Credit: Kamrul Hasan/UNHCR.

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End of workshop celebration cake.

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