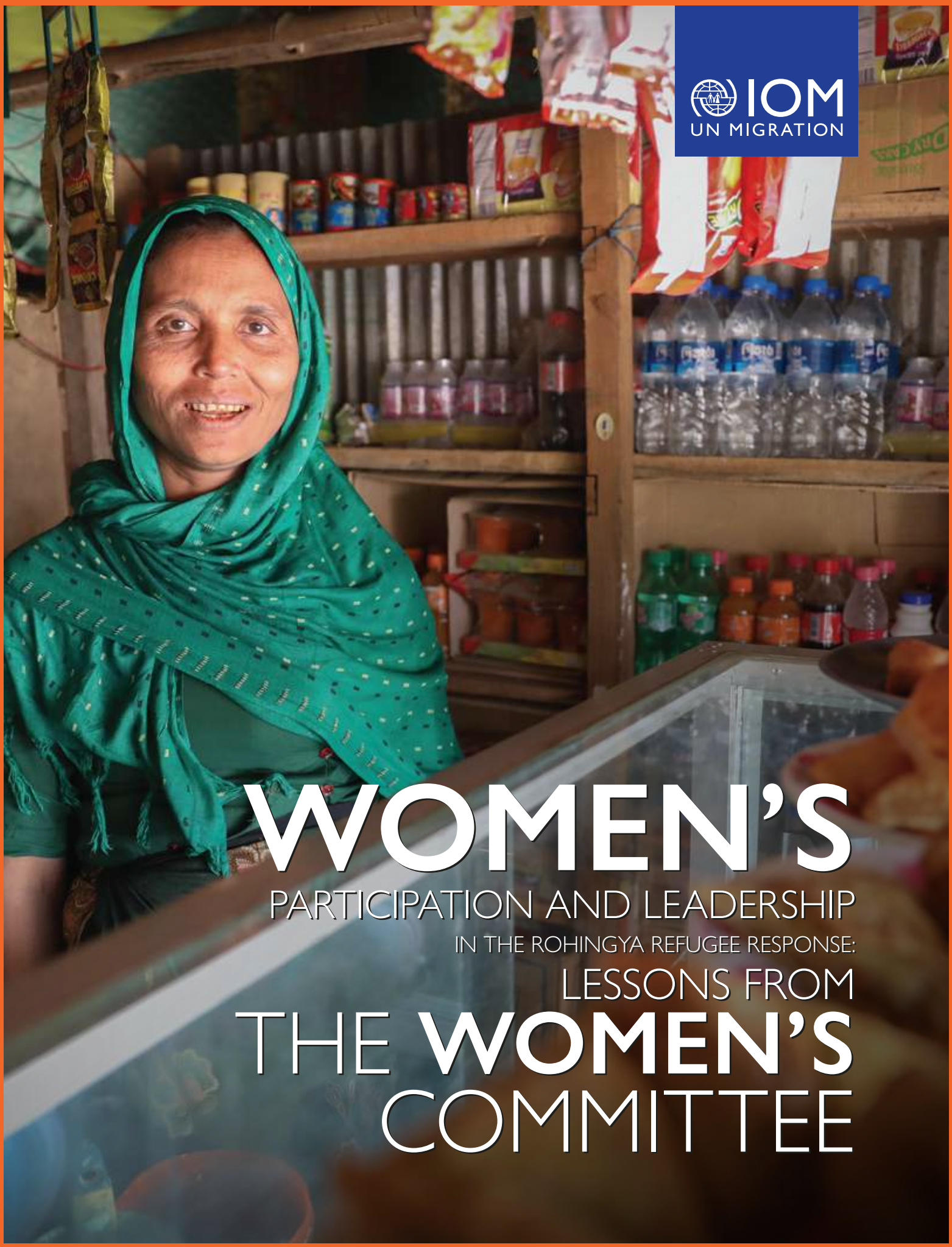


IOM
UN MIGRATION

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP IN THE ROHINGYA REFUGEE RESPONSE: LESSONS FROM THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP IN THE ROHINGYA REFUGEE RESPONSE: LESSONS FROM THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

© 2019 International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Permission is required to reproduce any part of this publication.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Freedom Fighters Office, Motel Road

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

This publication has been issued without formal editing by IOM.

Suggested citation: Smith, M.D., and Tejeda Frem, L. (2020). Women's Participation and Leadership in the Rohingya Refugee Response: Lessons from the Women's Committee. IOM, Bangladesh.

Cover description: Women's Income Generating Project Beneficiary in Leda Makeshift Site, Teknaf Bangladesh

Cover photo credit: Abdullah Al Mashrif

Design and Layout: Syed MD Tayab

Women in Displacement (Bangladesh): *https://womenindisplacement.org/bangladesh*

Acknowledgements

This research was made possible by key senior staff and field teams in each of the participating camps, who took time to ensure that the participants were treated with respect and kindness, and that their service needs were met. The authors would like to specifically thank the following staff: Marjolein Roelandt, Rumpa Dey, Connie Tangara, Celeste Bean Sanchez, Sheiknoor Hassan, Chissey Mueller, Esther Kim, Mosrafa Khanam, Umme Naznin Absari, Medhashree Chakma, Shanta Rani Dey; Mamum Parvez Pallob, Mohammed Ali, Kazi Mizanur Rahman, Tanaya Dewan, Hasna Hena, Safura Parvin, Dilara Begum, Rojina Akter, Muzibur Rahman, Mohammed Solem and Shamim Uddin Rubel.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part I: INTRODUCTION **5**
- Background 5
- Context 6
- Camp Govenance 8
- Objective 9
- Methodology 9

Part II: LEDA CAMP COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION STRUCTURES **11**

PART III: LAUNCHING THE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION PROJECT **17**
- Baseline Assessment Outcomes 18
- During Consultations 19
- Feedback from Male Leaders 21

PART IV: LAUNCHING THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE **23**
- Participatory Selection Process 23
- Women's Committee Structure 25

PART V: BARRIERS & ENABLERS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE PILOT **31**
- Barriers to Participation 31
- Enablers of Participation 33
- Operational Challenges 34

PART VI: KEY LEARNINGS & IMPACT OF THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE **37**
- Access to Information 37
- Participation in Camp Activities 38
- Representation in Camp Governance 40
- Decision Making 41
- Perceptions of Safety & Staff Safety 42

PART VII: REFLECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS **45**
- Recommendations for IOM 46
- Recommendations for IOM and Humanitarian Organizations 46

PART VIII: CONCLUSION & MOVING FORWARD **49**

Annexes **53**
- Annex 1: Gender-Based Violence Overview 53
- Annex 2: TOR for women's committee 55

PART I: INTRODUCTION

Background

Worldwide, an estimated one-in-three women will experience gender-based violence (GBV) in her lifetime[1]. Reported cases in no way represent the scale of this human rights violation. IOM assumes GBV is prevalent in all crisis settings and has taken concerted efforts to ensure that learning, tools, guidance and actions inform IOM's crisis operations in a systematic manner: this is why IOM has developed the Institutional Framework for Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Crises (GBViC Framework) – the first such dedicated Framework for the Organization.

Situations of crisis and displacement in particular can exacerbate the risks of GBV, which is why, multiple strategies are needed to **address underlying root causes, support survivors, and mitigate GBV risks** by addressing contributing factors. At its core, these strategies must ensure that women are provided with opportunities for active leadership and engagement.[2] To better mitigate GBV risks and achieve gender equality, it is crucial for women and girls to have a voice in a wide-range of formal and informal decision-making forums in camps. Moreover, according to the Camp Management Toolkit, 'ensuring meaningful participation of all groups of the population in decision-making and in camp governance structures is an essential pillar of good camp management. It is also essential to contribute to improved humanitarian response, disaster risk reduction, holistic community support, and ultimately, accountability toward affected populations.'[3]

Out of this need, the global Women's Participation Project (WPP) emerged. In coordination with the Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster (CCCM), and IOM Site Management and Protection teams, the project was implemented in Cox's Bazar in 2018 to better understand how women's participation in governance structures in camps and camp-like settings could contribute to mitigating and reducing the risks of GBV.

---

[1] According to a 2013 analysis conduct by the World Health Organization with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the South Africa Medical Research Council. Retrieved from: https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women

[2] As outlined in Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2015) Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risks, promoting resilience and aiding recovery. Retrieved from: https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2015-IASC-Gender-based-Violence-Guidelines_lo-res.pdf

[3] International Organization for Migration (IOM), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) (2015) Camp Management Toolkit. Retrieved from: https://cccmcluster.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/CMT_2015_Portfolio_compressed.pdf

Context

In late August 2017, Bangladesh saw a massive influx of 745,000[4] Rohingya fleeing violence and serious human rights abuses from Rakhine State, Myanmar. To visualize the scale of the influx and setting for women's participation, it would be the equivalent of the entire population of Washington D.C. fleeing and living in an 'area less than 8 per cent the size of the land where they came from.'[5] The new arrivals settled in Ukhiya and Teknaf Upazilas where they live with Rohingya refugees from previous inflows as well as with Bangladeshi host communities. Since August 2017, IOM, other humanitarian actors and the government significantly scaled up their activities to provide life-saving assistance to the Rohingya who were forcibly displaced from Myanmar.

Rohingya who arrived in 2017 live side by side with host community and Rohingya who were displaced years or sometimes decades ago. Accounting for the different refugee flows, as of February 2019[6], there are over 932,000 refugees in Cox's Bazar district, of which 52 per cent are women and girls.

The Rohingya, whom the Government of Bangladesh do not formally recognize as refugees, continue to face immense challenges in Bangladesh even though they have found a safe haven. The lack of a clear legal and policy framework pertaining to refugee protection in Bangladesh leave the Rohingya vulnerable to harm, abuse and exploitation and expose them to serious protection risks. Their irregular status and restricted mobility, coupled with their limited access to civil documentation, livelihoods, education and health care, render most of them reliant on international aid.

The Rohingya are hosted across different camp settlement types; these can broadly be categorised as collective sites, collective sites with host community, and dispersed sites. Leadership and governance structures among refugees have been somewhat ad hoc due to the chaotic influx in 2017 and the challenging conditions upon arrival in Cox's Bazar district. As village populations (in Rakhine) did not arrive in the camps together, new geographically-based (camp block level) leadership structures emerged with Majhis (appointed community Rohingya leaders) playing key roles. The Government-appointed Camp in Charges (CiC), which are responsible for the camp administration, have increasingly exercised quasi-judicial authority in addressing civil documentation matters and disputes among Rohingya in the camps.

Due to a recent increase in human trafficking and other crimes such as drug trafficking, robbery, and murder across the camps, the Rohingya fear crimes and abuses perpetrated by several militant groups that are allegedly present in the camp settlements. With a focus on major security threats rather than low-level criminality (which in most cases is handled by the Majhis), the army and intelligence services have asserted their authority in the camps and environs, through checkpoints, perimeter controls and informants. However, law enforcement struggles to provide holistic security support within the camps due to personnel coverage constraints, the need

---

[4] UN OCHA. Rohingya Refugee Crisis. Retrieved from: https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis

[5] Ibid. Rohingya Refugee Crisis.

[6] According to IOM's Needs and Population Monitoring

to coordinate with other security actors, and challenges with applying national laws to the unique camp context. Refugee communities are particularly concerned about the absence of security provision and responsive law enforcement at night. Recent proposals to securitise the camps and address perceived security threats have focused on hard security solutions such as fences and security cameras – an approach that may foment an ambience of entrapment for those who live within the camps.

The crisis has also significantly affected Bangladeshi host communities in mixed camp-like settings and at the peripheries of burgeoning camps and settlements. Additionally, the increase in levels of crime and insecurity in the camps, including its cross-border dimension, has a negative effect on host communities' perceptions of the Rohingya community as a whole. Overall the sheer scale and speed of the most recent influx of Rohingya refugees has inevitably had an economic, social, political, environmental, and security impact on the host communities in Cox's Bazar district, with Rohingya populations outnumbering surrounding host communities by a ratio of two to one in some areas. The main impact on Bangladeshi host communities are related to food security, economic vulnerability, strained resources, market access, labour opportunities, infrastructure, public services and the environment.

With a population of 2.2 million[7] and development indicators that are far below the national average, such as poverty at 23.2 per cent, extreme poverty at 12.92 per cent,[8] and literacy at 39.3 per cent[i], Cox's Bazar is one of the most vulnerable districts in Bangladesh. Host and refugee populations face significant day-to-day challenges such as access to water, food, firewood, land, sanitation facilities, schools, labour opportunities, and poor infrastructure.

From the onset of the emergency, hundreds of incidents of GBV were reported on a weekly basis, they occurred in Myanmar, during flight, and now in the camps in Cox's Bazar. Women and girls are exposed to further risks due to a wide-range of contributing factors including: poor living conditions in the camps, limited basic resources, lack of income generating activities, insufficient lighting and gender segregated toilets and bathing facilities in the camps, distance of water points, absence of security patrolling during the night and restricted movement overall. Many of these risks have shown to lead to harmful coping mechanisms such as child marriage, survival sex, trafficking, and other forms of GBV (Refer to Annex 1: Gender-Based Violence Overview).

The WPP was piloted in Leda Makeshift Camp, serving the Leda and Alikhali communities. These camps are close to each other and very complex with a mixed population of Rohingya from previous exodus, new arrivals from the 2017 influx, host communities, and proximity to the Myanmar border. There are many related risks and hazards, such as drugs, kidnappings and human trafficking as well natural disasters. In addition, the IOM Protection team had the most complex and high-risk caseload from this area and managed an existing women and girls safe space (WGSS)[9] to operate activities from, acting as an essential hub for interaction with women and adolescent girls in the community and fostered holistic integration between IOM's Protection and Site Management field teams.

A baseline study for the WPP was conducted in Shamlapur, Leda, Unchiprang with the pilot project being rolled out in Leda Makeshift (Camp 24), serving both Leda and Alikhali communities due to need and to mitigate existing protection risks. In addition, the camp governance structure in this area has traditionally been very 'top down.'

---

[7] Arditis, S. and Catambone, C. (2018). A regeneration of Cox's Bazar. Dhaka Tribune. Retrieved from:https://www.dhakatribune.com/opinion/op-ed/2018/04/11/regeneration-coxs-bazar/

[8] Government of Bangladesh (2017). Retrieved from: http://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/a1d32f13_8553_44f1_92e6_8ff80a4ff82e/Bangladesh%20%20Statistics-2017.pdf 2555

[9] A safe space for women and girls is a place where women and girls can go to at any time to feel safer and empowered and have access to information, education, recreational activities, support and services. (UNFPA, IRC, Nov. 2017).

Camp Governance

Leadership and governance structures among refugees have been somewhat ad hoc as a consequence of the chaotic exodus in 2017 and the challenging conditions upon arrival in Cox's Bazar district. As village populations have generally not arrived in the camps together, new geographically based leadership structures have emerged (ISCG, 2018, p. 6).

The ACAPS, NPM Analysis Hub published a thematic report titled "Rohingya Crisis. Governance and Community Participation" in June 2018, that provides an overview of the governance structures and mechanisms for community participation that vary across sites (ACAPS, NPM Analysis Hub, 2018b).

The camp administration and governance structure of the Government of Bangladesh can be summarised as follows:

> *The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) is responsible for the refugee response and thus for the governance of the Rohingya camps and settlements. The Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) represents the MoDMR in the Rohingya response. The RRRC had been previously in charge of managing the registered refugee population only, but after the 2017 influx its mandate was extended to cover all Rohingya people in these settlements. The RRRC appoints civil servants on a rotation basis to act as Camp-in-Charges (CiC) in all camps and settlements. These individuals are the government's representatives at the camp level. They are responsible for daily administration, coordination, and delivery of services, in conjunction with the army.*
>
> (ACAPS, NPM Analysis Hub, 2018b)

Camp in Charges (CiC) have increasingly exercised quasi-judicial authority in disputes and law enforcement often reifying negative coping among Rohingya. The Protection Sector has also raised several other issues in relation to the conduct of CiCs.[10] One of the distinctive key features of the governance structure of the Rohingya refugees camps in Bangladesh is the majhi system[11]. During the 2017 refugee influx, the Bangladeshi

---

[10] CIC interference is hindering Protection work; they are pressuring Protection to record all cases in a case registry that will be kept in the CIC office. Camp level protection focal points continue to push back on Protection partners not being able to comply. The issue has been raised in the PwG and GBV sub-sector.

[11] The direct translation of "majhi" from Bangla to English is "boatman". The word was originally used to refer to the boat captains who help Rohingya cross the Naf river from Myanmar to Bangladesh. The majhi system was established after the 1991 Rohingya influx. Individual refugees were appointed as leaders, known as "majhis", by government officials to support the CiCs and the police in maintaining control and order and act as focal points for camp management activities. A similar system had been in place in IDP camps in Rakhine State, where some refugees were appointed by the government to fulfil a similar role as a key liaison between the Myanmar military and the Rohingya population. (ACAPS, NPM Analysis Hub, 2018b)

Army introduced the majhi system that was already in place in older makeshift settlements to the new settlements. As unelected informally appointed refugee representatives, the majhis are in charge of providing population estimates, organising distributions, and communication between the CICs, the humanitarian community and the refugee community. Typically, a majhi is in charge of one block and reports to a head majhi who then reports to the Bangladeshi Army and the CiCs. In practice, however, the reporting lines are not always clear cut, and both the army and the CiCs use the majhis as focal points for camp governance. Over time their role has expanded to also include the provision of security and dispute resolution in many locations.

This prominent position, endows the majhis with considerable power within the refugee communities, although they are not democratically elected or formally given decision-making powers on camp governance. Additionally, majhis are not being payed, which in conjunction with a lack of accountability has created situations for exploitation and abuse. These accountability concerns are to be taken seriously in light of a track record of majhis having abused their power in the past, the most significant and common abuses include diversion of aid and sexual exploitation and abuse as well as charging refugees for the illegal forging of Bangladeshi nationality papers. Consequently, the majhi system was abolished in the registered refugee camps managed by UNHCR (Kutapalong and Nayapara refugee camps) in 2007 due to widespread abuse of power and corruption. Various community participation initiatives have also been put in place within many of the new settlements to expand the channels of communication and engagement between humanitarian agencies and the refugee community[12] (ACAPS, NPM Analysis Hub, 2018b). Against this backdrop, IOM launched the WPP in Leda and Alikhali in 2018 and compiled this learning report in 2019.

Objective

The objectives of this learning report are three-fold:

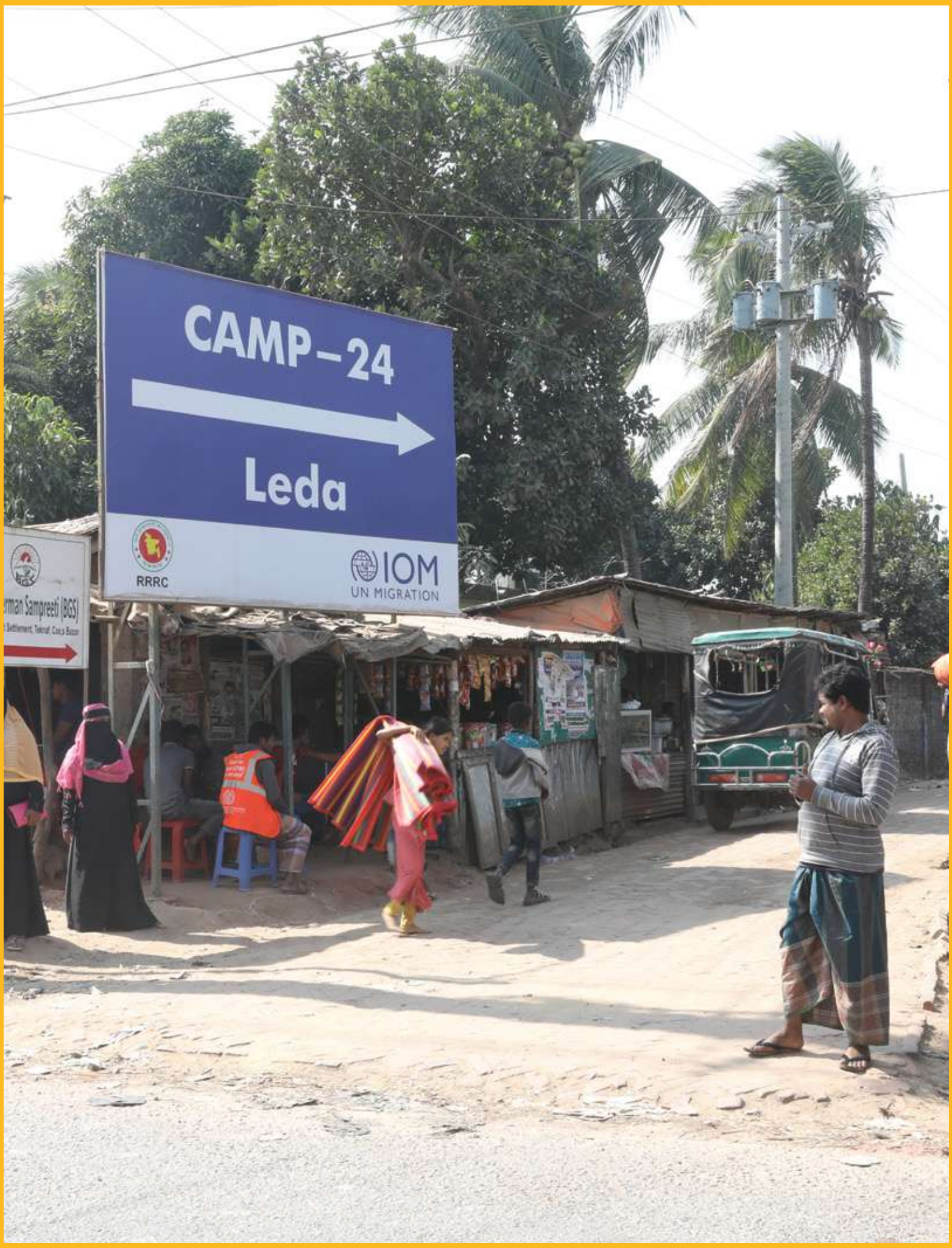
1. To draw lessons learned from the pilot implementation of the WPP
2. To capture the experiences from the women in Leda and Alikhali camps who have participated in the Women's Committee that took root from the implementation of the WPP
3. To provide recommendations for IOM and other humanitarian actors considering implementing the WPP in other camps in Cox's Bazar.

Methodology

The report builds on the outcomes of a baseline assessment conducted in January 2018 which identified five key barriers to women's participation, namely: 1.) access to information, 2.) participation in camp activities, 3.) representation in camp governance, 4.) decision-making and 5.) perceptions of safety. The analysis is based on data gathered in July 2019 through four focus group discussions conducted with a total of 50 members of the Women's Committee, ten key informant interviews with male community leaders and semi-structured interviews with IOM staff involved in the project.

---

[12] *In some, but not all, new camps and settlements, community participation initiatives have been set up by humanitarian actors in parallel with the majhi system, in the form of participatory groups, committees, and other initiatives. These have, in some cases, an issue or sectoral focus and an advisory function for programming. In others, they have a more general focus, and are forums for refugees to bring up any issue or concern and discuss solutions. (ACAPS, NPM Analysis Hub, 2018b)*


CAMP–24
Leda
RRRC
IOM
UN MIGRATION

PART II: LEDA AND ALIKHALI COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION STRUCTURES

There are 32 camps in Cox's Bazar and 10 are in close proximity to host communities. For the project, Leda and Alikhali makeshift sites (Camps 24 and 25) in Teknaf were selected due to the mixed demographics in these areas. These sites made the context complex and unique mainly because different population groups living side-by-side, including host community families, Rohingya families who arrived in 2017 and Rohingyas who came years or decades ago. According to IOM's Needs and Population Monitoring (NPM)[13] Site Assessment Round 15 estimates, the population breakdown is summarized below which shows that approximately 80 per cent of the total population are Rohingya while only 20 per cent are Bangladeshi.[14]

Population Group	Camp 24 (Leda)	Camp 25 (Alikhali)
Host Community (Bangladeshi)	**6,900 individuals 1,250 households**	**3,500 individuals 620 households**
Rohingya Community (Old and New Arrivals)	**35,354 individuals 7,669 households**	**10,072 individuals 2,388 households**

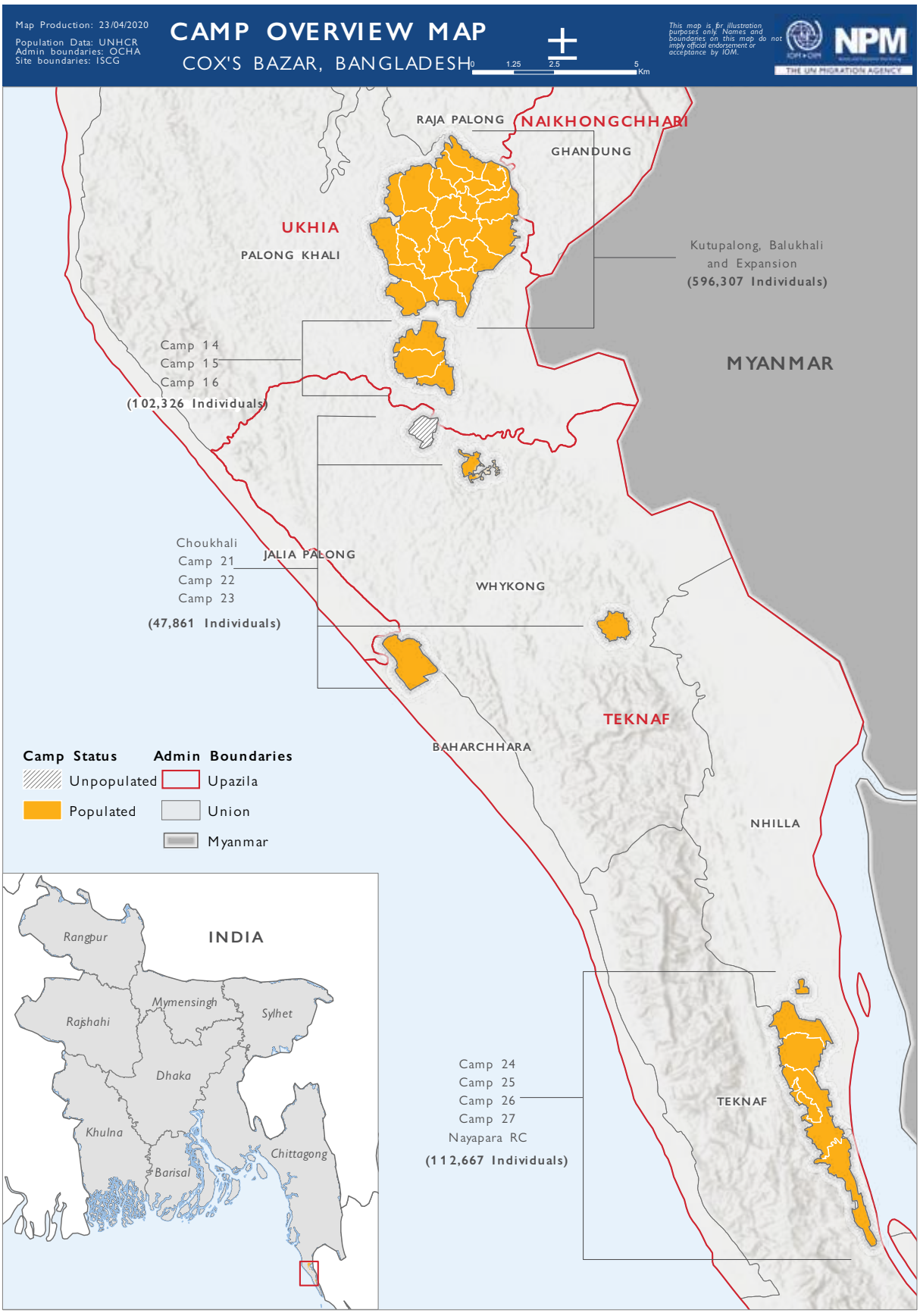
This growing population is competing over common resources such as land, water, food, shelter, and firewood in the area often resulting in inter-communal conflict and violence. According to Oxfam's study (July 2018)[15], there have been reports of growing tensions between host and refugee communities related to 'access and use of land, perceived and actual disparities in aid distribution and access to public services, broader resource competition and perceptions of power.' This echoes findings from the 2018 Inter-Agency report entitled 'Protection Needs and Trends Assessment for Refugee and Host Communities in Teknaf Sub-district which highlighted that this situation becomes increasingly worse during monsoon and cyclone seasons with many households unsure of where they will find fuel, water, and other basic resources. Tensions between refugee and host communities around common resources can further perpetuate and contribute to GBV risks specific to women and girls, for example in the collection of firewood and other materials needed for survival and subsistence.

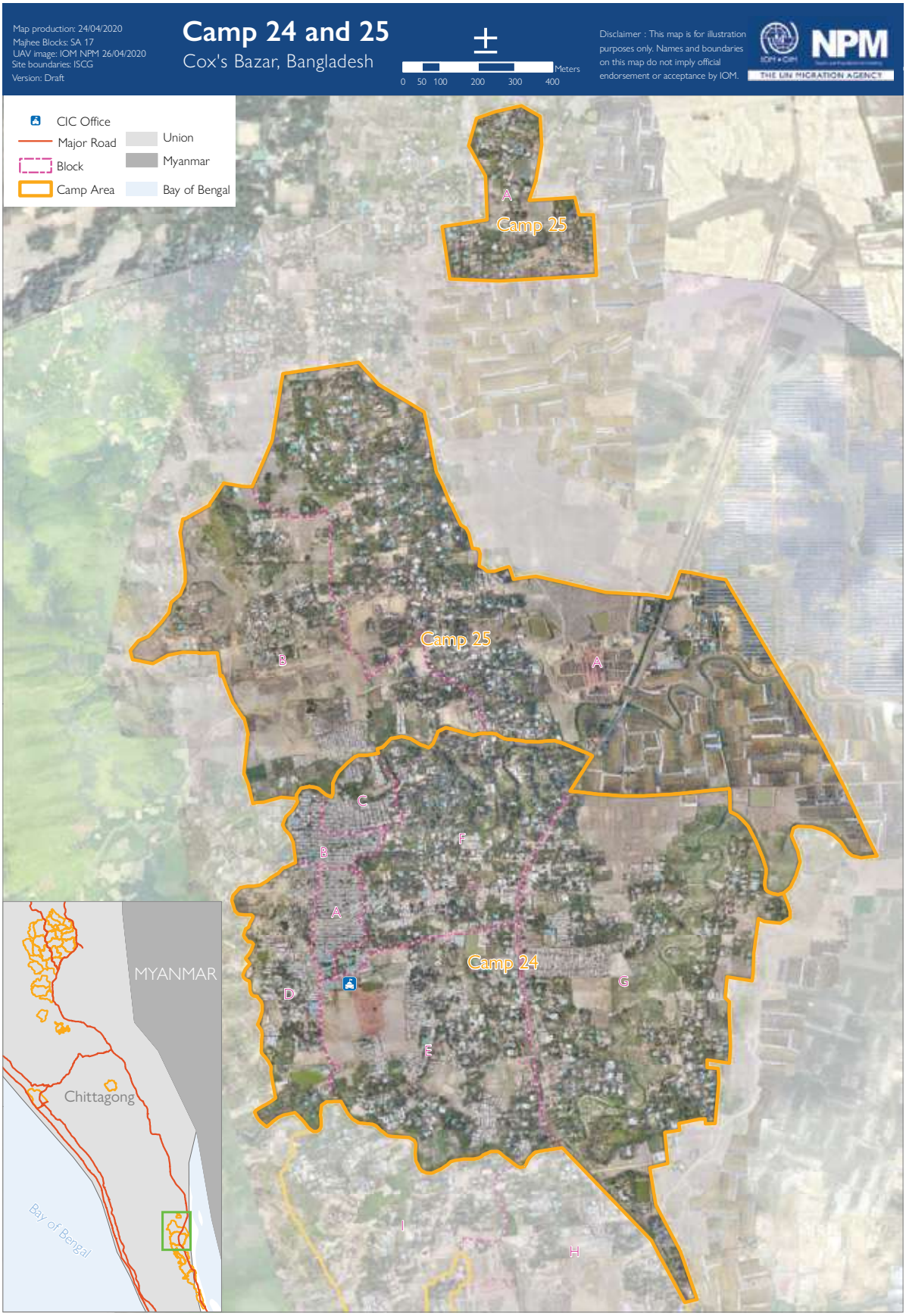
---

[13] IOM Bangladesh NPM was first launched in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh in early 2017. Since 2017, IOM NPM has conducted 16 rounds of "Site Assessments". The NPM Site Assessment collects information about the overall Rohingya population in Cox's Bazar district. It provides an overview of key population figures, living conditions, needs of populations across all locations where Rohingya refugees have been identified.

[14] IOM (2019). Needs and Population Monitoring (NPM). Site Assessment: Round 15. Retrieved from: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/npm_site_assessment_round_15.pdf

[15] Inter Agency (2018). Protection Needs and Trends Assessment for Refugee and Host Communities in Teknaf Sub-district- Interagency Report. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/teknaf_protection_assessment_-_inter-agency_final.pdf


Map Production: 23/04/2020
Population Data: UNHCR
Admin boundaries: OCHA
Site boundaries: ISCG
CAMP OVERVIEW MAP
COX'S BAZAR, BANGLADESH
0 1.25 2.5 5 Km
This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.
NPM
THE UN MIGRATION AGENCY
RAJA PALONG
NAIKHONGCHHARI
GHANDUNG
UKHIA
PALONG KHALI
Kutupalong, Balukhali and Expansion
(596,307 Individuals)
MYANMAR
Camp 14
Camp 15
Camp 16
(102,326 Individuals)
Choukhali
Camp 21
Camp 22
Camp 23
(47,861 Individuals)
JALIA PALONG
WHYKONG
TEKNAF
BAHARCHHARA
NHILLA
Camp Status
Unpopulated
Populated
Admin Boundaries
Upazila
Union
Myanmar
INDIA
Rangpur
Mymensingh
Sylhet
Rajshahi
Dhaka
Khulna
Barisal
Chittagong
Camp 24
Camp 25
Camp 26
Camp 27
Nayapara RC
(112,667 Individuals)
TEKNAF


Map production: 24/04/2020
Majhee Blocks: SA 17
UAV image: IOM NPM 26/04/2020
Site boundaries: ISCG
Version: Draft
Camp 24 and 25
Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh
0 50 100 200 300 400
Meters
Disclaimer : This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.
NPM
THE UN MIGRATION AGENCY
CIC Office
Major Road
Block
Camp Area
Union
Myanmar
Bay of Bengal
Camp 25
Camp 24
A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H
I
MYANMAR
Chittagong
Bay of Bengal

A woman at IOM's Shelter/NFI Distribution Point, Leda (Camp 24), Bangladesh

Government and Leda (Camp 24) Camp Community Representation Structures

Below are the key government representatives and community representation structures in Camp 24.

Government

Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR): Government Ministry responsible for the refugee response and governance of camps.

Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC): Representative of the MoDMR in the Rohingya response.

Camp-in-Charge (CiC): Appointed by the RRCC, CiC are civil servants responsible for camp administration and camp management, alongside the army. They are appointed on a rotating basis.

Army: In the Rohingya crisis, the Army was the first to respond in their disaster response role. A Camp Commander oversees military activities in the camp.

Community Representation Structures in Leda (Camp 24) and Alikhali (Camp 25)

All structures, except for Imams, are set up at the village (locally known as 'Para') and block level. In Camp 24 there are 7 blocks and 33 sub-blocks and in Camp 25 there are 2 blocks and 13 sub-blocks.

Majhi: Structure set up by the Army to support the immediate influx. Majhis are appointed on an ad hoc basis. In camp 24 there are 74 Majhis, and in Camp 25 there are 26 Majhis, totaling 100. At the onset of the emergency, there were no female Majhis. However now, there are 7 female Majhis in Camp 24.

Para (village) Development Committee (PDC): Setup by Site Management actors to create a more participatory structure. There are a total of 10 PDCs with each having 11 members, totalling 110 PDC members. To ensure social cohesion, in each village there are 6 seats reserved for host community and 5 seats for Rohingya. Among them, there are 3 women representatives, roughly 27 per cent per para.

Religious leaders: Imams, although not engaged in a formal religious representation structure in the camps, also play a key role in the community and camp activities. Assessments found that most decision-making and community level decision making and information sharing is done in mosques where women are not allowed to enter.[16] The Imams also represent communities in engagement with the CiCs in camp management. There are 33 mosques in Leda and 20 in Alikhali, dominating the public sphere[17].

> *"While members of these groups interact regularly and participate in joint meetings, the reality for women is that you will never see them speaking up, using their voices."*
>
> *-Protection Officer*

[16] *Oxfam (2018) One Year On: Time to Put Women and Girls at the Heart of the Rohingya Refugee Response.' Oxfam Briefing Paper. Sept. 2019. https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620533/bp-one-year-on-rohingya-refugee-women-girls-110918-en.pdf*

[17] *Key to note that Rohingya women and adolescent girls in particular have restricted mobility in public spaces and little meaningful involvement in public decision making overall.*

IOM
UN MIGRATION
IOM
OIM

PART III: LEDA AND ALIKHALI COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION STRUCTURES

The wide-range of case studies where the WPP has been piloted on the global level indicate that enhancing women's agency in public and private spheres is critical for social transformation and preventing violence against women and girls in all settings.[18]

The participation of women is a phased process towards empowerment with a strong protection lens in order to ensure that opportunities for women and girls are situated "within reach" while identifying longer-term strategies for transforming harmful social gender norms that prevent them from taking on leadership roles.[19]

> *"In most camps, women are not aware of their rights, but their safety, security, and dignity are so important!"*
>
> *– Site Management Officer*

> *"At the onset of the emergency, no one was engaging women, they were systemically discriminated."*
>
> *- Protection Officer*

> *"It is always the men and male leaders such as Majhis and Imams who are consulted. But why would no one ever think for a second to consult women and hear their feedback, feelings, and needs?"*
>
> *– Protection Officer*

When the IOM Protection and Site Management teams in Cox's Bazar first heard about the idea of the Women's Participation Project, on the surface everyone thought it was a really good initiative that could be integrated into Site Management programming. While mainstreaming protection into CCCM in particular is not new, two key questions that lingered in the minds of the project team were:

- Would it be possible to adopt it in the midst of the emergency response?
- Would there be community backlash given prevailing gender norms in the Rohingya community, and how little is known about Rohingya women's leadership experiences Myanmar?

Despite these initial challenging questions, staff members expressed that the project was very important at a personal level. "I am a woman," said a national staff. "When I heard about the idea of Women's Participation in such a complex setting like Leda, I felt that indeed women should be prioritized in camp management and coordination. I was very happy to be included."

---

[18] IOM and WRC (2018) Women's Participation Pilot Learning Report in Displacement. Endline Report. July 2018. https://womenindisplacement.org/sites/default/files/report/2019-02/GBV_DraftEndline_Report_2018_July18.pdf

[19] Despite recognition of gender social norms, like purdah (a form of women seclusion that is widely practiced in South Asia) that inhibit women's participation within camp systems and structures in Cox's Bazar, humanitarian actors have yet to consolidate a comprehensive mapping of understandings of leadership, how these are gendered and related to social norms, and what capacities women have and are missing in order to better challenge norms and use position of authority created within the humanitarian response. IOM and UN Women will be conducting a social norm mapping and research report to better understand leadership and empowerment opportunities and structures for Rohingya women in the response.

Baseline Assessment Outcomes

To kick-off the project, a *baseline assessment* was conducted from 22 – 25 January 2018 to establish the existing levels of women's participation and identify strategies for improvement. The assessment identified the following key barriers to women's participation:

Baseline Study Findings (January 2018)	
Access to information	• Women rely on male family members to convey messages to the community leaders as traditional values prevent women and girls from directly approaching men. • Female community members rely heavily on male family members to receive information on decisions that impact them.
Participation in camp activities	• All movements of women and girls are closely monitored by their male family members and are expected to be justified with a valid reason. • Majhis and Imams seemed open to accept female participation in camp activities.
Representation in camp governance	• While female community members seemed to accept that Majhis had their best interest at heart, they felt that their needs were unheard or unanswered. • Majhis are appointed community leaders of Rohingya population and recognized as part of the leadership structure by the Government of Bangladesh.
Decision making	• Decision-making is primarily controlled by majhis at the community level and by males at the household level.
Perceptions on safety	• All women and girls said to feel only safe at their homes at night. • Rohingya women also felt unsafe around the water pumps for example, given disputes with host community due to increasing competition over available resources, facilities and job opportunities.

Overview of activities conducted between January 2018- September 2018

Staff Training

Who:

- CCCM Secretariat Women in Displacement Focal Point
- IOM CxB Protection and Site Management

Why:

- To equip field staff on how to conduct FGDs and KIIs for the project
- To orient staff on the goals of the project and lessons learnt in other contexts

What:

- Training of field staff on how to use different FGD and KII tools according to age, gender, and community groups types

Outcomes:

- Successful FGD pilots

Baseline Study

Who:

- IOM CxB Protection and Site Management

Why:

- To understand camp governance structures and who is participating- including their roles and responsibilities
- To understand challenges that prevent women from participating
- To understand camp delineation

What:

- 11 FGD's were held in the field
  - 2 in Shamlapur
  - 6 in Leda
  - 3 in Uchipariong

Outcomes:

- Baseline report including recommendations to enhance participation of women in camp life

Community Consultation

Who:

- IOM CxB Protection and Site Management

Why:

- To explore if the idea of Women's Participation is feasible
- To explore if women were willing to participate
- To encourage men and majhis to allow women to participate

What:

- Community block meetings
- Home-to-home community visits
- One-on-one conversations with male leaders

Outcomes:

- Positive interest from women
- **Emergence of the idea of a Women's Committee**

Consultations

Consultations were organized to target different groups of women and men, including community leaders and the existing camp committees. Given that women had not actively participated in camp management or women's empowerment activities, they were very surprised when first approached with the idea of women's participation.

During the house-to-house consultations, there were also a number of questions on women's minds:

- Would I be able to benefit from this? Will there be opportunities to receive more material goods and income-generating activities?
- Will I be blamed for doing something wrong by my community?
- Will my husband and male leaders agree with women's involvement in these types of activities?

Like any community-led consultative process where the process itself determines the outcome, it was difficult to concretely explain to the women what engagement would look like. However, through continuous household engagement, particularly with the husbands and other male leaders, understanding and perceptions started to shift.

As a result of this process, a number of different strategic interventions were identified and nearly 400 women expressed interest in participating in the project.

Feedback from Male Leaders on the Importance of Women's Participation

While many questions were lingering, male community leaders shared a range of reasons on the importance of women's participation in camp governance and camp activities.

1. Women are vulnerable but play a key role individually, in the family, and in the community, it is important to hear and respect women's views.
2. By achieving a certain level of representation women would be able to realize their rights and interests.
3. Increasing the rate of women's participation would inspire other women to participate and help dismantle harmful stereotypes.
4. Women know better than men the problems women face in this context, and women are more comfortable discussing with other women, it is easy to approach a women with a request.
5. Women are good at prioritizing community members and they actively share information.
6. Women could be consulted on issues such as GBV, hygiene, safety and security, caring for pregnant women and newborn babies.
7. Women would improve their skills, mental wellbeing, and social relationships.
8. Women have good leadership skills and are able to balance different demands.
9. Women are more proactive and value relationships with others.
10. Women can support men to handle crisis situations.

PART IV: LAUNCHING THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

Participatory Selection Process

Integration between IOM Protection and Site Management teams was crucial to the roll out of the WPP. Training and field level coordination was a dedicated effort to ensure a common understanding of roles and responsibilities, core protection standards, gender and GBV.

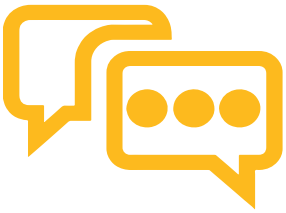
The 'Khusor Ghor' WGSS (meaning 'happy house'), a name bestowed on the WGSS by the women in Leda, served as a strategic entry point for regular community engagement and a safe space for dialogue and voicing concerns. Targeted outreach and awareness raising in the community by IOM Site Management and Protection teams ensured that women and girls were linked to activities in the WGSS even if they could not participate in the women's committee, alternative opportunities and a social network developed through the start up phase of the project and ensured SM teams knew also how to better refer protection cases.

Key was a mapping of community leaders and power holders in the community, consultations in the WGSS mapped out what would be the significant barriers and what needed to happen to ensure they felt safe engaging in the project and felt ownership of each step of the design, including approval from the CIC. Participatory in its approach, IOM site management and protection teams presented the findings of the WPP baseline assessment to the CiC and wider community to have 'buy in' from key gatekeepers in the community for women and girls participation. Imams also had a pivotal role of support in the WPP intervention working with site management and protection teams to sensitise Rohingya at the block level and encouraging support.

IOM's Protection team ensured mapping of the women support groups and formation of women's committee as proposed by the women and girls and provided on the job training and capacity building to IOM Site Management teams. The nomination process was based on women's interests and recommendations by community members, GBV and Site Management staff. The WGSS acts as a the central hub for women and girls to safely discuss concerns related to the intervention and seek support from IOM protection teams. The selection process was discussed and agreed upon by the women interested in joining the Committee within the safety of the WGSS and with IOM staff/facilitators who could ensure everyone's voices and concerns were heard. Women shared that they had never participated in any type of selection process before as they were not allowed to have such committee structures in Myanmar. This was a new experience for them.

1. Invitation to participate

- Through the Women and Girls Safe Sape (WGGS), and house visits, roughly 40 women per para expressed interest and were invited to the Women and Girls Safe Spaces for an information session
- Key messages from the Terms of Reference (ToR) were shared and discussed



2. Consultation on ToR

- ToR consultations were held per Para in WGSS.. Roles and responsibilities were outlined
- ToR was updated based on input from women and successfully adopted
- A quota system was suggested that included old and new Rohingya and host community

3. Committee Member Selection

- Sessions were held per Para to select 10 women per Para
- First step was to agree on the selection process
- Women agreed that a voting system was appropriate. Each women would stand at the front of the room and with their back to the crowd those in favor would raise their hands
- 100 women were selected in total

4. Focal Point Selection

- Sectoral focal point structure was introduced by Site Management
- Skills and capacity assessment were conducted to identify which women should act as focal point for each sector.
- Using the outcomes of the assessment, sectoral focal points were then selected

Women with Disability: A few months later after the selection of the 100 women, it was evident that women with disability were not participating. The entire process outlined above was also conducted to identify and include them. In the end an additional 10 women with disability were selected. Resulting in the total of 110 Committee Members.

"For example, if one woman knew where the health facilities were and what kind of facilities were available then she was selected for that sector."

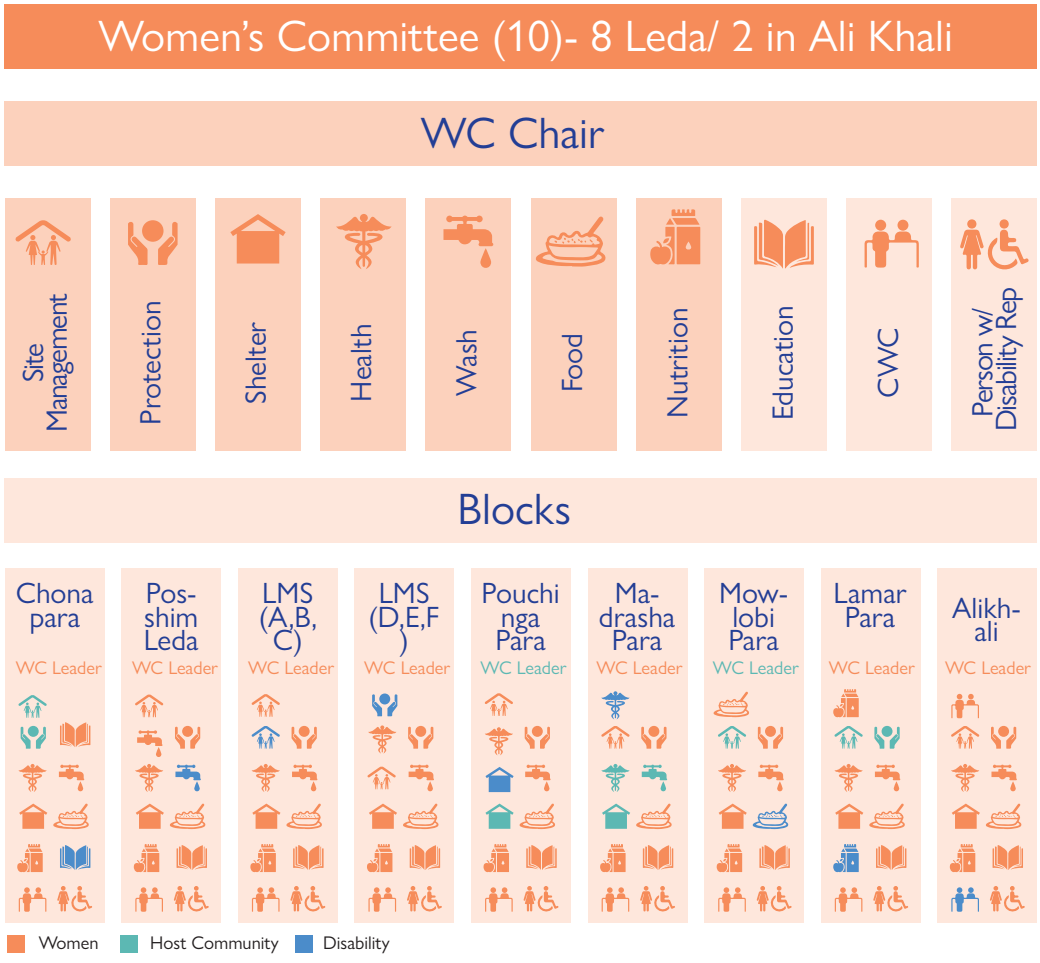
-Protection Officer

Women's Committee Structure

The structure of the Women's Committee was inspired by the PDC structure[20] to ensure that there are women focal points for each block. Building upon lesson learned and positive experiences of these PDCs, IOM Site Management also introduced the Sectoral focal point structure to ensure smooth coordination with service providers in the camps, who are also organized by sectors.

During this process, the women made the very specific request for the establishment of a quota system to ensure a balance of power between the three different groups: Rohingya who arrived before 2017, Rohingya who arrived in or after 2017, and women from the host community. There was consensus of all stakeholders on this approach.

After the selection process was completed, a skills assessment was conducted to 1) decide who would form the core group, and 2) appoint the women as focal points for the sector they had the most knowledge of. Each block was to have a representative from each sector. Below is the resulting, and current, structure of the committee.



[20] *Setup by Site Management actors to help counter balance some of the challenges with the mahji system.*

"Traditionally, all these committees follow the president, vice-president, secretary model, but the Women's Committee doesn't. It has a core committee and sectoral focal points. It's an exceptional structure. It is very good and much more service-oriented."

- Site Management Officer

As a result of this process, the Women's Committee was formally launched in September 2018. The Committee brings together 110 women leaders into a platform that is recognized by the community and the CiC. A ToR for the women's committee is available in Annex 2. The primary objectives are as follows:

1. Increase **representation** of women and girls within the camp governance structures
2. Strengthen representation of women and girls in daily **decision-making** activities
3. Enable women and girls to share information about their needs and concerns
4. Improve **access to information** about services and support available to them

Women's Committee members are responsible for representing the interest of women and girls in a fair and impartial way within Leda and Alikhali. Participation in the committee is purely voluntary and does not involve compensation.

Women's Empowerment, Participation and Leadership Training of Trainers (ToT) in IOM's Multipurpose Centre in Leda

Capacity building: coordination with humanitarian sector focal points

Leda Women's Committee Core Team members undergo the Women's Leadership Training of Trainers (ToT).

Fire safety training

INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE ACTIVITIES: Search and rescue | Fire safety | Pre-emptive evacuation of Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVIs)

Emergency Preparedness and Response

Women's participation initially began around disaster risk reduction (DRR) and emergency preparedness and response which helped to pave the way for women to take on more leadership roles in the community. It also helped to reduce the barriers to women's participation. Specifically IOM established Safety Unit Volunteers[21], which are committees consisting of around 30 to 40 per cent of women who are trained on different sectors like Protection, WASH, Food Security, Shelter/NFI, etc. One of their main focuses was to identify extremely vulnerable individuals and refer to appropriate services and protection actors. This was seen as an acceptable activity that was relevant for both Rohingya and HC in the camp in line with community based protection. These first responders specifically oriented and trained on safe identification and referral, providing psychological first aid and ensuring information provision around household safety, distribution access points, and logistics and information related to safe emergency shelters in the event of a cyclone. There was more acceptance from at the onset of WPP around engaging women in 'soft activities' including service monitoring, referrals, emergency messaging and child-caring activities. Such training helped IOM negotiate greater spaces for participation and interaction within camp management more widely.

Later, training and capacity building was accepted on a wide range of topics was key for committee members through a phased approach. Key topics included: Site Management/CCCM principles and Protection core concepts and safe referral. Soft skills development included a focus on psychological first aid, leadership and facilitation skills as well as community engagement techniques. More in-depth thematic and sectoral capacity building was carried out for the sectoral focal points of the committee.

[21] *Now known as Disaster Management Units*

Women's committee consultation on inclusion, Camp 24 (Leda) Khusor Ghor WGSS (IOM and PULSE)

Inclusion

A gap was identified early on in the project particularly with regards to emergency preparedness and response planning on inclusion of persons with disabilities and households with caregivers of persons with disabilities. Members of the women's committee alerted Site Management and Protection teams to take action and include them in the WPP. The participation of women with disability has served as a key link to identify and support persons with disabilities more broadly in the community and ensure their specific needs are considered in camp management and emergency preparedness and response efforts. For example, with the support of the protection team and women's committee, persons with disabilities were consulted and included in the development of evacuation plans, linking to other Emergency Preparedness Response structures like the Protection Emergency Response Unit (PERU) teams or Mobile Medical Teams who are first responders to support persons with disabilities. Women's committee members targeted persons with disabilities in early warning and response mechanisms (i.e.: communication understanding flags and sectoral logos in the camps, muster points for families, cyclone shelters and specialised assistance to persons with mobility issues (porters). Their advocacy for inclusion also compelled Site Management and Protection teams at IOM to flag this issue at the interagency sector level and strengthened engagement with disability organizations in the response. Upon the recommendations of the women's committee, IOM was able to successfully facilitate inclusion of women with disability in the committee through the distribution of assistive devices or support to caregivers to accompany them to training.

Promising Practices in Social Cohesion

From the project's inception IOM ensured a strong focus on ensuring social cohesion given the complex protection environment. A key aim was to not exacerbate inter-community tensions or do harm to women participants.

Initially, there was some distrust between host community and Rohingya women but through regular group-based training activities and a learning by doing approach in mixed groups, dialogue was strengthened and more interaction between host community and Rohingya was observed in the Khushir Ghor WGSS outside of the formal training as part of the women's committee.

Participatory consultations found that the lived experience and common challenges they face as a women as a key uniting factor. For example, as mothers, both host community and Rohingya committee members were concerned about a dangerous open pit that one child fell into and died. The committee advocated to construct fencing around the pits and ponds and created a safer environment for their children together.

Another Rohingya women's committee member discussed with the group that she would have ask her husband to allow her to attend further training. Another women's committee member from the host community quickly replied, "you will fight for this, you have to make him understand the importance of this training and of what we are doing here." The Rohingya woman promptly clarified, "I don't mean that I'm not attending, I'm just sharing that I have to consult with him to make him aware of the activities and how they are not a bad thing."

This was also true for the aforementioned focus on disability inclusion. Women's committee members believed certain protection categories were essential regardless if they were Rohingya or host community. Persons with disabilities living in flood or landslide risk areas had been neglected by humanitarian actors previously. community identified further needs like the inclusion on PWD which had been neglected previously.

The structure of the committee was designed as sectoral and service oriented which sets it apart from the rest of the committees in the camp. This also allowed them to participate in monitoring services in the camp, do referrals and provide useful information back to the community. This bridged the gap between the community and the service providers and also indicated to IOM gaps in response through the pilot that could be addressed in other interventions (disability focus and promising good practices in the WPP around fostering social cohesion).

A woman discusses inclusion in the community in Khushir Ghor WGSS.

Women's committee consultation on inclusion, Camp 24 (Leda) Khusor Ghor WGSS (IOM and PULSE)

PART V: BARRIERS & ENABLERS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE PILOT

Barriers to Participation

"Women's activities are not allowed in our society"

- Member of Women's Committee

Individual

Women in the camp have many responsibilities that, at different points, presented barriers to participation. At the individual level, women shared the following barriers:

- Childcare responsibilities particularly for breastfeeding mothers
- Limited time to attend meetings in different locations
- Lack of educational opportunities and financial support
- Stressful environment and poor health condition
- Not finding the meetings effective to meet their needs
- Marrying and having to relocate
- Cultural restrictions preventing women from going outside their shelter
- Mobility and other challenges for women with disabilities\

Household

At the household level the following barriers were identified:

- Getting the husbands' permission or buy-in, one woman reported having to discontinue participation because her husband would not allow it
- Managing time between several household responsibilities, including firewood collection, attending distributions, cooking, etc.
- Family members do not agree with women participating or working outside the home
- Family is unclear about the benefits that the women are getting from participating
- Lack of suitable place for the child while women are participating
- Risks to children if both men and women leave the house to work and participate in activities

Community

Community-level perceptions were rather mixed, below are some of the barriers identified:

- Given cultural and religious practices some community members thought that women raising their voices is not appropriate and have a negative perception of these acts
- Broad social barriers, such as gender violence and discrimination- thinking that women are not equal to men
- Women's opinions being dismissed
- Religious leaders having negative views on women's engagement
- Having male leaders in the household, one woman reported not being able to engage because her husband was a community leader, and this would not be perceived positively by the community

> One woman who had shown interest at first, but then did not go to the first meeting explained, ***"I am a widow. I actually want to continue, but my eldest son prohibited me from going to the trainings and group discussions."*** Her son explained: ***"Because of Islamic perceptions, it is prohibited for women to go outside the home. Allah will give us what we need."***

Another significant barrier to participation is the limitation on the number of members that the Committee can accommodate.

To overcome some of these barriers, facilities were provided in the Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS) for shared babysitting and further community awareness-raising to persuade the men on the benefits of women's participation. For women with physical disabilities, for instance, providing transportation money for the caregiver was one way to help them overcome their mobility barrier.

Enablers of Participation

During the baseline assessment and community consultation process, there was a lot of support from community members in Leda, including from Imams and Majhis. The CiC was also supportive of the idea given that there were already a number of committees operating at camp level. Having male leaders with good standing in the community support these activities was quite positive as people typically follow their leadership.

Individual

- Women's individual capabilities and motivation, the desire for training and capacity building
- Recognizing that their needs are different from those of men
- Desire to know their rights and help others in the community
- Finding something new and interesting
- Having someone there to listen to them
- Prospects of engaging in income-generating activities such as sewing, handicraft, home-based gardening, etc.

Household

- Being a head of household and hence the decision-maker in the family
- Husbands and family members being supportive

Community

- Community members encouraging women to continue their responsibilities as part of the Women's Committee
- Community members understand the value of the work and how this could contribute to a better future for all women
- Recognition that women have a strong understanding of what drives and motivates women and issues that impact them such as GBV and human trafficking
- Recognition that women are able to fight back against corruption of camp leaders
- Religious leaders recognizing that women can lead and should be included in camp activities
- Majhis encouraging women's activities and women receiving support from CiC

"All women should participate in these activities because needs are different from one person to another."

– Male Community Leader

A neighbor of a Women's Committee member shared ***"this is a really great initiative. Majhis used to take bribes for solving women related issues, but now its diminishing day by day."***

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

Every mission and every response is different and unique. They are influenced by different cultures, religions, geographical location and situation where the displaced community lives. As such, in addition to the challenges that women faced, there were also significant operational challenges for IOM. They included:

Context

- Protection mainstreaming, especially programming, can be difficult to incorporate at the onset of an emergency where lifesaving services tend to be a priority.
- Building a common language between refugees and humanitarian actors is difficult as many have never heard about technical humanitarian terminology, such as site management, protection, WASH, etc.
- Global toolkits were not appropriate for this specific context, making it difficult to deploy them. For instance, most GBV and women's empowerment training curriculum have really complex concepts that do not resonate with the Rohingya community.
- In participatory processes, the means dictate the end, and as such it was very difficult to explain to the women from the start how the project would actually manifest.
- Women and families were often relocated making it difficult to track and update them.
- At the onset, the only available livelihood opportunity was through cash for work and it is designed mostly for infrastructure work. Rohingya women felt it was causing more harm than good and hence stopped participating.

Staff

- Criminal groups in the camps are threatening the safety of staff because they are working towards women's empowerment.
- Training national staff on international standards, and also supporting their behavior change towards women's participation was a challenge.
- Not having enough female Site Management staff at the beginning of the project.
- Difficulty for senior leadership to prioritize WPP given other competing demands and challenging context

- Lack of training support and skills building on women's participation for field staff – particularly for male staff,
- Unclear roles and responsibilities at the beginning of the project, resulting in unbalanced workloads.

Ongoing piloting, adjusting and testing was necessary to overcome some of these challenges. Women leaders in the organization played a key role in pushing the project forward in the midst of the emergency.

"Even when discussing at global and regional forums, you realize that there is no perfect formula for women's participation."

– Site Management Officer

PART VI: KEY LEARNINGS & IMPACT OF THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

BARRIER 1: ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Women relied on male family members to convey messages to the community leaders, as traditional values prevent them from approaching non-related men. Female community members also relied heavily on male family members to receive information on decisions that impact them.

Key lessons:

- **Women are now directly receiving life-saving information**
- **Women are gaining knowledge of life skills and women's empowerment**
- **Women are much more aware of their rights and feel comfortable demanding information**

In Leda and Alikhali, Committee members participate in bi-weekly meetings facilitated by Site Management, where they are able to get the latest camp information and discuss any rumours/ misinformation going around. For instance, during these meetings, women became aware of what to do in advance of the monsoon season this year.

From there, as sectoral focal points, the women are tasked with disseminating information in their blocks, propelling other women to have access to the same level of information as Committee members.

Women's Committee members are taking very seriously their role as disseminators for information. During a recent Training of Training (ToT), where the Core Group is being trained on leadership skills, they asked after the training for follow up review sessions to ensure that they have fully learned the information and are able to pass it along successfully. This is quite crucial given that Rohingya does not have a written script and women are tasked with the difficult challenge of learning through images and memorizing all information through different activities. They feel extremely committed to building the leadership skills of other women.

Women have also reported becoming very familiar with the Feedback and Information Centers (FIC) set up by Site Management. Where before women did not know or did not feel comfortable entering the facility, they now know well how to use this resource.

The Committee has also served as an entry point for other agencies who want to share relevant information. For instance, the Women have been trained on issues related to child protection, human trafficking, GBV, registration, and proper safe referral mechanisms. The women report being more aware of how to solve their own problems and those of other community members.

"One of my neighbors was not receiving enough food rations for their entire family. I was able to refer them to the appropriate agency and the issue was quickly resolved."

- Women's Committee Member

Over time, women have realized that they have a right to access information, particularly from service providers. During a recently launched livelihood training, one woman who was not selected for the pilot went directly to IOM staff and asked: "Why wasn't I selected for the food processing training, I am a Women Committee member and I should have had this information before."

Community members have also realized that Women's Committee members are very knowledgeable. "One night, at midnight my neighbors' husband came knocking on my door." Shared one CM. "The wife was pregnant and heavily bleeding, and the husband did not know what to do. I immediately knew what to do and helped rush them to the hospital for proper care." The Women's Committee member believes that as a result of participating in the Committee, other community members know that she is someone that can support them with information.

While significant barriers have been broken down for women accessing information, there is still much to be done. To illustrate, during the LPG (gas tanks for cooking) distributions, approximately 50 per cent women and 50 per cent men were going to receive the LPG. In this instance, a significant portion of the population is relying on men to receive information on how to operate the LPG, although women are the ones using them most. This lack of access to information, in this case, is putting the women and household at risk.

There have been some efforts to fill these gaps - for instance through radio listening groups, which serve as a weekly means for receiving and discussing key messages related to humanitarian programming and important knowledge dissemination, but these are likely still not reaching all women in every block.

"Women's Committee members were feeling shy when attending meetings because they couldn't sign their names and had to give a thumbprint. However, they learnt their signature and now are very confident."

- Site Management Officer

BARRIER 2: PARTICIPATION IN CAMP ACTIVITIES

All movements of women and girls are closely monitored by their male family members and are expected to be justified with a valid reason.

Key lessons:

- **Being aware of their rights has enabled members to raise their concerns in meetings, this has increased their confidence and self-esteem**
- **Women have an increased understanding of how to solve community issues or identify the agency or authority for proper and safe referrals by sectoral focal points**
- **While women enjoy greater respect, some community members are still skeptical of how the women are contributing since they are only providing knowledge and awareness instead of material goods**
- **Women are taking a leading role to support community disputes by showing other women how to communicate and advocate for themselves based on soft skills learned from the Women's Leadership ToT**

This project has had a huge impact on women's participation in camp activities. Women are visibly more active in the community, engaging, voicing their concerns, meeting with humanitarian sectoral focal points and even discussing directly with donors during visits.

They are also consulting and attending meetings with male leaders and bringing up their concerns and those of other women. The women shared a range of ways in which they are participating in camp activities. These included:

- Directly raising their security concerns to CiC and IOM Protection, such as when moving to the hills to collect firewood for cooking
- Supporting and ensuring that the distribution processes are done in an orderly fashion and helping to solve tensions when they arise
- Helping WASH and Site Management actors meet sanitary needs by informing where toilets were needed

vInforming Site Management on strategic places to install solar lighting that would ensure women's safety when moving at night, going to the bathroom or the hospital

- Helping community members meet their basic needs, such as helping those that are not receiving enough food for their families
- Engaging in Cash for Work activities, such as tree plantation

Women with disabilities have felt significantly empowered by participating because they now can voice their opinions, while before they were ignored.

.

"It's a good initiative and they share the things which they learn with family members and other women in the block. They have been sincere about women's safety and security after their involvement with these activities."

- A Rohingya Imam shared that seeing women participate in camp activities has changed his opinion

"Women's participation is good. This is because women are now more self-dependent than earlier."

- Imam (Host Community)

"In the early days of the emergency, women were never seen at the CiC or Site Management offices. But now, you see lots of women here and also accompanying other women to go voice their concerns."

– Protection Officer

Some of the women are really outspoken and many of the agencies now want to directly engage them, putting a strain on their time. This is starting to emerge as a challenge.

BARRIER 3: REPRESENTATION IN CAMP GOVERNANCE

Decision-making is primarily controlled by a system of 'majhis' or community leaders. While female community members seemed to accept that Majhis had their best interest at heart, they felt that their needs were unheard or unanswered.

Key lessons:

- **Women are being recognized as leaders by male leaders and government representatives and they feel more respected and valued**
- **Some male leaders feel that the Women's Committee has reduced their own leadership role**
- **Women want visibility items, such as an identification card from IOM so that they can be easily identified by the community and other stakeholders**
- **Women's Committee may serve as a model for social cohesion between Rohingya and Host Community**

Before the Women's Committee, staff reported that not a single woman was participating in the Majhi system, and the 50-50 goal of the Para Development Committee was not being met.

The introduction of the Women's Committee, as an informal camp governance mechanism, has balanced out this lack of representation. Since the launch of the committee, there has been some progress in other structures involving women. Now, for example, there are women Majhis.

Reflecting on the importance of women's representation, one Site Management colleague explained:

> *"I know that males and females are equal, so there should be 50 per cent women and 50 per cent men in government. However, I learned that its common phenomena in our country to have 70 per cent men and 30 per cent women in government- so women are always the minority. The population in our camp is roughly 35,000 with the majority being women and girls, but their representation was so low. This committee being 100 per cent women is very good because they are also most vulnerable."*

When looking purely at numbers, with the introduction of the Women's Committee there now a total of 45 per cent women representatives across the community representation structures in Leda and Alikhali.

	Total Members	Number of Women
Majhi	100	7 (7%)
Para (village) Development Committee (PDC)	110	30 (27%)
Women's Committee	110	110 (100%)

Looking at the bigger picture, the Women's Committee members are happy because they are being recognized and supported by the male community leaders. Most Women's Committee members reported willing to engage in other camp governance structures directly and participate in relevant meetings.

However, there are still some challenges. In camp coordination meetings, women are not really involved, and when they are, although physically present, they are at the sidelines and not vocal. This is partially due to the humanitarian community unintentionally pushing women to attend and provide their input, while some of them still do not feel comfortable doing so.

On the negative side, some male leaders have also felt that having women engaging in camp governance has reduced their own leadership role. Also, there have been some negative reports of Women's Committee members demanding that they be given priority during distributions (for instance asking to cut the queue) because of their role in the Committee.

"We haven't seen any backlash or protection related issues emerging from the women becoming committee members. This is good so far."

– Protection Officer

A Camp Chairperson shared ***"I have lived in LMS for 10 years, and when comparing the period before the WPP and now, women are now more engaged in activities in the camp."*** He views this as a direct consequence of the WPP. Seeing this has changed his opinion of women's participation. ***"It's a good initiative and I believe that women know how to share big ideas with concrete actions to achieve results for women in the camp."***

BARRIER 4: DECISION MAKING

Key lessons:

- **At the household level, some women report actively engaged in conversations**
- **Some women are still influenced by the decisions made by males**

In terms of influence in decision-making, the feedback is mixed.

At the household level, the influence of women has now improved given the new knowledge they have acquired, and their role in sharing information with other family members. One Women's Committee member, for instance, reported having active family planning conversations at home.

This has elevated their status in making personal decisions as well.

"I decided to engage in income-generating activities, at first my husband did not agree. Then we tried to persuade him, and he changed is his mind."

– Member of Women's Committee

"I remember when one of the women was sick. She was involved in tree watering. The husband decided to help her and completed her tasks for her. This is a shift."-
- Site Management Officer

The women have also been able to influence camp level decisions. There is strength in numbers and when feedback is delivered jointly it has more weight. This, in of itself, has been empowering. For instance, Women's Committee members requested a space where they can meet to discuss challenges and brainstorm activities. As a result, they influenced IOM's decision-making process and a new multi-purpose space is being built.

While there has been good progress, some women have reported that their decisions are still being strongly influenced by men's opinions.

A national staff shares, that one woman was discussing about her husband allowing her to attend trainings. The other woman quickly said, ***"you will fight for this, you have to make him understand the importance of this training and of what we are doing here."*** The woman promptly clarified, ***"I don't mean that I'm not attending, I'm just sharing that I have to consult with him to make him aware of the activities and how they are not a bad thing."*** This is how things are changing over time.

BARRIER 5: PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

All women and girls said they only feel safe at their homes at night; for instance, they felt unsafe going to the latrines at night, which are outside. Women also felt unsafe around the water pumps given disputes with host community.

Key lessons:

- **Women now know the relevant authorities and service providers to communicate their safety concerns**
- **The referral pathways for accessing services via sectoral focal points is fully functional and women are able to safely refer GBV survivors and other protection cases.**

Leda and Alikhali camps are very complex with a mixed population of old Rohingya, new arrivals, host communities, and proximity to Myanmar border. There are many risks and hazards, such as drugs, kidnappings and a wide range of protection issues.

While committee members reported having received protection related training for emergency situations, they still feel that participation in the Women's Committee has not satisfactory contributed to their perception of safety.

"From a protection standpoint, the ultimate goal is, first and foremost women's safety and protection, for them to be free of GBV harm and able to freely and safely move in public spaces.
– Protection Officer

Women are very aware of their safety and security. When these issues are discussed, their immediate focus is on physical safety. When IOM and other humanitarian organizations leave the camps in the late afternoon, issues of safety are in the hands of the army and the police. Women report hesitation in communicating directly with them.

"It would be wrong to say that women and girls are 100 per cent safe, especially at night, but the situation is improving day by day"
-Male Community Leader

One example to illustrate the ongoing security challenge and women's roles in helping resolve them. *"Last week a perpetrator took a girl from an area in LMS,"* said a Site Management staff. *"The women leaders raised their voice about this violence, had a meeting with the girl's family, and were able to mediate a solution to the problem. As a result, the girl was safely returned to her home."*

Staff Safety

IOM female national staff have reported that male community members are targeting them and spreading rumours because of their work with the Women's Committee. This is having a big impact on staff members dignity and motivation to work in this project.

Additionally, in local newspapers and social media, there have been articles and negative comments targeting all national female staff working in the humanitarian response. **"Recently the Women and Girls Safe Space staff were threatened by local community members to shut down the facility,"** said a Protection Officer

Women headed households have very specific safety concerns when it comes to their children. For instance, there were a lot of open pits and ponds in the camps and one child, unfortunately, died after falling into one. As a result of women's advocacy, they came up with the idea of fencing the pits and ponds to solve this urgent child safety need.

Another example already mentioned, but that is also directly linked to issues of women's safety, was the lighting in the camp. Women expressed the need for more lighting to be able to go outside and feel safe. In response, Site Management engaged the women in identifying priority areas for solar light installation.

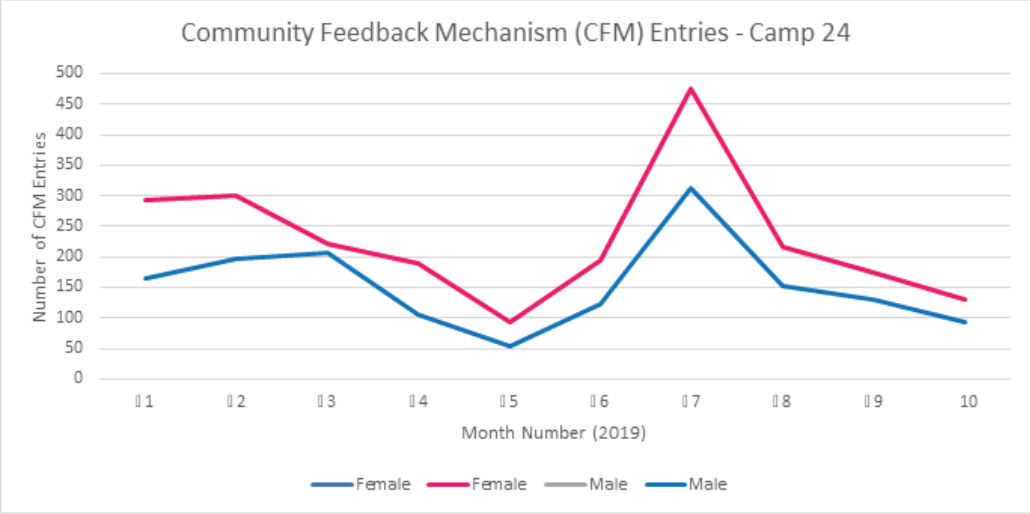
Finally, beyond physical safety, participating in the Women's Committee contributes to feeling safe in discussing issues and sharing ideas. *"The Women's Committee mirrors the WGSS, in terms of being a peer group, in a safe space, with ground rules,"* said a Protection Officer. *"The WGSS is just bamboo and wood, but it is more about the people- the group makes women feel quite safe."*

PART VII: REFLECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a discernable shift in women's participation in Leda and acceptance in their roles from the community.

The WPP has laid the foundation for other dimensions of women support going forward. This includes creating space for women's participation in camp governance that fosters social cohesion. For example, women interact and co-exist across Teknaf communities in accessing common services like water, health, and markets. Incorporating female involvement in camp governance and service delivery enhances accountability and addresses access issues.

There are promising indications in terms of feedback complaints from women. Comparatively, female has higher number of complaints/feedback reported to Site Management's Community Feedback Mechanism. Below are the community feedback mechanism entries broken down by gender in Camp 24.



Reflecting on IOM's experience with this pilot project, and understanding the contextual limitations in Bangladesh, below are a number of key recommendations for IOM and other humanitarian organizations to take into consideration when seeking to mitigate GBV risks by implementing the WPP or establishing similar Women's Committee in other camps in Cox's Bazar.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IOM

- Conduct a refresher session on the Code of Conduct for Women Committee members
- Re-define project roles and responsibilities and revise them as the project evolves
- Embed in Site Management exit strategy a plan for the continuous operation of the Women's Committee
- Provide practical support to women, such as child-friendly corners in the WGSS
- Introduce Committee members publicly to bring their level of recognition on par with those male leaders

RECOMENDATIONS FOR IOM AND HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS

Policy

- Include women's participation and women's empowerment issues in the national humanitarian Joint Response Plan
- Create flexibility in funding proposals for women's participation and women's issues, given that women's issues in displacement are still not well understood and that all actors can have a responsibility to mitigate GBV risks.
- Prevention and mitigation is a shared responsibility, hence should be mainstreamed in all clusters to allow flexibility in programming.

Programme Management

- Begin engaging women from the onset of the emergency, women's issues should be a part of core planning to ensure the efficient use of resources and accountability to the entire affected population and donors.
- Embed women's issues into regular programming as mitigating risks of GBV is the responsibility of all humanitarian stakeholders.
- Include host community in mixed camp settings, and women with disabilities from the beginning.
- Continuously monitor and assess progress to ensure no harm is being done as result of the activities.
- Map out all formal and informal leadership and governance structures to understand their roles and responsibilities and interests.
- Map out stakeholders working on women's issues and participation.
- Map perceptions of women's leadership and engage men early on to have their support.
- Train male community leaders on key concepts and the importance of women's participation.

Project Management

- Establish a dedicated team to lead and implement the project.
- Share progress and positive news outside of implementing units, and outside the organization to garner greater support and to receive new ideas.
- Ensure male staffs are well trained on women's issues.
- Ensure that there are female staff in field teams.
- Solicit specialized expertise in engaging women with disabilities.
- Schedule activities at convenient times for staff and participants.

PART VIII: CONCLUSION & MOVING FORWARD

While the Women's Committee does not reach the highest degree of participation as identified by CCCM, all stakeholders agreed that the Women's Committee element of the Women's Participation Project has been a resounding success.

"The 2018 problem statement, we solved it! Now we need to keep moving forward and address women's evolving needs through income generating and leadership capacity building activities."
- Protection Officer

As a result of this success, women's needs are evolving, and their demands are expanding. Women are now really demanding education for themselves and their children as a top priority. Education is an enabler for income-generating activities. The women want basic literacy and numeracy. With these skills, they are then able to engage in other activities such as financial planning needed to run a small business.

"Without education, we are totally blind. We also need livelihoods opportunities so that we can earn money and get peace from our husbands"
– Member

"The other day, one woman was showing us that she could write her name in English. She wants more educational and livelihood opportunities."
– Site Management Officer

There is a strong need to find creative solutions for meeting educational needs given that formal education is not permitted for Rohingyas by the Government of Bangladesh.

"The women are hungry for more, and our current pace is not able to meet their needs. With the little that we've done you already see the great sense of empowerment. They just need the right level of support now. Advocacy is necessary to open up new opportunities for these women."
– Protection Officer

"We have thousands and thousands of women and we are only covering 190. Instead of patting ourselves on the back, IOM should roll this out in all camps."
- Protection Officer

Final reflections

The second phase of the WPP focuses on livelihoods, a sensitive issue for Rohingya in Bangladesh because they are not legally permitted to work. IOM has worked to roll out the Women's Income Generation Support (WINGS) Project in partnership with ICCO. WINGS is a pilot project that strengthens the resilience of women in both Rohingya and host community through access to income-generating activities. The programme objectives are to: 1) Target skills development in areas with the greatest market opportunities. 2) Implement skills training on food processing, cap making, tailoring, home food production, poultry and goat rearing (depending on the preference of the beneficiary). 3) Provide relevant assets to give beneficiaries the tools to put their acquired skills to work.

At present, trainings on fast food processing and sewing and tailoring are going on combining both Host and Rohingya women in the trainings. Women from both communities have been attending the awareness session together as well, and getting empowered with the project. A recent Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) report indicated that findings in this all the women are successfully working and still having the assets, the project has demonstrated that the following up business support is necessary to give continuity on business to the beneficiaries.

Through the regular women's committee work and visibility of the WINGS project, more women have come forward and core committee members have noted that many women who need this training have been excluded. In pilot interventions in a sensitive environment around terminology around livelihoods, these activities are framed more as self-reliance. Any pilot initiative that won't be to scale for the needs of the camp should be coupled by other referral pathways to self-reliance or income generating activities or skill building at least. Women who have not participated in WINGS have been referred to IOM's WGSS where there are regular skill and training on sewing/tailoring, handicrafts, cooking, gardening and other related life skills curriculum.

In addition, to develop their soft skills, IOM's WGSS regular informal training, IT classes and more. Given the challenges in Rohingya accessing formal education, the IDEAS Box has also provided some temporary solutions complementing the non-formal education curriculum in the WGSS and learning centres n the camps. include computer where women and girls work on their homework

The WPP has provided a strong evidence-base and foundation for women's participation, empowerment and self-reliance with a protection focus. Such self-reliance interventions have also been inclusive of women with disabilities of who have been working to promote inclusive engagement in various activities in the daily care and maintenance in the camp, in disaster preparedness and response as well as in self-reliance opportunities. These projects have catalysed new interventions working with IOM TRD and Protection and partners and have served as potential models that can be scaled up across the response.

Building upon these pilot successes, IOM aims to replicate and apply these project approaches throughout its areas of intervention and will work through an integrated approach with Protection to develop and implement dedicated activities to address needs and strengthen capacities of those at highest risk of GBV in line with IOM's mission-wide GBViC Operational Framework and 2020 Action Plan for Cox's Bazar.

Showing off their homework in Leda IDEAS box.

Achievements to date

Annex 1

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE OVERVIEW

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) defines GBV as 'any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty.'[22] Acts of GBV violate a number of universal human rights protected by international instruments and conventions and many—but not all—forms of GBV are criminal acts in national laws and policies.[23]

The GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS) Classification Tool, categorizes GBV incidents according to six core types:

- Rape
- Sexual Assault
- Physical Assault
- Forced Marriage
- Denial of Resources, Opportunities and Services
- Psychological/Emotional Abuse

Situations of crisis increase the risks of GBV, due to issues such as 'family separation, disruption of relationships, scarcity of essential resources to care for most basic needs, substance abuse, collapse of community and/or State-led protection systems, disruption of community services, changes in cultural and gender norms (including towards increased acceptance of violence), weakened infrastructure, and increased ethnic and racial discrimination.'[25]

In 2018, IOM launched the IOM Institutional Framework for Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Crises, which articulates why and how IOM tackles GBV in crises and outlines how to mainstream GBV and gender into humanitarian response.

---

[22] *IASC GBV Guidelines, p. 5.*

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *The GBV Classification Tool is developed by the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS). The tool can be found on http://www.gbvims.com/gbvims- tools/*

[25] *IASC 2015, p.13*

GBV Mainstreaming

- **Promote human rights**
- **Integrate measures to**
  - □ Prevent GBV from occurring
  - □ Mitigate risks of GBV
  - □ Respond to GBV survivors' needs
- **Ensure measures are taken**
  - □ In all sectors of assistance
  - □ At every stage of a crisis
  - □ At organizational level
- **Train staff and partners**

GBV Mainstreaming

- **Promote human rights**
- **Integrate measures to**
  - □ Address the immediate and structural needs of all people of concern at all times
  - □ Foster respectful, non-violent gender norms
- **Promote gender equality**
- **Train staff and partners**

Experience from IOM camp management in Nigeria, Philippines, Ecuador, South Sudan, and Iraq suggests that increasing women's participation in camp governances contributes to improving gender equality and mitigating the risks of gender-based violence.

As such, in Cox's Bazar this project aims to contribute to GBV mainstreaming through mitigating GBV risks according to the IOM Institutional Framework.

Annex 2

Women's Committee Terms of Reference

(ToR)

Aim

The women's committee members are responsible for fairly and impartially representing the interests of women and girls in Leda. The committee will include 10 members representing the different interests of the old refugee community, new influx, and host community for fairly and impartially representing the interests of the area. Committee members will be appointed on the democratic process agreed upon by partner and site manager. Moreover, all members are to follow the below responsibilities in order to remain as active members. In addition, committee members are to relay challenges and needs from the household level to site managers and partners when information is requested or when deadlines are set.

Committee Structure

- Women's committees will comprise of 1 primary focal point or representative and 9 sectorial focal points (Nutrition, WASH, Health, Protection, Food Security, Shelter/NFI, CWC, Education and Emergency Preparedness and Response) through an election process and in line with agreed upon selection criteria
- The committee will be inclusive and representative consisting of equal representation from the old refugee community prior the influx, host community and the new refugees from the August 2017 influx
- Communication Paths: a) Reports to (partner): This individual reports directly to Site Management Officer (male/female staff) b) Reports to (camp): INSERT CAMP NAME

Roles and responsibilities

- Meet regularly with women and girls of the community to discuss issues, challenges and recommendations and support site management in the camp and ensure the needs of women and girls are taken into account through the nine aforementioned sectors
- Develop a network of individuals in each block that relay information
- Understand and follow protection referral pathways and guidance including protection principles of respect, safety, security, do no harm, confidentiality, best interest of the child.
- To be trained on issues of responding to GBV reports and referring GBV/protection related issues to the respective designated individual
- Meet with partners and site manager about advocating for greater support where needs are identified
- Actively participate in capacity building / training opportunities by SM partners and humanitarian service providers
- Meet with site manager and partner either weekly/monthly or on an ad hoc basis to discuss the dynamics and environment of the site.

- Promote efficient coordination between the CiC, site manager and various pre-existing community structures
- Conduct regular meetings documenting and sharing meeting minutes with the site manager
- Support service providers to resolve issues raised at the community level by mobilizing stakeholders as requested.
- Receive and share information from the CiC, UN/NGOs and other community committees to women and girls in the community 'and act as a source of information about women and girls'.
- Assist in the identification of gaps in the provision of humanitarian assistance through supporting site monitoring with Site Management
- Actively participate in mass information campaigns and special events conducted by SM and other humanitarian agencies
- Attend, as required, camp management coordination meetings
- Promote awareness of the functions and responsibilities of the women's committee to the community

Signature:

Name:

Position:

Date:

Committee member:

Camp Management Agency:

The Women's Participation Project, and other Protection activities have been made possible with the generous support of several donors, including: the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO), the Department of International Development (DFID), the Government of Canada (GAC), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), US Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM), and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of the Australian Government and always with the kind support and cooperation from the Government of Bangladesh.

IOM
UN MIGRATION