



FOUR YEARS ON: SHIFTING GENDERED PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Comprehensive Gender Analysis within Rohingya and
Host Communities in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

This report was produced by the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group in collaboration with ACAPS Analysis Hub, IOM Needs and Population Monitoring Unit, UNHCR, and UN Women.

Author: Daun Cheong

Research Coordination: Joelle Charbonneau

Design: MAASCOM

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the technical advisory group members for their contributions throughout the research project: Federica Mastroianni, Malika Tamim, Sajnin Tasnim, Oyessorzo Chowdhury, Xiomara Hurni-Cranston (ACAPS), Nujulee Begum (ActionAid), Sunita Maharjan, Sutanuka Sayanti Barua (CARE Bangladesh), Immad Ahmed (HAP), Eminenur Cinar and Hrithika Barua (IOM-NPM), Clementine Novales, Samapti Chakma, Mahmuda Sultana and Gita Adhikary (Oxfam), Mohammad Muktedir Hossain (RTMI), Tahmina Parvin, Christine Friis Laustsen, and Anna Kirvas (UNHCR), and Maria Teresa Dico-Young, Flora Macula, Nadira Islam, Farzana Farid Lucy, Runia Mowla, and Margaret Mckeown (UN Women).

We would like to thank the women, men, and gender diverse persons from the Rohingya refugee and host communities for taking the time to share their experiences through the interviews and surveys.

This Comprehensive Gender Analysis was made possible by the IOM Needs and Population Monitoring Unit Rohingya and Bangladesh enumerator teams.

The Comprehensive Gender Analysis has benefitted from the valuable contributions of members of the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, the Gender Focal Points and Sector Coordinators.

Cover photo: Rohingya woman volunteer holding microphone.

Photo Credit: Abdullah Al Mashrif/IOM

Date Published: March 2022.

The Rapid Gender Analysis was generously funded by the Government of Germany, World Food Programme, and the Government of Canada.



FOUR YEARS ON: SHIFTING GENDERED PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Comprehensive Gender Analysis within Rohingya and
Host Communities in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh



ACRONYMS

5W	Who's doing What, Where, When and for Whom
ARSA	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
CiC	Camp in Charge
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GiHA WG	Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group
IGAs	Income Generating Activities
IOM NPM	International Organization for Migration Needs and Population Monitoring
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
ISCG	Inter-Sector Coordination Group
JRP	Joint Response Plan
KII	Key Informant Interview
MSC	Most Significant Change
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RRRC	Office of the Refugee Relief & Repatriation Commissioner
RTMI	Research, Training and Management International
SDR	Secondary Data Review
GBV	Gender-based Violence
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
WLO	Women Led Organizations
WRO	Women's Rights Organizations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY	5
1. INTRODUCTION	11
2. METHODOLOGY	13
2.1 Limitations and Lessons Learned	17
3. SECONDARY DATA REVIEW MAIN FINDINGS	19
4. IN-DEPTH: FINDINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES	23
4.1 Changes in Gender Dynamics	24
4.1.1 Gender Programming in Humanitarian Response	24
4.1.2 Perceptions and Changes in Gender Dynamics	26
4.2 Drivers of Change in Gender Dynamics and Opportunities	40
4.2.1 Influencers for Positive Changes	40
4.2.2 Roles of Governing Bodies	42
4.2.3 Women's Empowerment	47
4.2.4 Men and Boys' Engagement	55
5. RECOMMENDATIONS	61
6. CONCLUSION	65
7. ANNEXES	67



Rohingya Refugee woman and man planting in a camp.
Photo credit: Heronmoye Tanchangya/ActionAid Bangladesh

SUMMARY

OVERALL FINDINGS

Gender programming as a social intervention, addressing the diverse needs of the affected population and evaluating its impacts, is complex and challenging, particularly in a humanitarian setting where urgent survival needs are prioritised. This study observed relatively meaningful and positive shifts in gender dynamics among both the Rohingya and the host community, despite the persistence of certain harmful norms and practices. We also discovered unexpected consequences of gender interventions and read subtle ambivalent feelings towards rapid change. The overall findings are summarized as follows:

- Over the last four years, the humanitarian sector in Cox's Bazar has established strong capacity in gender programming. After consulting more than 800 community members and frontline humanitarians working in gender programming, positive changes in gender norms and practices are more frequent among those engaged in gender activities, such as income generation and awareness sessions with regular interactions with humanitarian service providers. While practices are changing rapidly due to institutional and humanitarian interventions, norms appear to be changing slowly in comparison. Positive changes in gender practices seem to be relatively faster in the host community than in the Rohingya community.
- The gender interventions focus strongly on women at the individual level, and do not fully address more multi-dimensional approaches including men and people with diverse genders, or beyond at the societal and institutional level.
- Community members who experienced or observed changes reported mixed feelings, both positive and negative reactions, about these changes in gender norms, practices, and roles. Host community respondents were more favourable and viewed the changes as an inevitable 'development' for their society, while Rohingya community members showed less enthusiasm about the changes experienced, feeling a loss of culture and tradition.
- Although both Rohingya and host communities still observe harmful practices, there is an increasing awareness of the consequences of the violent behaviours and more women know where to seek support if violence occurs within their home or that of their neighbours.
- The new roles and expectations faced by Rohingya women and men are radical and have created post-displacement gendered burdens. While the importance and

effectiveness of women's participation in income generating activities and leadership in women's empowerment cannot be stressed enough, those activities also come with their share of negative repercussions for women. At the same time, balancing the burden of women's increased labour from adding these roles, without compensating with reducing care work, is barely addressed. Although there have been some shifts in shared responsibilities around income generation and care at home, both women and men still feel pressured to fulfil socially prescribed roles.

- Humanitarians appear to be the biggest influencers in gender norm changes with slight variations across the sub-groups of Rohingya men and women and host community men and women.
- Both Rohingya and host communities are experiencing unprecedented social interaction with each other and with governing or semi-governing bodies such as camp-in-charges and humanitarian organisations. Exposure to and interaction with governing bodies and humanitarians has increased people's understanding of and expectations for institutional services. Preventive and responsive measures, including awareness-raising and training at the community level and legal and institutional enforcement, are requested by the communities and the key informants. With support from NGOs, host communities noted that they have a clearer idea about the implications of women's education, economic participation, and gender equality in their daily lives.
- Women's economic participation was recognised as the most significant change in both Rohingya and host communities and among both women and men. Men from both communities appear to notice more changes in women's empowerment, such as economic participation, increased mobility, and education, while women point out changes such as divorces and dowry.
- Perceptions and practices around women's economic participation, leadership, and empowerment are positively shifting in both communities despite lingering traditional gendered social norms and resistance to change.
- Women in both Rohingya and host communities, particularly younger women, showed more progressive views on women in leadership. But even older women had more progressive views than younger men, showing how perceptions around women in leadership and community participation are very gendered even across age groups.
- Men and boys' engagement with gender mainstreaming is a prerequisite, not an option. Although these activities have received limited focus thus far, it was noted that the stronger men and boys' engagement is, the faster and more sustainable the changes brought about are. Community sensitisation engaging men has been shown to contribute to improved gender relations, shared reproductive responsibilities, and reduced harmful practices to some extent.
- Religious teachings and Sharia law are selectively interpreted when it comes to gender relations. Positive interpretations of religious values can increase the understanding of women's rights and promote equitable gender relations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMMING

1. **Strengthen gender programming and implementing capacity** by building on the existing human capital, particularly in women's leadership and rights, at the community and organisational level. **This must include Rohingya and host community volunteers, women leaders, women-led civil society organisations (WLOs), and frontline staff of local/national non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** through cross-sectoral, regular, and coherent pass-on/ refresher training to enhance and share the existing skills and knowledge by the GiHA WG and sectors/working groups.
2. Develop a **comprehensive Gender Activity Map (such as 5W)**, including all local and national actors with a regular updates and knowledge sharing plan. Ensure all sectors and actors register the information of their stand-alone gender and gender mainstreaming activities and collectively track the changes and progress regularly. GiHA WG should coordinate this effort.
3. Identify and share **knowledge and lessons learned from successful gender programming and gender-mainstreaming interventions** (best practices case mapping), led by GiHA WG and sectors or, working groups.
4. **Continue to track gender dynamics over time**, using standardized and well-defined indicators (for example: women's wellbeing, participation in leadership, economic empowerment, education levels) to measure and track the impact of gender interventions at different levels, and dimensions.
5. **Utilize the expertise and experiences of WLOs and local and national NGOs** to identify, develop, and disseminate coordinated and standardised, culturally sensitive, and effective communication messages for transformative changes.
6. **Increase preventive (in addition to responsive)** measures to reduce harmful practices such as GBV, child marriage, dowry, and polygamy.
7. **Increase investments and efforts on building social cohesion** between the Bangladesh host community and Rohingya community, as well as inter-block communities within the camps.
8. Given that religion and religious adherence is important to both communities, **there is more areas for humanitarians to engage with religious teachings that promote physical and material wellbeing.**

INFLUENCERS FOR POSITIVE CHANGES

1. Tailor gender transformative messaging and programming to **empower the individuals (men, women, and other diverse genders) most likely to influence** different levels and members of the communities.

2. Establish a group of men and women religious leaders and experts from both communities to discuss Islamic teachings on human rights, gender equality and respectful relationships that can be positively translated. Invite leading religious leaders from Bangladesh who are proponents of women's rights to develop and disseminate rights-based communication messages that are religiously and culturally acceptable by both communities.
3. Strengthen volunteers and leaders' capacity to have an adequate understanding of gender equality and skills to disseminate rights-based messages to the communities.
4. **Engage community influencers to build their understanding and respect** for gender diverse populations and support them to further sensitise communities about the **rights of gender diverse populations and Hijras**.

ROLES OF GOVERNING BODIES, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVOCACY BY ACTORS WITHIN THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

1. Maximize learnings from **the experience and expertise of the Bangladesh Government in promoting gender equality** and in bridging religious teachings and gender equality principles.
2. Advocate the Office of the Refugee Relief & Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) **to create an enabling institutional environment for WROs and WLOs** to implement a wider range of gender activities that address all dimensions of empowerment for women, men, and other diverse genders.
3. Advocate for **more extensive and fairer institutional and legal interventions** to reduce child marriage, dowry, divorce, polygamy and other forms of GBV, including GBV against the gender diverse population including Hijras.
4. Advocate for **sensitization and training on a range of gender issues for Camp in Charges (CiCs) and union counsellors to ensure approval of gender interventions by humanitarian actors. As well to strengthen CiC's engagement for more consistent application of legal frameworks.**
5. **Advocate for increased women's representation within CiCs, union counsellors, police officers and women advocates (lawyers)** to provide more accessible institutional services and legal supports for women in both communities.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: LIVELIHOODS AND LEADERSHIP

1. **Expand gender-responsive interventions beyond the individual to address structural level changes**, including power relationships within households and communities, capacities for community led change, and governance and institutions. The GiHA WG to lead advocacy and policy on this.
2. Continue to advocate for translating existing women's leadership into formal political representation, by **restarting block level elections to expand women's participation in formal camp governance processes**. To be implemented in partnership between government and humanitarian actors, alongside WLOs.
3. Community members including women, men, and people with diverse genders **must be engaged in the design** of socially acceptable gender transformative programming.

4. Continue to address, advocate for, and **provide protection to, Rohingya women leaders, community volunteers and WLO members** in the camp. Guarantee Do No Harm principles are upheld and any threats as a result of their activism is mitigated to ensure their security, safety, and freedom.
5. To promote feelings of safety and reduce social stress, **tailor livelihoods activities for Rohingya women to take place at the family and block level.**
6. Expand economic activities for the host community to **target the most marginalized, especially undereducated families**, who feel they are not benefiting from existing humanitarian job creation.

MEN AND BOYS' ENGAGEMENT IS A PREREQUISITE, NOT AN OPTION

1. **Increase engagement of men and boys to support gender programming** by ensuring their access to social and educational opportunities and spaces to interact with male champions/change agents/role models.
2. **Broaden men and boys' engagement on gender issues beyond GBV**, for example into sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), and polygamy and dowry prevention.
3. **Strengthen community-level sensitisation through increasing the number of male change agents and continuing to build their capacity and understanding** on gender equality issues by providing regular refresher sessions and training opportunities.
4. **Motivate and engage key influencers identified by the community** such as educated community members, union members, Imams, and Majhis to lead positive changes in the gender dynamics.
5. **Enhance work with traditional keepers of gender norms such as elders and religious leaders** in discussions on gender equality issues.

RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENTS

1. **Conduct an organisational capacity and capability assessment** of programming and implementation on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls **by local governmental institutions (camp/union level)** to identify the areas that require technical support.
2. Expand gender analysis on the **impacts of gender interventions on the perceptions of the affected populations and local and national actors.**
3. **Ensure inclusion of intersectionality, men and boys' engagement, women's leadership, institutional engagement, and expanded inclusion of people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) in future gender research.**
4. **Conduct research on post-displacement gendered burdens from social psychology or behavioural science perspective**, to identify strategies for do no harm gender programming, in particular entry points for Rohingya women to engage in socio-economic activities more actively with less social pressure and emotional burden.
5. **Invest in gender research capacity**, particularly Rohingya enumerators, facilitators, translators, and analysts, for improved quality and accuracy in communication and data collection.



Umme Habiba is a student taking a computer literacy programme in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar.
Photo credit: Mahmudul Karim/UN Women

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2021, after consulting with various stakeholders and building upon lessons learned from the 2020 Rapid Gender Analysis, the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GiHA WG) decided to take a different approach to gender research in the Rohingya refugee response. Noting that the Rohingya prefer open-ended guided conversations in their own language, the GiHA WG prioritised a qualitative approach. Because existing gender analyses and assessments on Cox's Bazar have effectively captured and identified the gendered impacts of the crisis and service provision gaps, the GiHA WG decided to take a transformative approach to understanding gender in the response, seeking to understand how gender dynamics have changed among both the Rohingya and host communities, and why. This comprehensive gender analysis aims to generate evidence that will support and inform the development of mid-and long-term gender strategies that bridge humanitarian assistance and development in Cox's Bazar.

This research seeks to understand the impact of humanitarian programming on gender dynamics from the perspectives of the affected communities. It is not an evaluation of any particular gender programme. The consultations exclusively focused on gender dynamics and more than 800 Rohingya and host community women and men from different social groups were invited to discuss their views, changes they have experienced and observed, and their concerns and expectations resulting from these changes. A wide range of humanitarian service providers were also engaged in the process, critically reflecting on their own experiences in gender programming operations at the community level and sharing their observations on the changes.

This research used a mixed methods approach with a strong focus on the qualitative to investigate the diverse perceptions and experiences among the Rohingya and host communities, addressing different dimensions of empowerment, motivations and catalysts that contributed to the perceptions, attitudes, behaviours, influencing factors, and parties that drive positive and negative change.

The following research questions were asked: 1) What are the most significant changes concerning gender dynamics, as perceived by the communities? 2) What are the key drivers and influencing factors affecting these changes? 3) What are the opportunities for sustainable gender transformation? and 4) To what extent do past and current gender interventions affect and interact with these changes?

Communities and stakeholders who were identified as less consulted in previous gender assessments based on the SDR were proactively sought out to ensure visibility of their voices and perspectives about gender issues, these communities and stakeholders included frontline humanitarian staff, host community members and community members from more conservative groups. Rohingya and host communities, women and men, progressive and conservative groups, beneficiaries, and non-beneficiaries are equally represented.



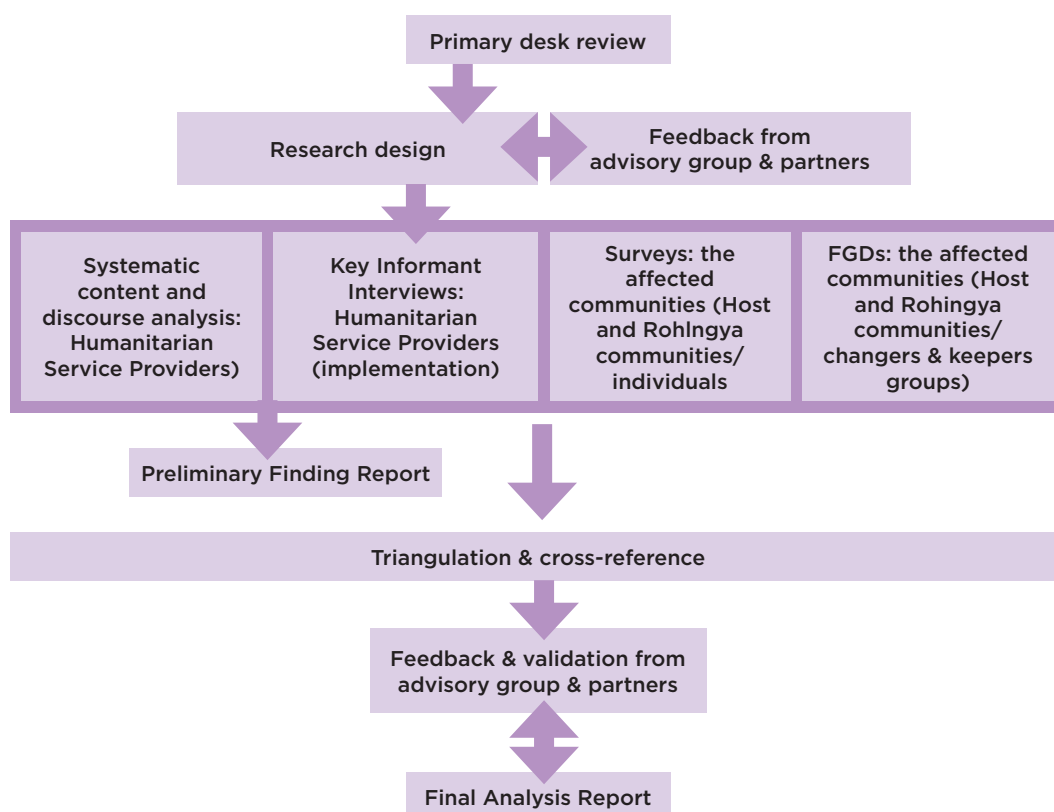
An FGD session is being facilitated by NPM enumerators.
Photo credit: IOM

2. METHODOLOGY

This research attempted to understand the diverse perceptions of gender norms and practices from both service users (the affected population) and providers (humanitarian agencies) and how their experiences and observations have changed over the last few years concerning gender dynamics in both communities. The researchers also examined the patterns and trends shown across the different social groups to provide insights into gender programming strategies.

Research Framework and Process

A mixed methods approach was used, combining secondary data review (SDR), key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and a perception survey. Three data collection methods were developed by the Lead Researcher, with support from ACAPS and International Organization for Migration's Needs and Population Monitoring team (IOM NPM) and reviewed by the technical advisory group.



First, an SDR was conducted to inform research design. The technical advisory group and data collection team provided feedback on the design and operationality of the research. The second round of SDR and KIIs produced a preliminary finding report to inform the 2022 Joint Response Plan (JRP) 2022. The findings from the survey and FGDs were triangulated for validity and compared with existing gender research to examine changes in gender dynamics that have occurred over the past four years. The research team also held several meetings with the technical advisory group, the GiHA WG, and sector coordinators to discuss and validate the findings. Feedback from these meetings was integrated into the final report.

Research Methods

Secondary Data Review

ACAPS' SDR on gender, conducted in July 2021 and updated in January and February 2022, informed the design of this research.¹ The SDR mapped out the status of gender studies and analyses and provided meaningful insights for future research areas. It also revealed a lack of literature, perspectives, and inclusion of diverse gender identities, people with disabilities, and host communities, and notes there are few stand-alone gender assessments and that those that exist rely heavily on quantitative data. The findings from this study resonate with ACAPS' results.

For this study, another SDR was conducted. First, a preliminary review of 20 key gender documents focused on identifying research gaps in existing gender analyses and informing the research design. A second review was done systematically to triangulate evidence from the KIIs and further draw out related topics for the survey and FGDs. Finally, key documents were revisited to triangulate and validate the survey and FGD findings. This SDR was done both manually and using Atlas.ti, using a double coding technique. Please refer to Annex A for inclusion and exclusion criteria for the systematic SDR.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): Perspectives of Humanitarian Service Providers

Twenty-one KIIs were conducted by the Lead Researcher between 18-31 October 2021. Local, national, and international NGO staff from 13 NGOs working in Cox's Bazar were consulted, and 16 of the 21 interviewees worked on gender, such as gender-based violence (GBV) case officers and managers. More than half the interviewees worked for local and national NGOs, and only field officers from implementing organisations who had been working on the ground for more than three years were interviewed. National and local NGOs have rarely been consulted at the frontline officer level within previous gender assessments.

The KIIs sought to understand the perceptions of frontline aid workers on gender interventions and the realities on the ground. It also sought to discuss changes they had observed through gender programmes implemented over the last four years in Cox's Bazar and the factors driving change or reification of gender norms and practices. Please refer to Annex B for the profile of key informants.

1 ACAPS [Gender Secondary Data Review](#), 2022.

Perception Survey: Individuals from the Host Community and the Rohingya Camps

The perception survey, inspired by the most significant change (MSC) tool, sought to understand diverse views of gender norms, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours, rather than to provide a statistically representative view of the surveyed population.² The survey asked respondents about the perceived changes in gender norms at the individual, relational, social, and institutional level, sites of the changes that occurred, people who can influence changes and how the communities perceive these changes. The last questions were open-ended and asked respondents to choose the most significant change for themselves.

The study employed a purposive sampling strategy to ensure the representativeness and inclusion of the intersectional aspects of the perceptions and perceived changes. We ensured that survey respondents do not overlap with the FGD participants to reduce redundant or wrongly saturated data collection. We selected five Rohingya camps in Kutupalong Expansion site, and five host community areas in four unions. Initially the camps were selected based on the level of gender activities being conducted in order to compare the heavily intervened and least intervened camps. UNFPA's GBV service facilities data and 4W map were used for this purpose. However, survey data did not reflect and validate this categorization of the camps and comparison when the respondents were asked whether they participated in gender activities or not as there was no correlation between the results and initial selection criteria. Therefore, no analysis has been conducted to compare those camps based on the initial selection criteria. Host community locations were selected based on their closeness to the camps and also with the purpose of maximizing the geographical coverage.

Rohingya Camps		Host Communities (Unions)	
1W		Halদিাপালং	
7		রাজাপালং	
4		পালংখালি	
11		ঝ্যকং	
12			
Total Rohingya Respondents	273	Total Host Community Respondents	273

Most Significant Change (MSC) Tool

This research introduces the use of an innovative qualitative tool to explore and measure changes in gender norms, perceptions, and practices. The nature of humanitarian response does not allow much time and space to adequately measure social changes resulting from humanitarian interventions. Gender-responsive programming has largely failed to provide an adequate tool to measure progress. By employing the MSC tool, we attempted to gauge the changes perceived and experienced by the affected communities to draw out their most important values and norms and to address fundamental gender issues from their perspectives in more socially and culturally acceptable ways.

2 Davies, R and Dart, J, [The 'Most Significant Change' \(MSC\) Technique: A Guide to its Use](#), April 2005.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Community Influencers (Keepers and Changers)

Forty-two FGDs were conducted, 20 in the Rohingya camps and 22 in the host community. Participants were selected based on their potential role as changers or keepers of tradition. This mainly included opinion leaders from different social groups who could influence and contribute to changes in gender dynamics to understand motivations for change (or refusal to change), the rationale behind norms and beliefs, types of fear, the capacity of the community to change, and means to capture niche alternatives in service provision. All discussions were conducted in Bangla or Rohingya by Bangladeshi and Rohingya enumerators. They were recorded, transcribed, and verified for accuracy. To ensure high quality, the recordings were translated verbatim and transcribed by a professional translation company. Data from the FGDs were imported to Atlas.ti for analysis. We used inductive and deductive coding to draw out patterns among the profile groups. An additional review was done manually on printed versions to ensure any interesting opinions and perceptions were included.

Different perceptions and attitudes towards gender were identified through SDR and KIIs. The data collection team were consulted to identify and categorise the FGD groups into keepers (of traditional gender norms: older generations, religious leaders, men and boys) and changers (who demonstrated significant changes: male champions, women leaders, youth groups). Balance between gender (women, men and Hijra), community (Host and Rohingya), and profile groups (keepers and changers) were ensured. Please refer to Annex D for profile of keepers and changers.

Data Collection Process

Staff from IOM NPM and ACAPS took part in a Training of Trainers conducted by the Lead researcher. They then trained IOM NPM data collectors on qualitative research methods and the data collection tools. Two-days of feedback and piloting of the research tools was done before data collection commenced to ensure the appropriateness and effectiveness of the different data collection tools.

All data collection occurred in November and December 2021 and was conducted by the Lead Researcher or IOM NPM team of 14 Rohingya and 15 Bangladeshi data collectors, supported by ACAPS and IOM NPM. Data was collected from five camps and four host communities (please see the selection criteria within annex).

At the end of the data collection, feedback sessions were held with the data collectors to discuss their experience and learnings, and to validate the data collected. They reported that the new approach and methods used intrigued them and provided fresh insight into their profession. Their observations and learnings were incorporated as a part of the evidence.

The translation company provided notes on each FGD translation. They identified issues with facilitation, such as leading questions and questions that are not consistent with the FGD guidelines and indicated discussions where questions outside the scope of the research were asked, such as about service provisions and complaint mechanisms. Some of these discussions were excluded as the relevance was low.

2.1 Limitations and Lessons Learned

The research does not claim to be exhaustive or statistically representative. It is focused on exploring and investigating the heterogeneity of the affected population that humanitarian responses often forget due to the nature of emergencies. We sought to better represent the diverse views and insights of the communities, particularly around gender questions. However, there were limitations to keep in mind and some lessons learned during the research process.

- Limited understanding of and exposure to gender issues prevented a more in-depth discussion. Our enumerators reported that communities were used to discussing service provisions and were not accustomed to discussing gender. A priming technique³ was used to prevent respondents from derailing from the main topics of conversation, but it delayed the survey and caused some confusion. Facilitating the survey and FGDs was challenging for the data collection team because it was a new research subject and they had very limited gender research training. Increased forums to discuss gender topics and more investment in gender research capacity building are recommended.
- Gender diverse populations and Hijras in the camp and host community were hard to find and risky to engage with for the survey. Instead, the desk review was conducted paying particular attention to gender-diverse groups and Hijra. One KII with three frontline officers working for the Hijra group and two FGDs with Hijra, one for each community, were conducted.
- There is a lack of publicly available information (proposals, plans and evaluation reports) on stand-alone gender programming and gender-mainstreaming projects, and those that do exist are restricted to sketching what is going on in the sector and limited critical examination of the current gender programming and implementation. This made it difficult to critically analyse the gender narratives of service providers and made it difficult to identify the camps and communities with heavier or lighter gender interventions, which this study initially sought to compare.
- Despite the two full-day training of trainers, four separate training sessions for each data collection team (Rohingya women and men, and Bangladesh women and men), and the piloting of data collection tools, the data collection team struggled to fully grasp the research scope and implications as the nature of the topic was more abstract and complex and new to the response, and additionally required use of new research tools.
- Due to IOM NPM's data collection and protection policy, adolescents could not be invited into the research. While it would be ideal to include adolescent perspectives, we were able to include younger participants (aged 18-30) and our analysis indeed showed they had different gender perceptions than older participants.

3 Priming refers to the activation of an idea in one's memory ([Francesca R. Dillman Carpentier](#) 2020 in Priming, The International Encyclopaedia of Media Psychology). Our survey used priming technique to guide/prime the respondents to focus on their perceptions and experiences on the specific subject as gender is not a familiar topic to the population.

- While the research design meant to include individual disability data, due to technical error the information was collected only at the household level and was omitted during the analysis.
- Individual data on religious belief/affiliation was not collected in the survey as it is considered a sensitive subject. We might have missed out on the non-Muslim minority in both communities.
- As November and December are harvest season, economically active age groups were hard to reach, particularly in the host community. Literacy and education played an important role. More educated and literate groups tended to understand the questions and topic better.
- Facilitating discussions with groups with strong traditional gender norms was difficult. Some participants were offended by questions about gender equality or changes in social norms.
- Language is still a big challenge when conducting research among the Rohingya. Although data collection was conducted in Rohingya, the translation of the transcripts into English was completed by a team of non-native Rohingya speakers.



Rokeya Begum, a Rohingya Refugee, is a part of the "Assistance for survival and sustainable capacity building" project implemented by Rohingya Women Welfare Society. Photo credit: Khaled Arafat Ahmed/UN Women

3. SECONDARY DATA REVIEW MAIN FINDINGS

To build on the ACAPS's existing gender SDR conducted in July 2021 and updated in January and February 2022, this research found that gender gaps in service delivery received most of the attention. Much of the existing literature was committed to providing operational and sectoral recommendations and system and institutional level implications were rarely emphasised. Few documents discussed transitions or shifts in gender norms among the Rohingya or host community population and reports on the progress or impact of gender interventions were rare, and only a small number of documents were concerned with the heterogeneous gender dynamics experienced by diverse social groups. A content and discourse analysis was conducted by the Lead Researcher, looking specifically at five topics and how they had been addressed in previous gender studies: intersectionality, men and boys' engagement, women's leadership, institutional and political engagement, and Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) and hijra communities. These topics are crucial to achieving sustainable gender transformation but are seldom discussed.

An **intersectional approach**⁴ looks at how inequalities and social risks intersect at the individual level rather than making broader generalizations at the level of an individual category, such as women. **Despite its uptake within gender studies, intersectionality was rarely discussed in the reviewed documents. While 10 out of 44 documents mentioned intersectionality, only three meaningfully discussed the intersectional impact of the crisis and humanitarian responses in Cox's Bazar.** Other documents briefly referred to an intersectional approach as desirable for inclusive service delivery or future gender research. 'Gender and disability' and 'gender and age' were the most mentioned examples of intersectional analysis. Only one report had an in-depth analysis of each social group and dove into how these intersecting vulnerabilities have impacted lives.

Intersectional analysis requires a more thorough analysis of each group and how the intersections of different identities create space for more risks or opportunities. Existing gender recommendations focus on intersectionality as collecting disaggregated social identity data at the assessment or monitoring level rather than interrogating the various intersections of inequalities of gender and other socially prescribed identities.

⁴ Intersectionality is "*a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power*" (Kimberlé Crenshaw, 2015); Intersectionality recognises that people's lives are shaped by their identities, relationships, and social factors. These combine to create intersecting forms of privilege and oppression depending on a person's context and existing power structures such as patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, imperialism, homophobia and racism (A. H. Monjurul Kabir, et. al (2021); UN Women, UNPRDR, [Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit](#)).

Evidence from the KIIs strongly supports **men and boys' engagement** as a prerequisite for sustainable, socio-culturally acceptable, and transformative changes in gender norms, practices, and power relations. However, **it appears that men and boys' engagement in achieving gender equality remains neglected in gender assessment and recommendations. 20 out of 44 documents mention men and boys' engagement but only four included meaningful analyses of power dynamics in gender relations and provided recommendations.** However, many recommendations continue to focus on women's social and economic empowerment. Overall, there is a lack of understanding about the role men and boys play in achieving gender equality, with their engagement considered additional as opposed to necessary. Engaging men beyond GBV and SRHR is a necessity. Men and women interact in all spheres of life, and men and boys as allies in gender programming is imperative.



Children playing in their free time after school break.
Photo credit: Md Dipu/HAP

While more than half of the documents reviewed (26 out of 44) referred to **women's leadership**, mostly calling for meaningful participation, only a few defined what this meant in the given context. The recommendations focus on promoting formal and informal leadership training, women's engagement in planning and monitoring, and community decision making. However, the leadership of community-based or local organisations and women's formal and political representation are largely neglected.

Despite the Bangladesh government's strong involvement in camp management, there is little evidence of **institutional and political engagement** in promoting gender equality. 17 documents mentioned the role of the Camp in Charges (CiCs) or the Bangladesh Government, but mostly as stakeholders in the humanitarian response plan or in relation to site management and GBV case management. Four documents elaborated the roles of CiCs as governing bodies at community level gender interventions. CiCs, as the local governing body and representatives of the Government of Bangladesh have considerable authority on managing GBV and child marriage cases. They are responsible for social and legal enforcement when violations against women occur in the community. Only a couple of documents mentioned the importance of advocacy targeting the Government of Bangladesh to influence CiCs.

There has not been any stand-alone analysis on the **gender diverse population and Hijra⁵ communities** to date.⁶ Seven of the 44 documents mentioned this group, and only two extensively addressed their issues. One was a special report on experiences and needs of Rohingya Hijra and male survivors of sexual and GBV and the other was an intersectional analysis on Hijra inclusion and elaborated upon their denied access to facilities (health and hygiene in the community and camp) and social engagement. Even within those two documents, they are presented as a vulnerable and marginalised group (cited as "*including persons with diverse SOGIESC*") rather than a researched group. Please refer to Annex A for the research protocol.

5 In South Asia, the term 'Hijra' refers to an identity category for people who were assigned as male at birth, but who develop a feminine gender identity (UNHCR, CARE and ActionAid, [An Intersectional Analysis of Gender amongst Rohingya Refugees and Host Communities in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh](#), September 2020)

6 The secondary data review only included documents that exclusively report on Cox's Bazar published by the end of 2021. A new report was recently published by Legal Action Worldwide, "*They Took Me to A Dark Place: The Experiences and Needs of Rohingya Hijra and Male Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*", Feb. 2022.



Volunteer speaking with Rohingya Refugee woman.
Photo credit: Iffath Yeasmine/UNHCR

4. IN-DEPTH: FINDINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section focuses on the changes in gender dynamics as perceived and discussed by community members consulted, as well as the main drivers they identified as contributing to these changes.

As discussed in the methodology, the perception survey took a primarily explorative and qualitative approach. It was comprised of the following sections:

- The first section had perception questions, which asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with certain traditional gender norms. This measured their own personal beliefs and views.
- Next, respondents were asked whether they personally had experienced changes in their own gender roles and practices and in their interactions with other family and community members.
- Thirdly, respondents were asked whether they observed these changes occurring externally within their family or community members around them, and then were further asked whether they liked these changes or not.
- Finally, respondents were asked who they believed was the most important person who influenced them to think differently about what women and men should do.

There was no baseline data for gender perceptions among the affected populations before this research was carried out. Therefore, we examined the gender perceptions by comparing different groups, including those who participated in gender activities and those who did not. Gender activities are defined as women-targeted income generating activities (IGAs), women and girls' safe spaces, gender equality related sensitisation sessions, and men-targeted discussion sessions. In the first section, measuring respondents' individual views, there is no significant difference between gender activity participants and non-gender activity participants. However, in the following two sections, measuring changes experienced within their own gender roles, as well as changes observed in their families and communities, we do see more noteworthy differences.

Some meaningful findings from the perception surveys were triangulated by the FGDs and KIIs to provide an enriched picture. A variety of groups with different intersectionalities were consulted for the FGDs. FGD groups were categorized into keepers (of traditional gender norms: older generations, religious leaders, men and boys) and changers (those who demonstrated significant changes: male champions, women leaders, youth groups). Balance between gender (women, men and Hijra), community (host and Rohingya), and profile groups (keepers and changers) were ensured.

Gender dynamics and norms changes are by nature messy and non-linear. Our findings show many contradictions which we believe shows the diversity and complexity of the ongoing situation and changes.

4.1 Changes in Gender Dynamics

4.1.1 Gender Programming in Humanitarian Response

Over the last four years, the humanitarian sector in Cox's Bazar has established strong capacity in gender programming. However, the gender interventions focus strongly on women at the individual level, and do not fully address more multi-dimensional approaches including men and people with diverse genders, or beyond at the societal and institutional level.

Established Capacity in Gender Programming

Data from the survey shows that positive changes in gender norms and practices are more frequent among those engaged in gender activities with regular interactions with humanitarian service providers. Women and men in both Rohingya and host communities attribute the positive gender changes in their communities to humanitarian work. Social acceptance and support for gender programming has increased as educated women and men from both communities are trained and mobilised as community volunteers and messengers in gender programming activities. Based on conversations in the KIIs and FGDs we observed established human, social, and institutional capacity in gender programming, even if to a limited extent. However, most stand-alone gender programming remains focused on GBV case management.

The KIIs and FGDs suggest that institutional knowledge and skills on gender programming and implementation improved significantly over the years. However, there are very limited



Volunteer teaches Rohingya Refugees how to sew menstrual pads and vests.
Photo credit: Saikat Mojumder/UNHCR

numbers of gender-focused service providers and only a few larger organisations with gender expertise, such as UN agencies and INGOs, are allowed to implement activities independently in the camps. Local NGOs, including women's rights organisations (WROs) and women led organizations (WLOs) from the Rohingya community, are systematically excluded.⁷ This seriously limits the capacity of humanitarians to introduce and implement measures that are contextualised and socio-culturally acceptable. Recognising and encouraging community-based women leaders and organisations' roles require more substantial support and commitment from humanitarian actors and the Government of Bangladesh. Safety and security continue to be major issues faced by Rohingya women volunteers and leaders. This includes blackmailing and physical and sexual assaults. Responses against violent groups needs to be strengthened and institutionally enforced.

Imbalance in Gender Interventions

Transformative gender changes require multi-dimensional approaches at the individual, social, and institutional levels. However, humanitarian response focuses on women's individual empowerment rather than legal, governmental, and institutional interventions. As such, existing stand-alone gender programming concentrates on GBV and early child marriage prevention. Intersectional analysis and intervention activities are rare.

It was challenging to identify the 5W (who's doing what, where, when and for whom) of gender programming in the humanitarian response. Collective goals and indicators for measuring gender impact have not been put in place because gender is 'cross-cutting' and because gender interventions are scattered and imbalanced. There is also a lack of analysis and documentation on governmental and legal interventions in gender programming, such as policy advocacy to the Government of Bangladesh and engagement of the CiCs and elected union counsellors.

Weak Protection and Sensitization for People with Diverse Genders

A binary understanding of gender persists in the humanitarian response. The Hijra community have received less attention and are among the least consulted groups; they feel left out from humanitarian support and lack adequate institutional services. Service provision and support are minimal, and discrimination and bullying persists. Strong stereotypes about gender diverse communities, with negative perceptions, were raised in the FGDs. Hijras face blackmail, harassment, and assault but get hardly any legal assistance from local governing bodies and authorities. Violence against Hijras persists but is not often reported or investigated. There was a strong sense of vulnerability in our KII and FGD sessions with members from the Hijra community. As with other Rohingya community members, Rohingya Hijras said they need to pay bribes to access economic opportunities. As with other host community members, Hijras in the host community expressed a higher sense of vulnerability because they do not receive humanitarian assistance.

⁷ CARE Bangladesh, *They Do Not Consider Us as NGOs: The Current State of Affairs of the Women-led Organizations in Rohingya Humanitarian Response*, 2020.



“We don’t get justice here. No one accepts our complaints. The people we complain about just bribe the leaders so that instead they beat us. These people say that we should be killed and driven away from the camp. Many people are becoming intolerant of us after hearing from these other people. They do not want us to exist.” (Rohingya Community, Hijra)

Some men from both changer and keeper groups, when discussing changes, were uncomfortable discussing Hijras, and showed a strong dislike towards them. They consider them a ‘shame’, ‘disappointment’, and ‘bad’ for their society. The content analysis demonstrates that the specific needs and interests of Hijras continue to be neglected in the gender discussion. Given that Cox’s Bazar is one of the most consulted responses in history, we should not understand so little about the Hijra communities in the affected populations four years into the humanitarian response.

4.1.2 Perceptions and Changes in Gender Dynamics

After consulting more than 800 community members and frontline humanitarians working in gender programming, positive changes in gender norms and practices are more frequent among those engaged in gender activities, such as income generation and awareness sessions with regular interactions with humanitarian service providers. While practices are changing rapidly due to institutional and humanitarian interventions, norms appear to be changing slowly in comparison. Positive changes in gender practices seem to be relatively faster in the host community than in the Rohingya community.

Gender dynamics are relationships and interactions between or among men, women, and people of diverse genders, that are informed by sociocultural ideas about gender and the power relationships that define them. Depending upon how they are manifested, gender dynamics can reinforce or challenge existing norms.

Gender norms are standards and expectations to which women, men, and people of diverse genders generally conform, within a range that defines a particular society, culture, and community at that point in time.

Gender practices are the activities that men, women, and people of diverse genders partake in on a daily basis.

Source: [European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

Gender Activities and Changes

While there was no apparent relationship between gender activities and individuals’ beliefs on traditional gender norms, women and men from both Rohingya and host communities who participated in gender activities did experience and observe positive changes in day-to-day gender roles and practices during interactions with their families and communities. Although only a small number of men and women in the host community reported participating in gender activities, they did appear to notice and experience more positive changes in gender roles and practices than the Rohingya community.

In the survey, we asked whether the respondents experienced any changes over the last four years at individual, relational, community level, and institutional levels. Almost in all questions, the respondents who participated in the gender activities agreed more to experiencing more changes compared to the non-participants.

Rohingya participants in gender activities perceived relatively more changes at the individual level compared to the host community, such as feeling empowered, being independent, taking on more roles, and being motivated. The host community reported greater changes at all levels (individual, relational, community and institutional). More than half of the married men and women respondents who participated in gender activities in the Rohingya community, reported better spousal relationships. This was also indicated in the FGDs often. Participants said that NGO sessions mediated marital conflicts by promoting mutual understanding and guiding them towards developing a more respectful relationship with their spouses.

However, it was institutional contributions that were perceived across all respondents to bring about the strongest amount of positive change, including interventions by humanitarian services, community leaders, CiCs, and Majhis (Majhis are Rohingya men appointed as camp representatives by government officials to support the CiCs, army and police in maintaining control and order, and act as focal points for humanitarian relief). Although fear of government authorities persists, the Rohingya community, particularly women, view these institutional interventions as able to protect them from IPV.

Most participants who had engaged in gender activities perceived the changes in gender roles and practices that they experienced and observed positively. However, Rohingya community members who had engaged in gender activities showed less enthusiasm about the changes experienced, feeling a loss of culture and tradition. In contrast, the host community views the changes as an inevitable 'development' for their society. Among the Rohingya, men are more worried about social changes than women, but both men and women with more education, including from religious schools, perceived the changes as less threatening.

Ambivalence Among the Community

Community members who experienced or observed changes reported mixed feelings, both positive and negative reactions, about these changes in gender norms, practices, and roles. Host community respondents were more favourable and viewed the changes as an inevitable 'development' for their society, while Rohingya community members showed less enthusiasm about the changes experienced, feeling a loss of culture and tradition.

The survey's results indicate that although men in both the Rohingya and host community, and women in the Rohingya community still hold stronger beliefs in traditional gender norms, there have been some shifts in gender perceptions among the population consulted.

Changes in norms appear to be relatively slower in the Rohingya community in comparison to the host community, possibly because the Rohingya had initially hoped for quick repatriation. Several Rohingya FGD participants stated that they considered the changes to be temporal and conditional, and a negative coping strategy for survival during displacement. As hope for repatriation fades, participants from five FGDs with both keepers and changers said the community is in the process of realising that these changes may become an inevitable part

of their new life in Bangladesh. Despite some resistance to change, Rohingya participants in FGDs discussed both positive and negative changes they observe in their communities and neighbourhoods, and almost all FGDs showed there has been changes in people's perceptions and practices.

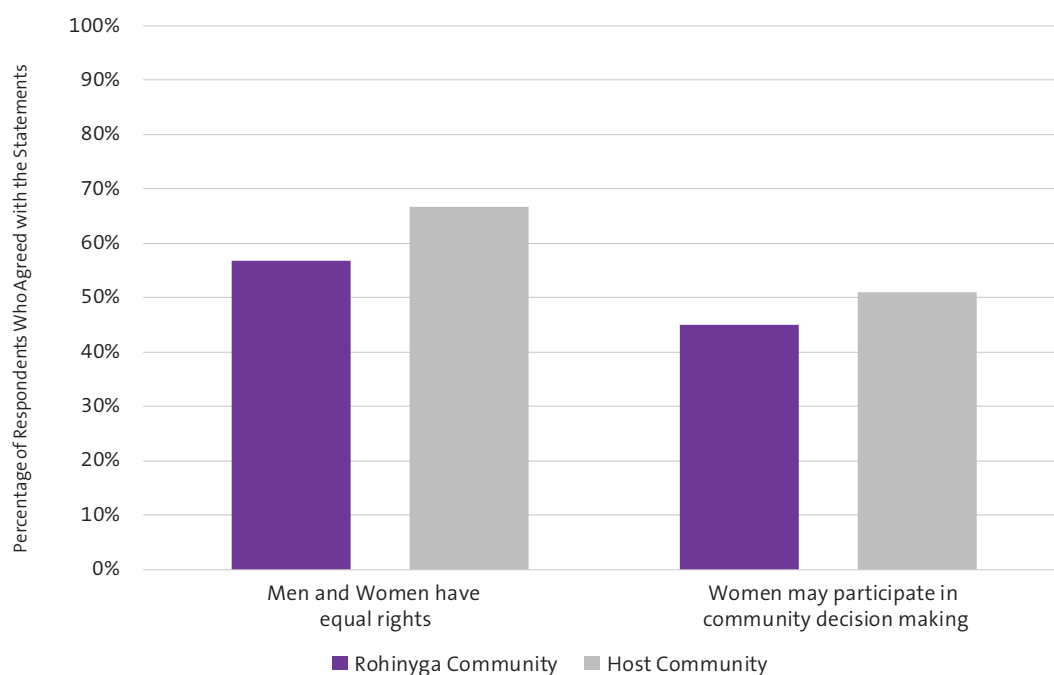


“Now that people are losing hope of getting repatriated, they (women) are working.” (Rohingya Community, Changers, Women's Community Watch Group, FGD 1-15)

“We will be happy if we can go back to our country. When women go outside the home for work, God becomes angry with us.” (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Imams and Elderly Men, FGD 1-18)

“I am not satisfied with current husband-wife relationships in the camps. Women are going outside to work. They are not obeying their husbands. So, we want to go back to our country so that we can again live with our previous system.” (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Male School Teachers from Religious Schools, FGD 1-08)

Figure 1: % of Respondents Surveyed Responding Agreement to Statements of Gender Equality, by Community



Before displacement, participants discussed that Rohingya women lived with limited mobility and lacked opportunities to work or socialise beyond their families or extended families. In Cox's Bazar, limited livelihood opportunities in the camps and the affirmative effort by humanitarian actors to engage women through women-targeted or women-only livelihoods opportunities has pushed women to work, often at the expense of their own beliefs and

value systems. Participants stated working outside was almost unimaginable in Myanmar. While some women considered this an opportunity or an inevitable change, others struggled to balance their identity as Rohingya Muslim women with that of breadwinners. Previous research also reported how the Rohingya sees this as compromising their Izzot (honour).⁸

Figure 2: Respondents Agreeing with Traditional Gender Dynamics, by Gender

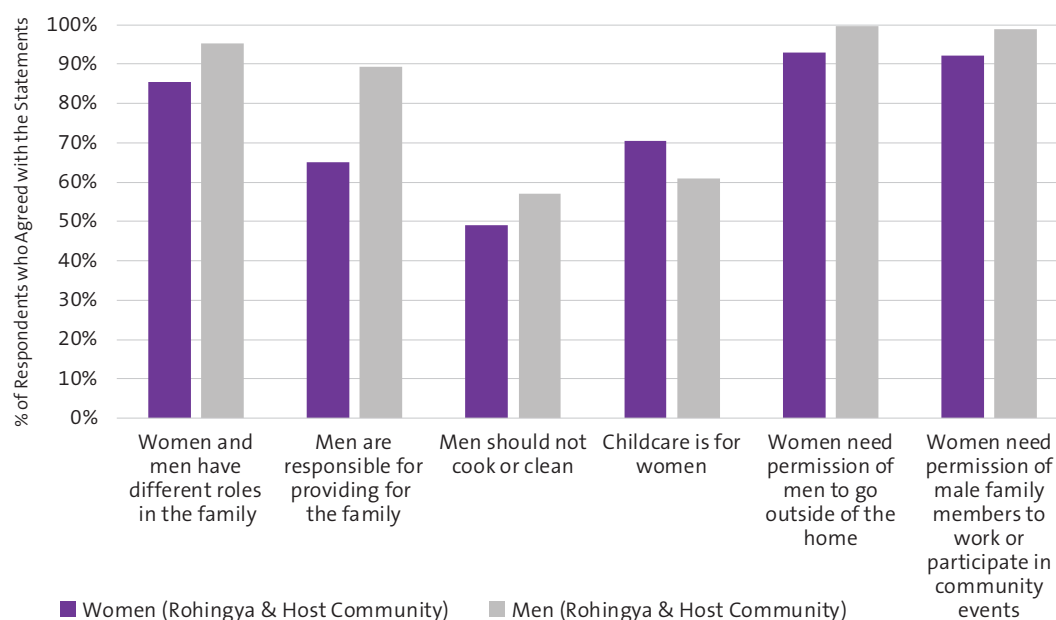
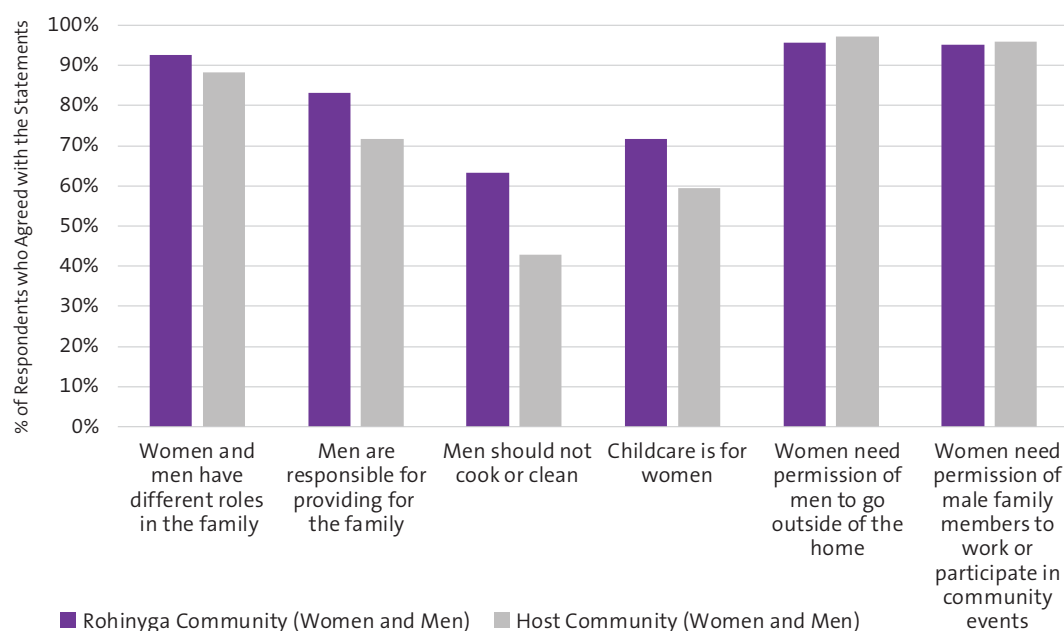


Figure 3: Respondents Agreeing with Traditional Gender Dynamics, by Community



⁸ "Izzot means honour, social reputation, sexual reputation" (IOM, UN Women, [Honour in transition: Changing gender norms among the Rohingya](#), 2020)

The survey shows mixed feelings about changes in gender norms. Overall, for both Rohingya and host community combined, 96% of respondents agreed that women need permission from a male family member to work or participate in a community event, and 90.5% believed in clear gender roles within the family (see Figure 2 and 3). 77.5% respondents saw men as the breadwinner, and 80.6% believed in gendered roles in economic activities. More than 60% of respondents saw women and men as having equal rights, and 37% believed that women could engage in income-generating activities (see Figure 1). 35% of men said childcare is not only the responsibility of women, and the same percentage of men also agreed that men can engage in cooking or cleaning. Education and age did not have an effect on these perceptions.

In the survey, we asked respondents whether they have observed changes concerning gender dynamics and how they feel about said changes. While host community women who participated in gender activities highly welcomed positive changes in gender dynamics, Rohingya women who participated in gender activities showed a much less favourable attitude towards the changes. Rohingya women who participated in gender activities did like some of the changes, particularly men's increased engagement in reproductive work (unpaid care and domestic work) or women's increased knowledge about community events, but they did not like others, such as women working outside. Rohingya women who had not participated in gender activities, in fact, were more favourable towards changes in gender dynamics, though these differences within the Rohingya community women are marginal. Both women and men in the host community held more favourable views of the changes they observed.

The Rohingya women involved in the consultations appeared to be experiencing internal conflicts between the strongly prescribed gender norms they had long lived with and the new practices they were being exposed to in Cox's Bazar. While there was no significant difference in gender perceptions (personal beliefs and views) between Rohingya women who participated in gender activities and those who did not, we did still notice some subtle conflicting feelings and attitudes towards the rapidly changing gender roles and practices. These were more noticeable among Rohingya women who participated in gender activities, who seemed to struggle between newly imposed roles, such as participating in IGAs, and the need to interact with strangers to survive.



“Though our husbands don’t allow us to work there [in Myanmar], [here] we have to work forcibly to feed or provide our sons with their requests and wishes. Therefore, we now have to change our norms and traditions. We eventually want to return to our country due to these serious conditions and situations.” (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Mothers in Law, FGD 1-14)

Participants in a couple of the FGDs with Rohingya women expressed discomfort about participation in activities that involve going outside, such as IGAs, and receiving humanitarian assistance. Some participants were worried about the rapid changes in women's mobility resulting in interactions with strangers, particularly men outside of their block. Women and men from conservative keeper groups saw working women as going against prescribed Islamic rules. However, there were participants in several FGDs in the Rohingya community who also testified that working women are beneficial because they provide for the family and contribute to social development.



“Our minds did not change about what women or men should do since we came here. We came here leaving our motherland behind. How can we change and forget who we are?” (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Women’s Taaleem Group, FGD 1-02)

“During this refugee life, women should stay at home and practice purdah. They should maintain the family so that their husband is satisfied... But now, some families let women earn or let children engage in labour which is completely prohibited in our religion.” (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Imams, FGD 1-06)

“Some men sit at home and send their women to collect rations, which society and religion both do not like.” (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Imams, FGD 1-06)

“Women are going outside to work. They do not obey their husbands and fights happen. If women stop going to work, there will not be any fights.” (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Male Teachers from Religious Schools, FGD 1-08)

When examining changes experienced at the individual, relational, community, and institutional levels, Rohingya women who participated in gender activities felt they experienced the least amount of change in their personal interactions at the community level compared to Rohingya men, and host community men and women. This might be due to self-policing among Rohingya women as they recognize societal disapproval may be even stronger because of their participation in gender activities, for example socio-economic activities outside of the home, and they fear backlash, such as security threats from violent groups. This could also be due to relatively lower confidence in social participation among Rohingya women. The differences between groups remains marginal, but the conflicting feelings women experience is consistent with the earlier finding in gender norm changes.⁹

Despite the absence of a baseline to compare how Rohingya women’s perceptions have changed over time, the findings are supported by testimonies from KIIs and the existing gender analyses that has noted that a limited approach to women’s empowerment risks women’s loss of social approval and support and a deterioration in their relationships at the household level.¹⁰

In the host community, interpretation of religion and traditional values stand in the way of women’s active participation. Some participants associate women’s economic empowerment with the uptake of a western lifestyle, which they consider destructive while others believe women-targeted support is unjust and discriminates against opportunities for men. Men and women expressed different perspectives about economic participation in the FGDs,

9 IOM, UN Women, *ibid.*

10 UNHCR, CARE and ActionAid *ibid.*, IOM, UN Women, *ibid.*

with some men considering it forced participation while many women considered it an opportunity. A group of older people from the host community said that lack of education and awareness had been the biggest barrier to women's socio-economic participation before.



“When girls earn money, they try to follow western styles which ruins our cultural values. These are the main barriers for the women to engage in the humanitarian activities.” (Host Community, Changers, Volunteer Men, FGD 2-05)

“Women did not go out as much before the arrival of the Rohingya refugees. [Now] women are leaving their families in search of work. This has a negative influence on modesty in our society.” (Host Community, Keepers, Housewives, FGD 2-06)

“NGOs always try to bring our women outside of their homes. There are no jobs for men, only for women.” (Host Community, Changers, Educated Men Group, FGD 2-15)

Overall, for both Rohingya and host community members, mixed feelings came up across the survey answers. 87.5% of all respondents said they had observed changes around gender norms and practices. Among the positive changes, women and girls' education and literacy for women and girls received the highest amount of support, while women's active engagement in socioeconomic activities was least favoured (*see Figures 4 and 5*). Almost all respondents observed changes such as more women outside (96.5%) and women participating in IGAs (97.3%). Respondents also said they did not like seeing women outside (77.5%), and 63% were opposed to women's economic participation.

Figure 4: Rohingya Women's Approval of Changes in Gender Dynamics and Practices, by Participation in Gender Activities

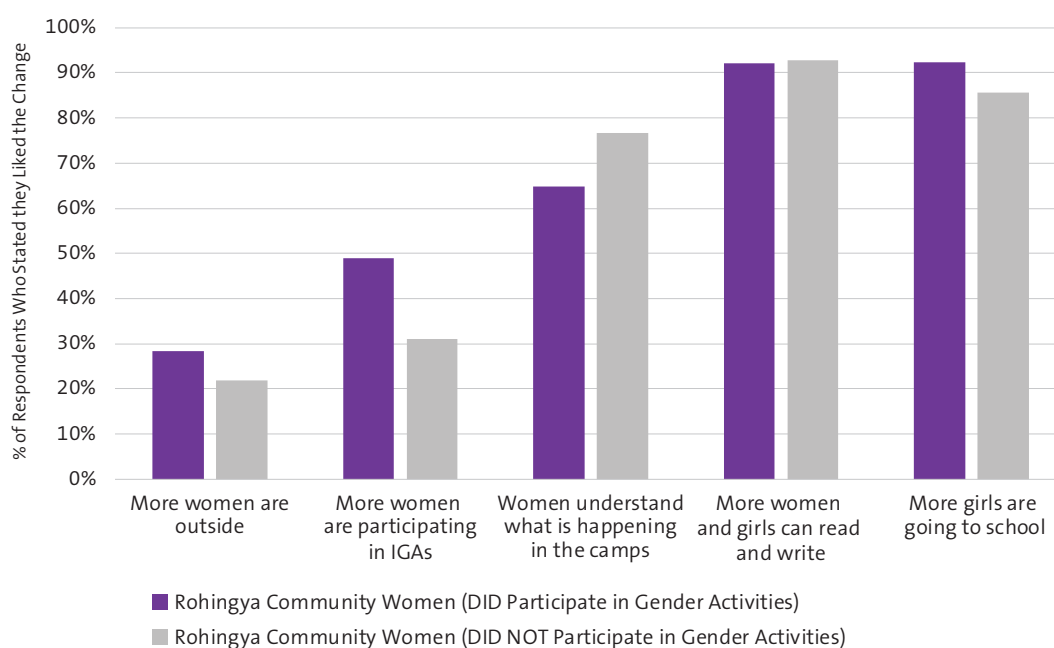
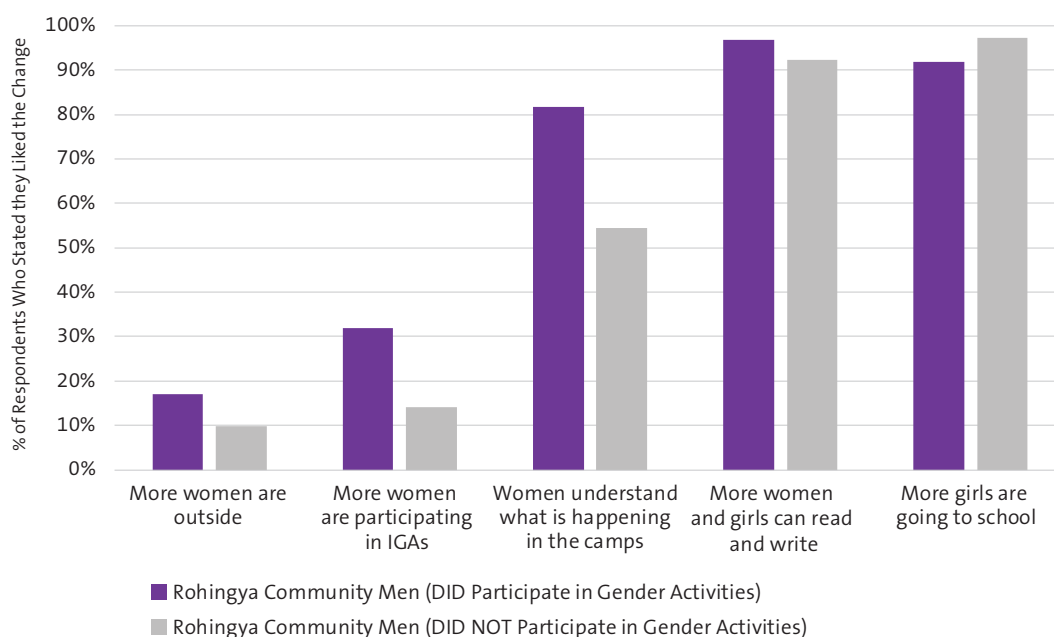


Figure 5: Rohingya Men's Approval of Changes in Gender Dynamics and Practices, by Participation in Gender Activities



These somewhat contradictory findings were echoed in both the Rohingya and host community FGDs, where participants support women working to relieve the financial pressure on their families but are very slow in accepting women's mobility and empowerment changes. When asked what a good or ideal woman, mother, and wife looks like, a few FGDs associated women's education with better education for their children and job opportunities. This is why women and girls' education is welcomed and accepted. However, in both communities some participants feel threatened by women's socio-economic participation and attribute what they consider to be negative social change, such as divorces and adultery, to women's work outside the home. Older community members and more overtly religious participants felt this more keenly. Across the board, and across both communities, elders least liked the changes in gender dynamics and young single women welcomed them the most.

These ambivalent or contradictory findings are not necessarily a negative sign; they signal change. It demonstrates that new practices are affecting existing norms, whether intended or not.

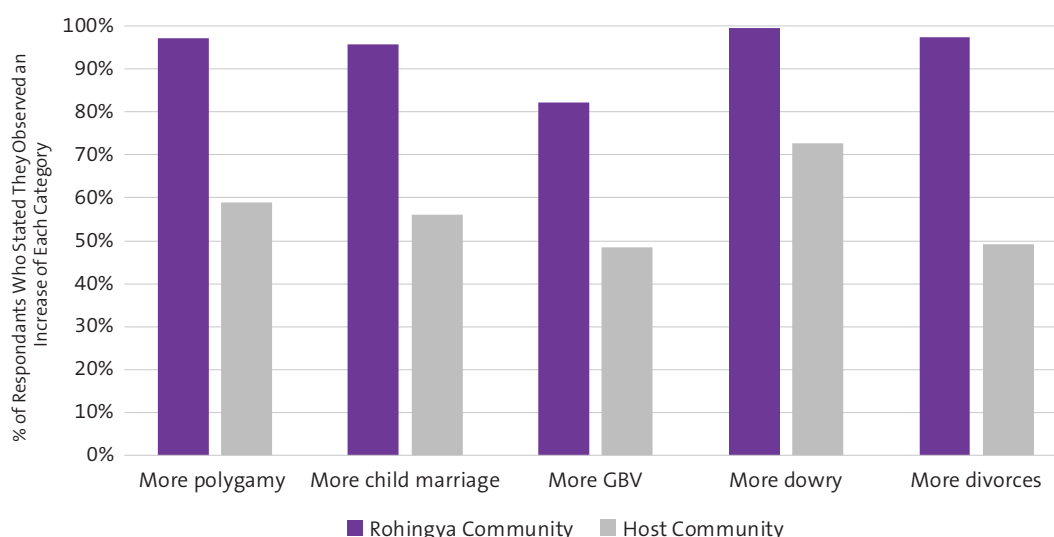
Harmful Practices

Although both Rohingya and host communities still observe harmful practices, there is an increasing awareness of the consequences of the violent behaviours and more women know where to seek support if violence occurs within their home or that of their neighbours.

Initial findings from KIIs with humanitarians and triangulated with SDR findings showed that humanitarians, the Rohingya, and members of the host community consider child marriage, polygamy, dowry, divorce, and GBV to be harmful practices. These categories were used during the survey and FGDs to understand how communities perceive negative change and harmful practices.

During the survey, Rohingya and host community respondents were asked if they have seen an increase in these practices within their communities in the past four years. As Figure 6 shows, while both communities stated they perceived there to be more cases of harmful practices, more Rohingya respondents said they had observed more of these negative social changes than their host community counterparts. Both communities attributed this increase to a lack of livelihoods and economic instability.

Figure 6: Men and Women Respondants Who Observed an Increase in Harmful Practices within Their Communities



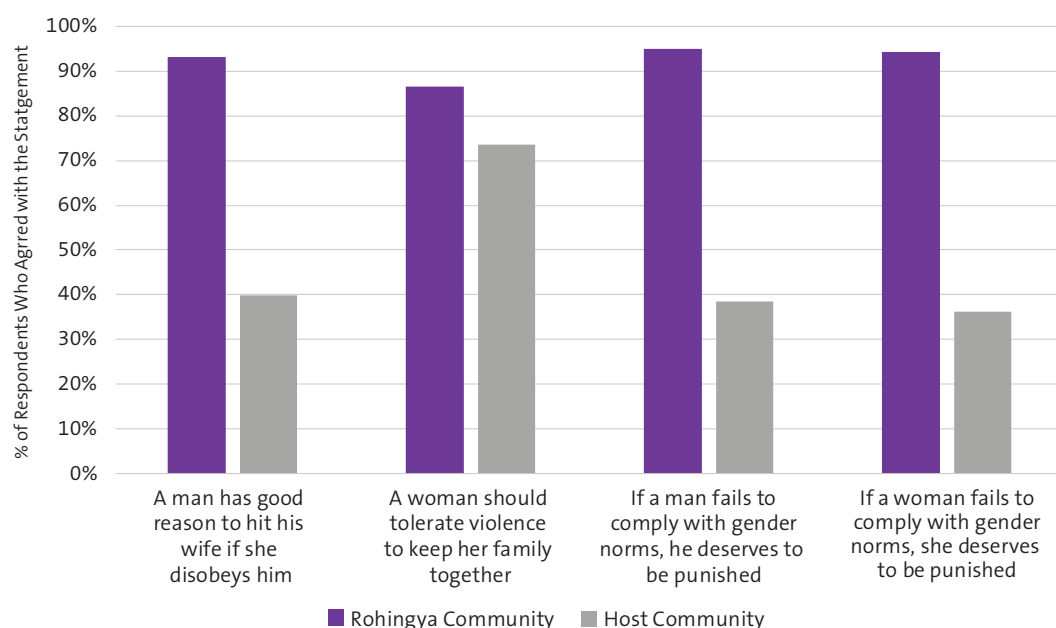
However, the FGDs did not overwhelmingly confirm these findings. For example, one Rohingya Imam group reported that child marriage has become a common practice, while a Rohingya women volunteer group claimed that it has stopped. Some FGDs said that harmful practices have decreased because of institutional interventions and as the communities have been sensitised by gender activities.

In the survey, we asked only whether respondents had observed more of any of these practices; therefore, there is a possibility that even if the respondent saw or heard of one or two cases, they reported it as observed. Similarly, in some FGDs, participants mentioned that they heard that these harmful practices are still happening but not anymore or not in their block. These stories suggest that social changes occur differently, from block to block even within the same camp.

Most Rohingya respondents (93%) overwhelmingly believed that there can be justified reasons for men to beat women and most (86%) also agreed that women should tolerate the violence for the sake of family (see Figure 7). Host community men held similar views, but host community women did not. When discussing punishment for non-conformity of gender norms, only host community women vastly objected to the idea that punishment is justified. Overall, for both men and women, 94% of Rohingya community respondents agreed with punishment for non-conformity, whereas only 38% of host community respondents agreed with the same statement. When asked about what punishment looks like, frequent responses included: social bullying, gossiping, and reduced marriage proposals. However, participants

in FGDs said economic incentives gradually compensate for this social disapproval, even in the most conservative groups.

Figure 7: Perceptions Related to GVB/IPV, Men and Women Respondents Combined



FGD participants in both Rohingya and host community said although they still see harmful practices, there is increasing awareness that GBV and child marriage are unacceptable and subject to punishment. Women noted that men are more aware of the consequences of their violent behaviours, and more women know where to seek support if violence occurs within their home or that of their neighbour's.



“I think NGOs have brought these changes. NGOs are working in this area on many subjects, and they are training local people by conducting meetings and sessions on various topics. I think people have now become more aware of social responsibilities because of NGOs’ work. One of the changes NGOs have brought to the community is the change in our opinion on child marriage. We did not have a negative perspective on child marriage before, however, after attending awareness sessions held by NGO volunteers, we have realized that child marriage is a bad practice.” (Host Community, Changers, Volunteer Women, FGD 2-11)

The Most Significant Change (MSC)

Women’s economic participation was recognised as the most significant change in both Rohingya and host communities and among both women and men. Men from both communities appear to notice more changes in women’s empowerment, such as economic participation, increased mobility, and education, while women point out changes such as divorces and dowry.

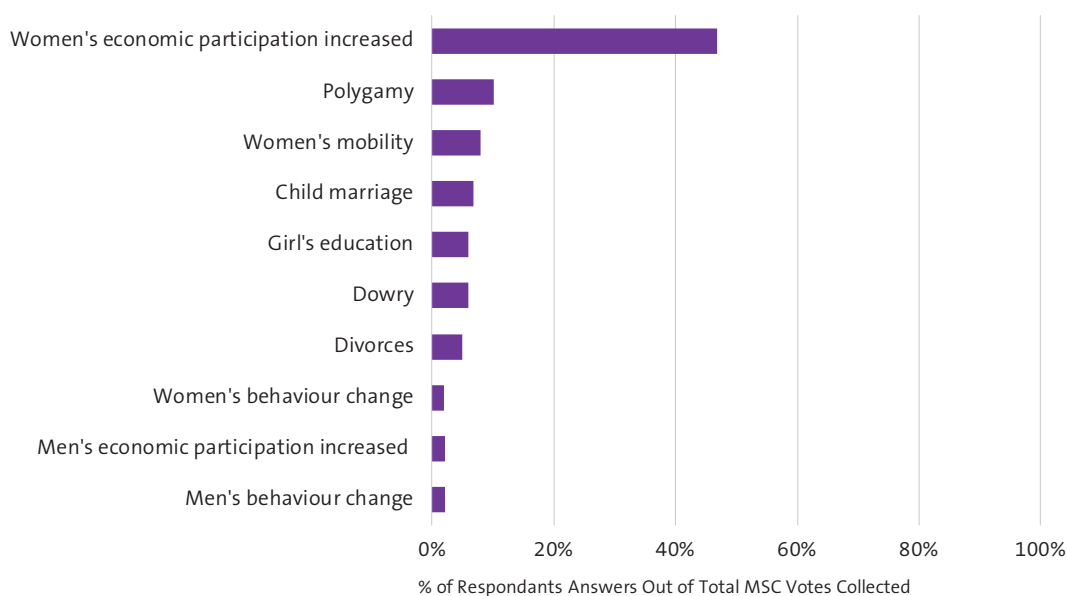
In both the survey and FGDs, participants were asked to vote for the one most significant change in terms of being a woman or a man. We collected 272 votes from the survey. As we can see in Figure 8, women's socio-economic participation was most frequently (48%) considered the most significant change on gender dynamics, with more members of the host community (67%) raising this than members of the Rohingya community (40%). In the survey, we see that men from both Rohingya and host communities appear to notice more changes in women's empowerment, such as economic participation, increased mobility, and education, while women point out changes such as divorces and dowry. This is likely because women's mobility and economic participation affects men's social primacy and power, while divorce and dowry affect women's social standing and ability to marry.

The host community women showed more support for women's income-generating activities. Host community women who had participated in the gender activities showed the most positive perceptions of women's economic responsibilities. Interviews with frontline gender officers corroborated these findings.



A Rohingya volunteer raises awareness of cyclone safety.
Photo credit: Saikat Mojumder/UNHCR

Figure 8: Survey Responants Most Significant Change



Post-Displacement Gendered Burdens

The new roles and expectations faced by Rohingya women and men are radical and have created post-displacement gendered burdens. While the importance and effectiveness of women's participation in income generating activities and leadership in women's empowerment cannot be stressed enough, those activities also come with their share of negative repercussions for women. At the same time, balancing the burden of women's increased labour from adding these roles, without compensating with reducing care work, is barely addressed. Although there have been some shifts in shared responsibilities around income generation and care at home, both women and men still feel pressured to fulfil socially prescribed roles.

When asked to define a good/ideal woman or man, both Rohingya and host community participants showed a very gendered understanding of roles and responsibilities. Men were expected to fulfil economic responsibilities, control the family decision-making, and maintain their status as head of household. A high-quality man was associated with a broad social spectrum and was expected to be an active member of the community. Women's virtues, however, were limited to the personal and the household level, such as having a good personality, being obedient to their husbands and in-laws, serving the family, and not nagging their husbands for money. The responses highlighted women's responsibilities to their families and in the home and the emotional and affective labour they must perform. The survey findings also demonstrated the clear division of labour, roles, and expectations for women and men. Most (90.5%) respondents agreed that women and men have different roles in the family, and 80.6% believed that men should work, and women should stay home to care for the children.

Survey findings indicated that Rohingya and host community women who had participated in gender activities showed a slightly increased workload in housework and care. Among those, the majority (78%) of Rohingya women reported increased burden, whereas other groups were less likely to feel the same (see Figures 9 and 10).

Figure 9: Increase in Household and Care Labour of Respondants Who DID Participate in Gender Activities, by Gender

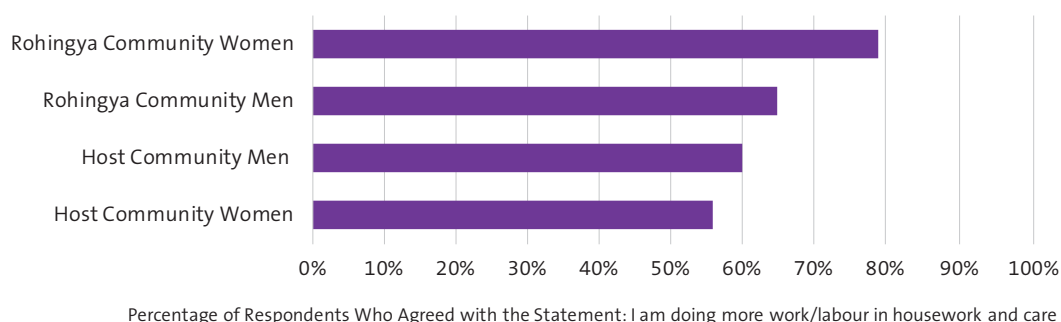
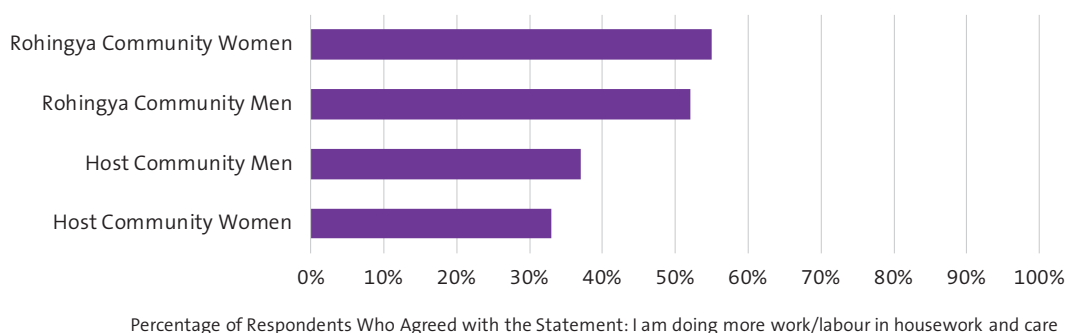


Figure 10: Increase in Household and Care Labour of Respondants Who DID NOT Participate in Gender Activities, by Gender



For Rohingya women, camp life has increased their physical burden. Women now do both productive (work outside) and reproductive (cooking and childcare) tasks, including IGAs, fetching water and rations, doing laundry, and bathing children. Men within the community ‘permit’ women’s productive work on the condition that women can finish their gendered tasks at home.



“Before, women had to work at home only. Now, they have to work both at the NGO and at home. After arriving back from work, we have to cook for the family and take care of the children... After arriving in Bangladesh, men have become useless.” (Rohingya Community, Changers, Volunteer Women, 1-03)

During the FGDs, some women expressed distress because of social shaming and disrespect by their immediate families and neighbours, which placed a heavy emotional and moral burden on them. Meanwhile, men felt vulnerable and powerless due to the loss of livelihoods, and therefore the loss of their role as breadwinners and heads of household.

Rohingya men felt threatened by losing their status and respect from the family, especially from their wives. They also reported social pressure, often in the form of mocking, from other men when they engaged and shared reproductive responsibilities. Although there have been some shifts in shared responsibilities, particularly around economic activities, both women and men still feel pressured to fulfil socially prescribed roles.



“For a wife to stay happy, the husband should have money. A wife obeys her husband if he earns income and provides for her. Otherwise, conflicts arise in the family because the wife thinks there is no point to obey her husband because he does not earn income to support her” (Rohingya Community, Changers, Women’s Community Watch Group, FGD 1-15)

“Our wives treat us with contempt because they are not dependent on our earnings. That is why we are dissatisfied with our household relationships here in the camp, because we are unable to meet each other’s needs (husband and wife) ... Our wives tease us, saying that we sit at home all day without work. A good wife is one who considers her husband’s joblessness and maintains a peaceful situation at home.” (Rohingya Community, Changers, Men’s Community Watch Group, FGD 1-07)

Humanitarian actors operating in the communities understand the emerging gendered burdens and provide sensitisation sessions that seek to mediate such conflicts and normalise the burden of shared responsibilities of productive and reproductive work.

Changes Perceived by the Host Community

Previous assessments have reported tensions between the host community and the Rohingya.¹¹ In this research, members of the host community expressed mixed feelings about the Rohingya.

Common complaints about the Rohingya included that they are a risk to safety and that the influx lowered wages and impacted the host communities’ access to natural resources. One key informant noted that the dire economic conditions increased drug dealing in Cox’s Bazar. Other complaints included concerns of increasing polygamy and dowry practices due to intermarriage between host community men and Rohingya women. Some host community women said men from the host community take advantage of Rohingya women’s rations and exploit Rohingya dowry practices. These men do not work to provide for their families, relying instead on humanitarian assistance and dowry money. Rohingya women also noted an increase in polygamy and adultery, blaming it on the lack of productive work for men. A special report on marriage and social justice also reported that dowry is the reason behind increasing polygamy.¹²

Some FGD participants also had positive opinions about the influx. Several discussants mentioned that because of the influx, NGOs had started working in their communities, creating job opportunities, improving infrastructure such as healthcare facilities and roads, providing various training and education opportunities, and providing livelihoods support,

11 OXFAM, Save the Children and Action Against Hunger, [Rohingya Refugee Response Gender Analysis, Recognizing and Responding to Gender Inequalities](#), 2018.

12 BRAC, Centre for Peace and Justice, [Perception of Rohingya Refugees: Marriages and Social Justice after Cross-Border Displacement](#), 2021.

which eventually contributed to an improvement in their well-being. However, many also said the benefits of an NGO presence go primarily to educated populations as they have more job opportunities. Uneducated groups remain marginalised and neglected by the development.



“As the Rohingya people came here, NGOs came to give them humanitarian support. As a result, local men and women received career opportunities which is the positive side of hosting the Rohingya people.” (Host Community, Changers, Teachers and Educated Women Group, FGD 2-02)

4.2. Drivers of Change in Gender Dynamics and Opportunities

A few key drivers that have contributed to changes in gender dynamics were identified. **First, influencers**, such as humanitarians, Majhis (who are appointed by the Bangladesh Government in the camps), elected union members in the host community, community volunteers, and educated people **contributed to effective communication with communities** to alter their views and practices. **Second, institutional interventions to protect women** were proven to be effective, including legal enforcement on GBV and marriage registration. Some Rohingya women in particular found the CiCs’ interventions in GBV and IPV to be effective. They demanded stronger institutional support to prevent misconduct and violence against women. **Third, deliberate affirmative actions and women-targeted activities**, such as IGAs, participation in vocational training and awareness-raising events, and social gatherings in safe spaces for women motivated and encouraged some women to tap into their latent abilities, enhance their confidence, and allow them to empower each other. However, economic empowerment programmes in particular must have careful design and efforts must focus on all levels of societal change in order to reduce burdens on individual women. **Finally, community sensitisation, engaging men as a preventive measure** in raising awareness on the disadvantages of child marriage and GBV, and advantages of women’s rights, gender equality, mediating family conflicts, and other issues (reproductive and sexual health, maternal health, child health, WASH, etc.) has increased men’s behavioural change. This change was observed by frontline workers and corroborated by many FGDs. Communities reported better spousal relationships and more respectful attitudes resulting from an increase in men’s awareness.

4.2.1 Influencers for Positive Changes

Humanitarians appear to be the biggest influencers in gender norm changes with slight variations across the sub-groups of Rohingya men and women and host community men and women.

To understand who influences changes in gender norms and practices, the survey asked respondents who in their life has most influenced them to think differently about what women and men should do. Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

Figure 11: Overall Combined Respondents - Who influences you to think differently about what men and women should do?

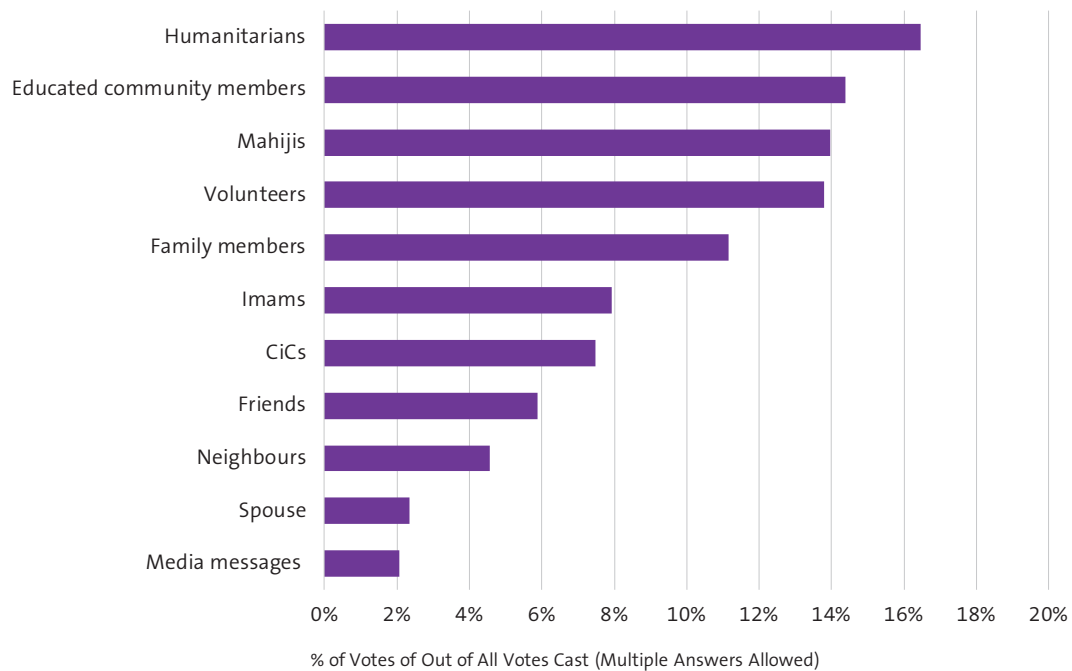


Figure 12: Rohingya Respondents - Who influences you to think differently about what men and women should do?

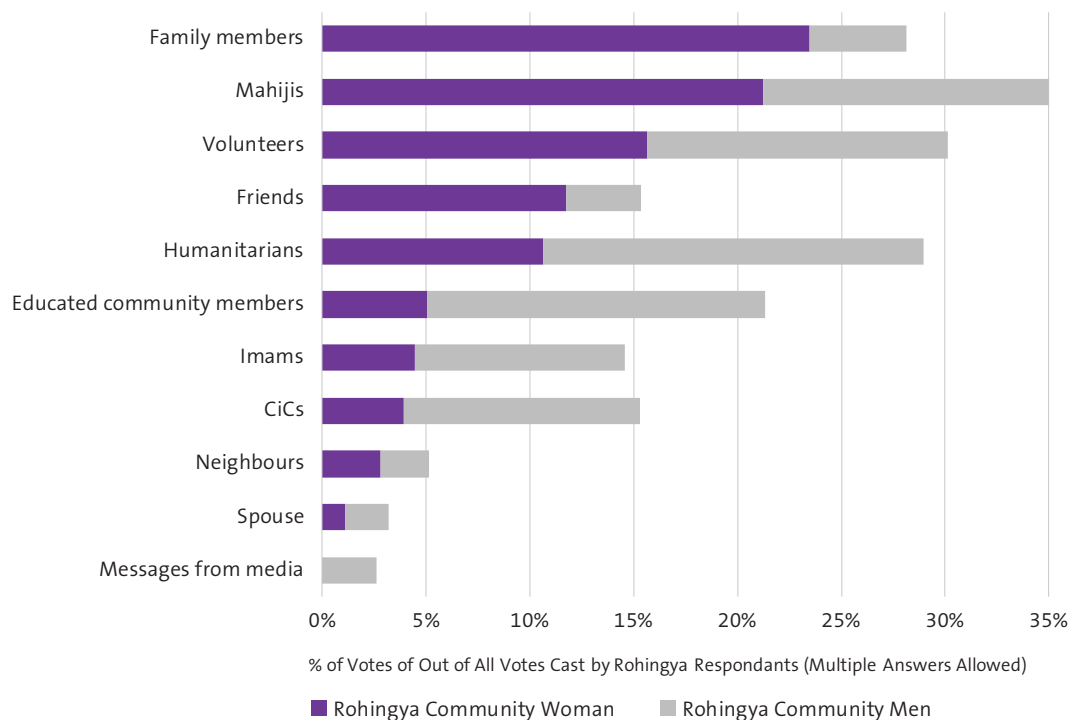
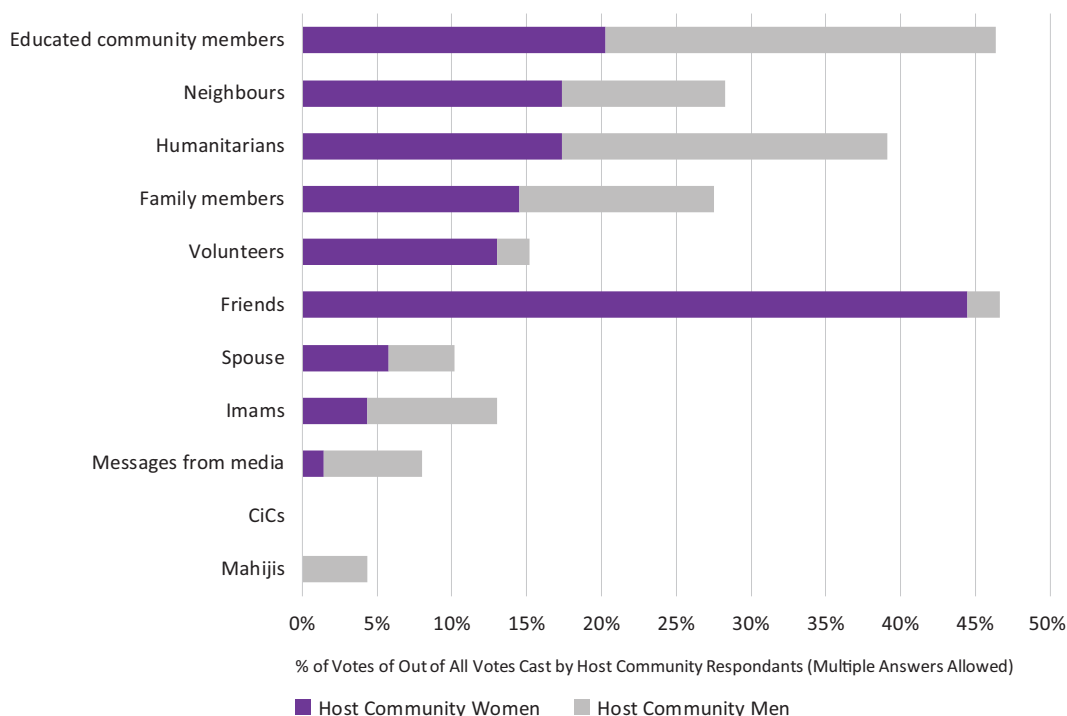


Figure 13: Host Community Respondents - Who influences you to think differently about what men and women should do?



Referring to Figures 11, 12 and 13, we can see humanitarians are among the top three key influencers that affect gender dynamics in all communities except among Rohingya women. In the Rohingya community, Majhis and community volunteers are also mentioned as influencers, while in the host community, educated community members and neighbours were among the most influential. The survey results are consistent with the FGD findings. Differences are observed between women and men. The Rohingya men, humanitarians, educated community members and volunteers are the most influential people, whereas Rohingya women find their family members, Majhis and volunteers are the most influential groups.

4.2.2 Roles of Governing Bodies

Both Rohingya and host communities are experiencing unprecedented social interaction with each other and with governing or semi-governing bodies such as CiCs and humanitarian organisations. Exposure to and interaction with governing bodies and humanitarians has increased people's understanding of and expectations for institutional services. Preventive and responsive measures, including awareness-raising and training at the community level and legal and institutional enforcement, are requested by the communities and the key informants. With support from NGOs, host communities noted that they have a clearer idea about the implications of women's education, economic participation, and gender equality in their daily lives.

New Social Contract as an Enabling Mechanism for Gender Transformation

A social contract is an agreement between members of a society and the governing body, and the rights and responsibilities of each party. The unprecedented social interaction with wider communities through gender activities has gradually and to some extent contributed to building an enabling environment for gender equality. The population now expects the governing bodies to play a more active role in transformative change in gender dynamics.



“People are changing as they learn from different training sessions given by different NGOs... If such training sessions are given systematically according to a village-wise plan, then even more changes would occur.”
(Host Community, Changers, Teachers and Educated Women, FGD 2-04)

Humanitarians are perceived by the Rohingya as pseudo-governing bodies and primary public service providers. Rohingya FGD participants said the community recognises their duty to abide by the law of the host country and to seek support and protection from the CiCs. Some FGD participants discussed that they the Majhis to mitigate household or community conflicts, while humanitarians play crucial roles in counselling the Rohingya. These new and close interactions with CiCs and humanitarians have established new rules and expectations between governing bodies and the community.

Due to displacement, the Rohingya experienced disruption in their social infrastructure which functioned as a collective safety net in the absence of the state's support. In Myanmar, the Rohingya had very few constructive interactions with the government, nor were they provided access to essential public services such as healthcare and education. Denied being recognised by the Union law as Myanmar citizens, the Rohingya were allowed very limited or non-political representation in the country.¹³ Since their arrival in Cox's Bazar, they have experienced an unprecedented and new social contract with the Government of Bangladesh and with humanitarian organisations. The structure of the Shomaz (community or society) has also changed from Myanmar to Bangladesh, with humanitarians and CiCs now having more control over the distribution of wealth to the poor and the mediation of conflicts.¹⁴

This new life in the cramped and initially makeshift camps with strangers as neighbours in the beginning resulted in social fragmentation and tension. However, four years after the influx, communities have built unconventional social networks and have been exposed to diverse socio-cultural experiences with new people, perceptions, attitudes, and ideas. Participants in some FGDs with community volunteers and Imams said that working with humanitarians in Bangladesh and interacting with the host community has motivated the Rohingyas to accept and adapt to new lifestyles.



“Because individuals from one region in Myanmar were scattered to other places after coming to Bangladesh, the Shomaz regulations have radically transformed, so no one listens to one another here.” (Rohingya Community, Changers, Men's Community Watch Group, FGD 1-07)

¹³ IOM, [Clan, Community, Nation: Belonging Among Rohingya Living in Makeshift Camps](#), 2020.

¹⁴ IOM, 2020, *ibid*.



“The unfamiliarity with different people sometimes creates many negative impacts and changes in our life.” (Rohingya Community, Changers, Female Heads of Household, FGD 1-19)

“Now we became friends here, even if we were from a different village.” (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Imams, 1-09)

Evidence suggests that the host community has seen compounded impact through participation in humanitarian gender activity, while simultaneously they are exposed to the government's gender equality awareness messages and have witnessed that their prime minister and some locally and nationally elected representatives are women.

Host community participants in several FGDs said that since the influx, humanitarian and development actors pay more attention to their needs. Having NGOs present as a service provider that fills the gaps of the government essential services, such as education, livelihoods, and other social engagement, this means exposure to new ideas and an opportunity to practice new gender roles.



“NGOs influence positive gender norm changes by organising different programs... During those meetings, they talk about gender issues... I feel that the NGOs contribute to 75% of women's progress.” (Host Community, Changers, Teachers and Educated Men, 2-02 FGD)

Some participants in the host community “keeper” groups said during the FGDs they realise girls' education pays off because there have been demonstrated opportunities for humanitarian jobs in recent years. Some respondents mentioned seeing role models on TV and active women in leadership and governance, but they could not associate it with their own realities as there have been limited opportunities for women's economic participation. However, with support from NGOs, host communities have a clearer idea about the implications of women's education, economic participation, and gender equality in their daily lives.

Not only do participants renew their understanding of gender norms and roles through gender interventions, but they are more aware of their rights and where to go for recourse when they are violated. However, these changes remain limited to a relatively small number of people who are engaged with the relevant services. One cannot assume that the impact is equally enjoyed by all across camps and unions.

Institutional Intervention as a Complementary Tool to Reduce Harmful Practices

Legal and institutional-level support and interventions play a preventive and responsive role in reducing harmful gender practices. Harmful norms and practices cannot be ended without a supportive legal and institutional environment.

In both communities, survey respondents agreed that changes in some gender norms and practices are driven by the governing (or semi-governing) institutions, including humanitarians and the Bangladesh Government. Based on the KIIs, it was noted that CiC's only support and advocate for a narrow view of gender, which is limited to preventing child marriage and GBV. Humanitarians working in gender interventions have expressed concerns about restrictions on gender awareness raising sessions and dowry prevention. While CiC's were viewed by some of the Rohingya participants in the FGDs as facilitating reduction in harmful practices, this is likely because they are the only actors in the camp with legal authority and are viewed as enforcers of rules. Even with this, harmful practices persist, particularly within families with dire economic needs, and FGD participants noted that rules can be broken through fake documentation or paying bribes.



“Our situation would have been worse if NGOs had not helped us and the CiC had not taken actions against the misconduct of our husbands.”
(Rohingya Community, Changers, Volunteer Women, FGD 1-01)

“We are told that no one should take or give a dowry. When a wedding takes place, the police and local authorities should intervene to ensure that no dowry is paid. The government is working to prevent child marriage in this way, but it is not working to prevent dowry provision. So, the government should investigate marriages to stop dowry provision.” (Host Community, Keepers, Housewives, FGD 2-06)

There are conflicting reports from the Rohingya community FGD participants whether legal enforcement is stronger in Bangladesh than it was in Myanmar. Despite restricted movement between the two communities, interactions, and influence are evident. In the host community, many participants within the FGDs said they are suffering an increase in polygamy, especially host community men marrying Rohingya women, as well as an increase in demand for dowries. In the FGDs women from both communities asked for stronger interventions and punitive action by government authorities and humanitarians.

Women participants also highlighted the role of Majhis and elder community members in mediation functions. One Rohingya woman said that in some blocks, Majhis have persuaded men to let their wives work outside. Members of a women community watch group also said Majhis, and Imams help mobilise communities to participate in gender sensitisation and training programmes. Each block has created and exercised different social gender norms depending on its leadership.

Responsive and Preventive Measures in Reducing Harmful Practices

The Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG)'s 2017 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion profile reports that women's economic participation increased social fragmentation and GBV.¹⁵ Our research shows mixed opinions, with some progress. Participants in some FGDs reported

¹⁵ ISCG, [Gender Profile](#), 2017.

that many men still take their frustration out on their wives in physically and emotionally violent ways. However, those who have been sensitised about gender show perception and behavioural changes as they understand that such violence is not just or allowed. Community members who have attended humanitarian sessions on gender roles in productive and reproductive work have renewed their understanding of shared responsibilities between women and men and said they feel less social pressure in engaging in new roles as there is increased consensus on gender equality.

While community-level sensitisation programmes are somewhat successful in changing perceptions about GBV and IPV, protection measures remain focused on reporting, case management, and referrals at the response level.¹⁶ A report analysing the limitation of such measures noted that women have limited socio-economic capacity to survive alone and are vulnerable within patriarchal family and community structures.¹⁷ Even when women are referred to a safe space, a third person or the community will try to mediate and the woman will often return to the relationship, relying on her husband and in-laws for protection and support.¹⁸ While legal and institutional measures and interventions are powerful as preventive and responsive measures, they cannot change women's dependence on patriarchal structures. To achieve fundamental and transformative change, community-level sensitisation engaging men and conservative groups should be in place as preventive measures, along with strengthened institutional interventions. The impact of these measures needs to be investigated to identify the most effective and socially acceptable modalities to tackle these issues.

Women and men respondents from both Rohingya and host communities said they had observed more cases of GBV in the past four years since the Rohingya's arrival in Bangladesh. Confusingly, many of the same respondents also said they experience a better relationship with their spouses. This was echoed in the FGDs, where participants from both communities said they have more respectful relationships with their partners due to awareness-raising activities. However, contrary to the survey, FGD participants claimed they see less violence and more legal interventions in marital conflicts in their community. Seeing more GBV or IPV does not mean that there has not been progress; it can indicate that people have become sensitised about the issue, and it is more often recognized as violence. Some Rohingya participants said these changes are more visible due to institutional support from CiCs and humanitarians. Rohingya women also said they support each other through socialising and learning from each other in safe spaces. They advise one another and counsel each other to stand up against abuse and use the institutions in place to resolve problems. In some blocks and communities, leaders also contribute to sensitising their neighbours. As these changes have occurred over such a short period of time in a very traditional community, it can safely be assumed that gender and protection interventions have contributed to the community's increased capacity to recognise and act upon harmful practices.

16 ISCG, [Joint response Plan, Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis](#), 2020.

17 Physicians for Human Rights, [Sexual Violence, Trauma, and Neglect: Observations of Health Care Providers Treating Rohingya Survivors in Refugee Camps in Bangladesh](#), 2020.

18 BBC Media Action, [Violence Against Women Within the Rohingya Community: Prevalence, Reasons, and Implications for Communication](#), 2018.

Current protection mechanisms are focused on survivors, and high levels of impunity remain.¹⁹ The survivors of GBV and IPV are often relocated and referred to temporary facilities and it is rare that punitive action is taken against the perpetrator. Unless punished, offenders remain free to remarry and expose other women to violence while the survivors lose their family ties and socio-economic protection.

4.2.3 Women's Empowerment

Perceptions and practices around women's economic participation, leadership, and empowerment are positively shifting in both communities despite lingering traditional gendered social norms and resistance to change. In the Rohingya community women's economic participation has been considered conditional and a compromise between traditional values and survival needs. In the host communities, while working women have also faced social pressure and bullying, over time the community has increasingly recognised these women as more educated, empowered, and eligible for marriage.



Rohingya woman artisans produces block print in Multi-Purpose Women's Centre in the camps.
Photo credit: Mahmudul Karim/UN Women

¹⁹ UNHCR, CARE and ActionAid (2020), *ibid.*; ISCG, CARE, Oxfam, UN Women, [COVID-19 Outbreak: Rapid Gender Analysis](#), 2020.

Women-Targeted Livelihood Activities and Family Conflicts

The dire economic condition in the camps and limited livelihood opportunities are the biggest concern facing both communities. When asked about their relationship with their partners, participants in almost all FGDs said economic pressure creates marital conflict, which sometimes results in IPV. While some women showed empathy with the struggles faced by men, others said men who cannot make money do not deserve respect, and women do not have to obey such men.



“A wife obeys her husband if the husband earns income and provides for his wife. Otherwise, conflicts arise in the family because the wife thinks there is no point in obeying her husband because he does not earn an income to support her.” (Rohingya Community, Changers, Women’s Community Watch Group, FGD 1-15)

“In Myanmar, men could grow crops and paddy in the paddy fields and do businesses to make an income, and women just had to take care of the family. After arriving in Bangladesh, men have become useless.” (Rohingya Community, Changers, Volunteer Women, FGD 1-03)

“If a father does not provide the necessities for his family, his wife and children will not respect him and then arguments happen.” (Host Community, Keepers, Housewives, FGD 2-08)

Survey results show that both communities strongly believe men should be the breadwinner (see Figures 14 and 15). Most Rohingya respondents surveyed think that men should work, and women should stay home to take care of children. Host community women showed slightly less traditional perceptions, but more than half still agree about men playing a primary economic role.

Figure 14: Women’s Perceptions about Gendered Economic Roles, by Community

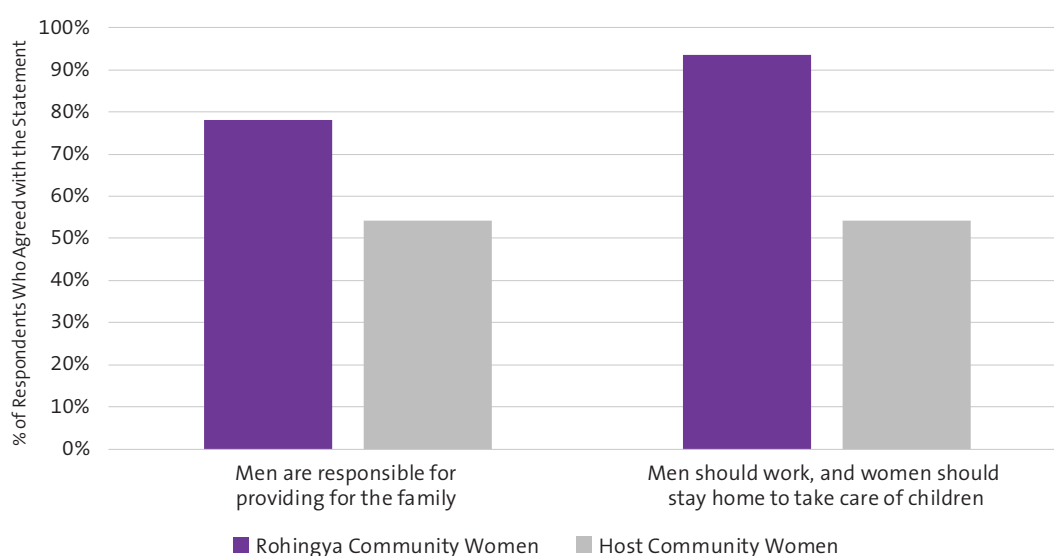
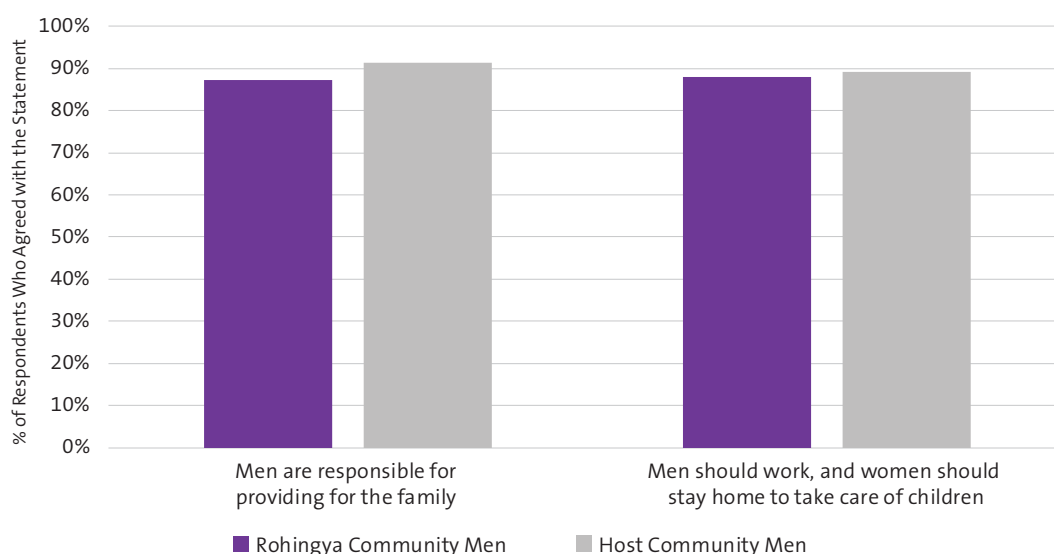


Figure 15: Men's Perceptions about Gendered Economic Roles, by Community



Men from both communities are distressed about their inability to generate an income and feel they are both losing face in society and losing respect from their wives and families. Some men FGD participants expressed agony about lack of access to livelihoods and women-only job opportunities.



“Now men are not getting jobs because they hire only women, so that is why the men let their women work.” (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Imams, FGD 1-09)

“God said men are not permitted to eat from their wives’ earnings.” (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Imams, FGD 1-09)

Conditions Applied for Women's Economic Participation

Women's economic participation has been considered conditional and a compromise between traditional values and survival needs. Keepers from the Rohingya community said women's economic participation is a positive if they maintain Purdah and fulfil their duties at home.



“As NGOs are trying to tell us to let our women go out, we have set a condition that they can go out by maintaining Purdah... That's why the authorities here are trying to say that both men and women should have equal rights.” (Rohingya Community, Changers, Men's Community Watch Group, FGD 1-07)

Men FGD participants from both communities associated women being outside with potential adultery. Participants in two FGDs with religious actors demanded that humanitarians provide separate services to women or provide men with education and opportunities to work instead of women.

Host community working women have also faced social pressure and bullying, such as no marriage proposals or shaming of their family, for taking NGO jobs. However, over time the community has increasingly recognised these women as more educated, empowered, and eligible for marriage.



“I have a female neighbour working outside. I saw that many people were criticizing her negatively. They said that the woman was going to get involved in bad activities. They were saying some negative words about her, and they said she would not be able to get married as she worked outside the home. But later, the very men who were criticizing her told her that the work that she had been doing was very good for her family. They told her “Having seen you work outside the home; I had also made my daughter work.” (Host Community, Changers, Male Students, FGD 2-17)

Many respondents expressed conflicting feelings towards women’s socioeconomic participation. For Rohingya women, whose pre-displacement experience in political and economic activities is limited, there are fears about women becoming breadwinners and working outside the home. They had never been exposed to gender programmes before and perceive this change as temporary, something to endure to survive. They feel that changes in practices were forced by the humanitarian response and by the Government of Bangladesh’s restrictions in livelihoods and IGAs. As time has passed and the situation has become protracted, the Rohingya are re-evaluating the pros and cons of women’s economic empowerment. Modifications in gender norms and practices will likely be more accepted, and more changes are expected.



A local fruit seller passing by the camp.
Photo credit: Md Dipu/HAP

The host community sees changing gender norms as an inevitable change for social development. However, it remains understood that women's economic participation occurs with the application of certain conditions. Women's economic empowerment is seen as conditional, only due to economic needs in both Rohingya and host communities, but not seen as a fundamental right for women. Unless broader institutional and social gender norms are changed, true transformation for equality cannot be achieved.

Financial Incentives Facilitate Women's Economic Participation

Financial incentives clearly facilitate changes in gender practices, attracting more women and men in IGAs and participation in different empowerment and leadership activities. This has also affected the perception around having daughters, as women can work for NGOs and contribute to the family. Women from the host community expressed that their view on girls' education has also changed, witnessing that it pays off because there are jobs available for educated women.



"We have changed our views about our daughter's education, now that they are safe here, we can send them to the NGO-supported learning centre." (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Women's Taaleem Group, FGD 1-12)

"We see a lot of girls and boys coming out of school together here, something we could not witness in Myanmar since they could not learn together. It makes us happy to watch them learning together." (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Women's Taaleem Group, FGD 1-12)

"Sometimes I feel unfortunate because I don't have a daughter who could work in an NGO." (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Mothers in Law, FGD 1-04)

"Because she has a job, a woman can bear the cost of her marriage." (Host Community, Keepers, Mothers in Law, FGD 2-09)

"There is no problem if a woman goes out to do a job. Now, a lot of money is needed for dowry. If the daughter is educated and has a job, she can marry a good man. Some people think that women who do jobs might get involved in illegal affairs and thus do not want to marry those women. However, others think that their families can live happily if both the husband and the wife work and thus try to marry women with jobs. Even in Rajapalong, many women have to quit their jobs after getting married. However, some people try to marry women who have jobs. Not everyone's opinion is the same." (Host Community, Keepers, Housewives, FGD 2-20)

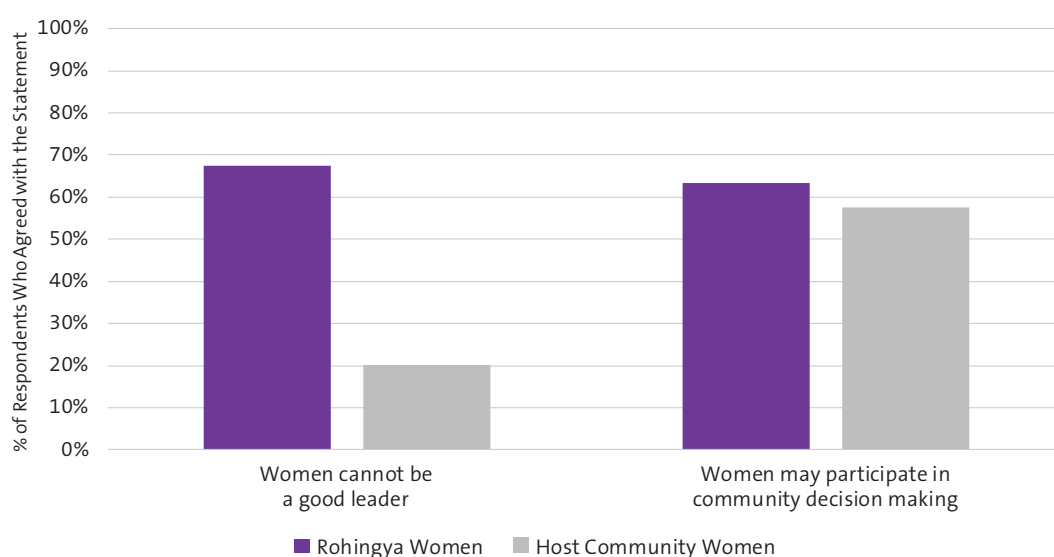
"Women are doing jobs so that they can save money for a dowry." (Host Community, Keepers Housewives, FGD 2-20)

Women's Empowerment and Leadership

Women in both Rohingya and host communities, particularly younger women, showed more progressive views on women in leadership. But even older women had more progressive views than younger men, showing how perceptions around women in leadership and community participation are very gendered even across age groups.

In Myanmar, Rohingya women and men had almost no opportunities to be politically active or to take on leadership roles. Even within their Gusshi or Shomaz, women did not have the right to participate in community-level decision making.²⁰ Within the home, they had a limited degree of bargaining power, depending on their relationship with their husbands and in-laws.²¹

Figure 16: Women's Perceptions of Women's Leadership, by Community



Survey respondents were asked if they disagree that women cannot be good leaders and whether women can participate in community decision making (see Figures 16 and 17). 67.5% of Rohingya community women surveyed agreed with the statement that women cannot be good leaders, compared to only 20% of host community women.

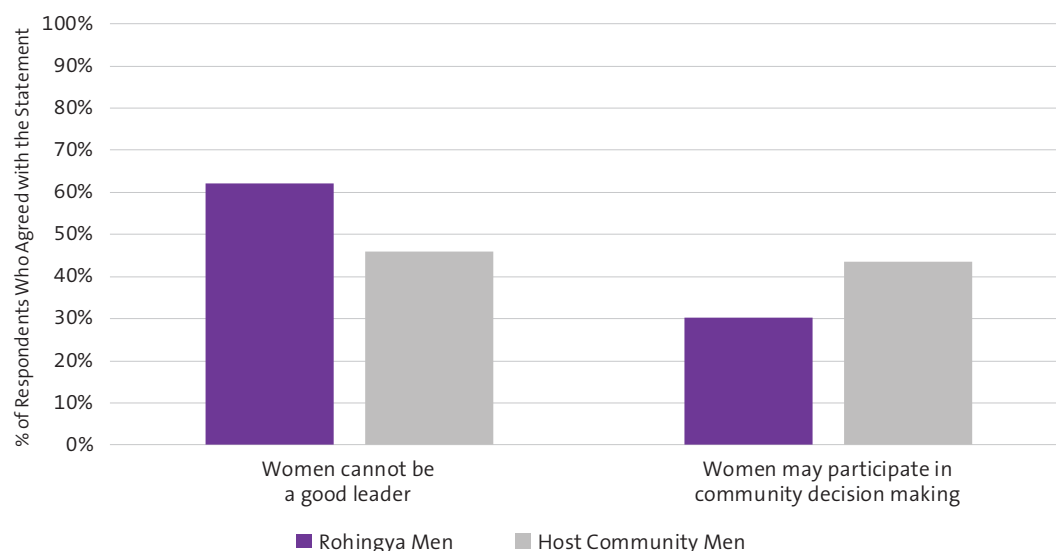
Contradicting the answers on women leaders, 63.4% of Rohingya women agreed that women may participate in community decision-making processes. Perhaps this suggests that they believe women can participate in decision making, but just not in leadership roles. 57.6% of host community women agreed women may participate in community decision making. Host community men were more likely to support women's participation in community decision-making than Rohingya men.

²⁰ "Gusshi means clan, extended family network." (IOM, 2020, *ibid.*)

²¹ Action Against Hunger, Save the Children and OXFAM, 2018, *ibid.*

When asked if they participate in any community level group meetings (social, political, or religious), 50.4% of Rohingya women answer yes. The number was far lower for host community women (39%). This is likely because there are more humanitarian interventions supporting women's community participation in the refugee camps.

Figure 17: Men's Perceptions of Women's Leadership, by Community



Women in both Rohingya and host communities, particularly younger women aged between 18 and 30, showed more progressive views on women in leadership (see Figure 18). But even older women had more progressive views than younger men, showing how perceptions around women in leadership and community participation are very gendered even across age groups (see Figure 19).

Figure 18: Women's Perceptions of Women's Leadership, by Age Group

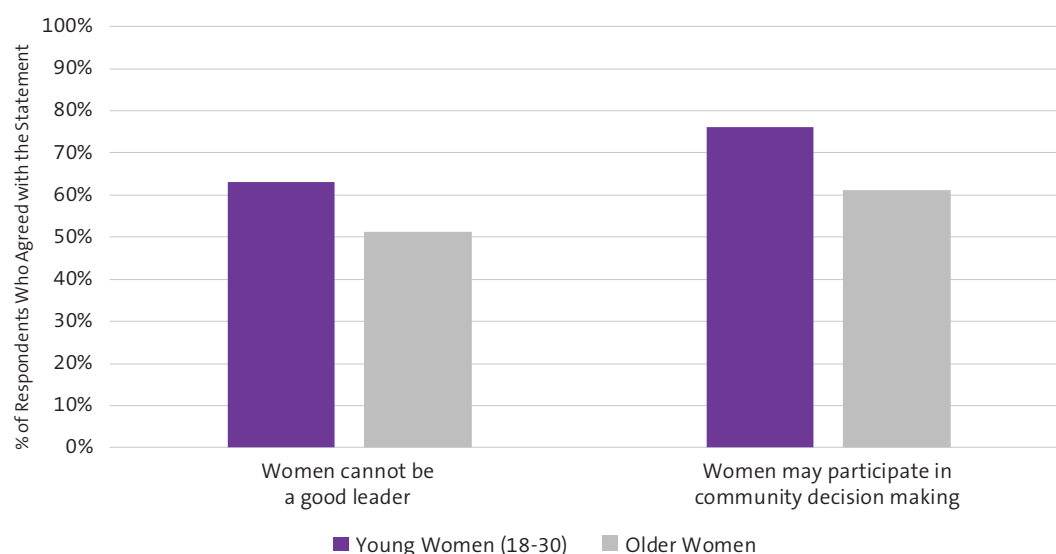
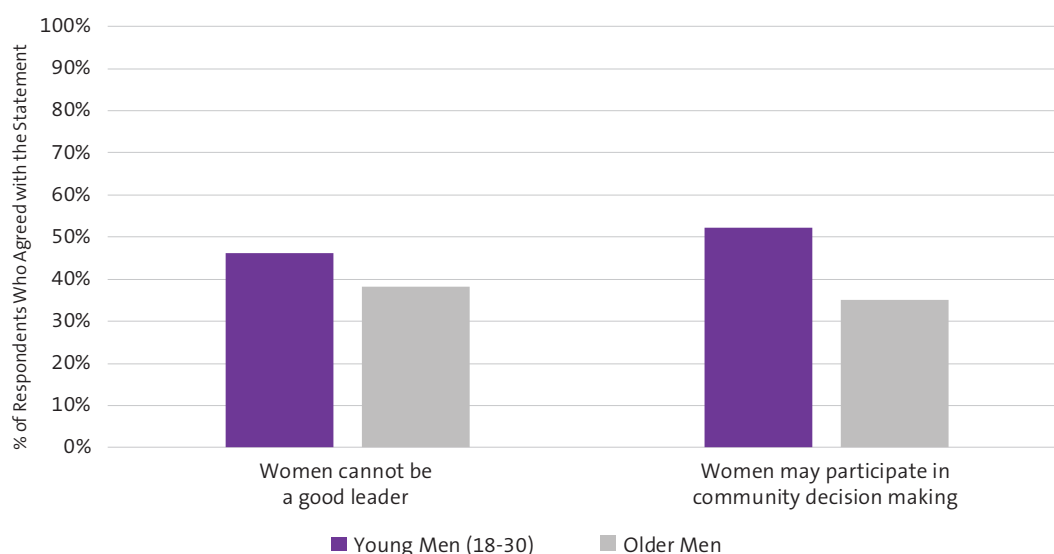


Figure 19: Men's Perceptions of Women's Leadership, by Age Group



In FGDs, several Rohingya women asked for the presence of women leaders at the block level. Some women valued women's leadership because women leaders can better understand and better represent women's issues. Some host community women volunteers said that host community women are more motivated by elected women representatives at the union level, along with the presence of women doctors and nurses at the local level. They said this encourages women's participation and education and the community recognises these women as role models.



"The Majhi in our block is a man, so we cannot explain the root of the problem clearly to him if a woman is beaten. If there was a woman leader in our block, we would be able to explain all our problems to her." (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Mothers in Law, FGD 1-04)

In FGDs with women from both communities, when asked about the functions of women leaders, the focus was on their role as counsellors or in mediation, not in decision-making or political representation. To some women in the host community, a leadership position is one where a woman is educated and serving others. Some educated women and men participants said women's empowerment and leadership is a prerequisite for the joint development of the family and society. A few older men in host community FGDs opposed the idea of women's leadership, saying it means disobeying their parents and husbands.



"Women play a leadership role in the community. To develop any society, women are needed as well as men. This is how changes take place in our country, community, and society. (Host Community, Changers, Male Students, FGD 2-17)

"We don't like women who do not listen to their parents or husband to become leaders." (Host Community, Keepers, Older Men, FGD 2-10)

In many FGDs, Rohingya women said they were inspired by Bangladeshi women working in the camps. Through women-targeted training and counselling sessions, Bangladeshi women function not only as service providers and mentors, but as an example of what an educated woman can do to support other women and contribute to the broader well-being of society. Women Rohingya volunteers are also seen as influencers.

While women's meaningful leadership and participation has been emphasized in a lot of the existing literature, there was no specific and shared definition for these terms. A few documents proposed promoting formal and informal leadership, training on leadership skills and decision making, women's engagement in planning and monitoring, and community decision making. However, the formal leadership role of Rohingya women at the community level and their political representation are largely neglected.

To establish meaningful participation and leadership among Rohingya women, it is critical to identify women leaders and women led community groups with the adequate skills and knowledge to lead and represent women. Training modules developed by United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), GBV/SRHR training courses run by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and election trials at the block level by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are all ways women can increase their community involvement.²²

However, safety and security remain major concerns for women in leadership positions. Two key informants working in the camps said that women led community groups, women leaders, and women volunteers face severe social and physical backlash from violent groups and conservative community members. Institutional support and legal enforcement must be systematic to further encourage women leaders and groups, and humanitarians need to engage the Government of Bangladesh to legitimise Rohingya WROs/WLOs. Humanitarians should also advocate for systematic and active engagement of Rohingya women's groups in gender programming and for protection mechanisms to be put in place to mitigate the risks their activism brings.

4.2.4 Men and Boys' Engagement

Men and boys' engagement with gender mainstreaming is a prerequisite, not an option. Although these activities have received limited focus thus far, it was noted that the stronger men and boys' engagement is, the faster and more sustainable the changes brought about are. Community sensitisation engaging men has been shown to contribute to improved gender relations, shared reproductive responsibilities, and reduced harmful practices to some extent.

Most frontline officers we interviewed highlighted the importance and effectiveness of including men in community sensitisation on gender equality. One officer who has been leading men-targeted activities in the camp said creating a physical space for men was crucial to engage them in awareness-raising activities as they can influence their family and community. The interviewee also said men participating in such sessions became advocates at the community level. Several organisations have mainstreamed gender into their different

²² ISCG, 2017, *ibid*; CARE, *The Current State of Affairs of the Women-led Organizations in Rohingya Humanitarian Response*, 2021.

sectoral activities, engaging men and boys. However, these efforts are not adequately recognised as central to gender transformative change, nor are they frequently reported on.

Women and men in both Rohingya and host communities testified that effective men's engagement improved gender relations at the personal and community level. Survey respondents reported improved marital relationships and increased men's engagement in reproductive work at home, which is corroborated by the FGDs.

The contribution of humanitarians to changing gender perceptions and practices has been invaluable. Men and women FGD participants from Rohingya and host communities claim some of these changes are because of gender interventions implemented by humanitarians, specifically by engaging men in different sensitisation and awareness-raising sessions. As communities witness changes in men's awareness and behaviour, so too do others change. Women appreciate such changes.

Men's engagement in reproductive work underwent a rapid transformation due to the increased number of working women in the Rohingya community. Many participants stressed these changes. Participants in some of the men's FGDs said they sometimes face social pressure from their male peers regarding these new practices. Most key informants also highlighted the importance of engaging men and boys because the stronger their engagement, the faster and more sustainable the changes brought about are.



“As an aware man, I would like to help my wife with the household work even after doing the outside work.” (Host Community, Changers, Volunteer Men, FGD 2-12)



Men's awareness session.
Photo credit: Jitu Roy/CARE



“In the past, our husbands used to be more irresponsible and inconsiderate. But now, as NGO volunteers encourage them to maintain good relationships with their wives, many of them have turned into good husbands.” (Rohingya Community, Changers, Volunteer Women, FGD 1-01)

“We have noticed small changes in our husbands who previously refused to help with household tasks in Myanmar. After coming here, they have begun to assist us because they learned about it at NGO meetings.” (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Traditional Birth Attendants, FGD 1-16)

“Previously, men behaved badly with their wives. Now, their behaviour has changed because of the NGOs. Some women also behave badly with their husbands and NGOs taught them about good behaviour too.” (Host Community, Keepers, Housewives. FGD 2-08)

“Now husbands help their wives with household tasks. And women with NGO jobs have become common. All these changes have come about due to the work of NGOs.” (Host Community, Changers, Volunteer Women, FGD 2-11)

Educated men said the root cause of gender inequality is uneducated and unaware people misleading the others. However, some volunteers and educated men have competing views between newly learned concepts of gender equality and their religious beliefs. FGDs suggest that volunteer men understand and explain gender equality theoretically, as they are trained to, but continue to maintain conventional gender norms and interpret equality conditionally.



“Our government is working for gender equality to develop society, but the uneducated and unaware are misleading the people, and the ones who are educated and aware are working for gender equality.” (Host Community, Changers, Volunteers Men, FGD 2-12)

“Everyone has some specific rights, but there are rules and regulations in each religion... Through following these religious rules and regulations, everyone can get their equal rights.” (Host Community, Changers, Volunteer Men, FGD 2-07)

“There must not be discrimination between boys and girls. In the community, there are some people who prefer their sons to their daughters. Sons are served more food than their daughters. Such an act should never be done” (Host Community, Changers, Educated Men, FGD 2-17)

Our evidence confirms the importance of engaging men and boys and suggests that humanitarian programmes have brought about some change among those exposed to the relevant activities. However, the reorganisation of productive and reproductive work through women’s economic participation and its impact on women’s overall labour burden needs to be further examined. Women’s economic participation increased the absolute number of

hours women laboured in both in productive and reproductive work. Unless intra-household labour is reorganised, women risk continuing to do a higher burden of overall labour. By studying the impact of men's engagement in reproductive work, humanitarians can mitigate the risk of overburdening women and design measures that contribute to equitable labour distribution between women and men.

The loss of men's economic ability crucially affects family relationships and the physical and mental wellbeing of women. Although household gender roles appear very rigid to the outsider, the spousal relationship was still reciprocal and based on mutual understanding and contribution.²³ More effort is required to engage men in productive activities without compromising women's empowerment. Men's engagement is a prerequisite in humanitarian gender programming for sustainable, socio-culturally acceptable, and transformative changes in gender norms, practices, and power relations.

Positive Interpretation of Religious Teachings

Religious teachings and Sharia law are selectively interpreted when it comes to gender relations. Positive interpretations of religious values can increase the understanding of women's rights and promote equitable gender relations.

According to the Rohingya, adherence to religious norms is a driving factor behind women's reproductive responsibilities and the need to maintain purdah. However, the line between religion and tradition is often blurred. Gendered interpretations of religion sometimes serve to disadvantage and punish women for non-conformity, while the use of religious interpretation in favour of women (such as the fact that Islamic law guarantees women's entitlement to dowry, or Mahr,²⁴ upon marriage, not men's, as raised by two groups of Rohingya men) is less common. The use of religious narratives can thus be taken as interpretive, not fact. History has shown that men continue to apply gender norms that work in their favour, sometimes with religious justification. Unless the socioeconomic burden on the Rohingya is lifted, men will continue to demand dowries for marriage to alleviate the burden of supporting a family after marriage.



“A woman should get four things from her husband: the first one is her dowry, the second thing is clothes, the third is a home where she can stay in purdah, and the fourth is food.” (Rohingya Community, Keepers, Imams, FGD 1-06)

Religious and conservative groups (imams and religious school teachers) were enthusiastic about sharing their views on the current changes in gender dynamics. Participants understood gender equality within their religious framework differently. For example, one Rohingya volunteer man said the religious interpretation of gender equality is that “the husband can't beat [his wife] harshly and any beating or punishment must be based on logical reasons and causes.” Given that religion and religious adherence is important to both communities,

²³ IOM, 2020, *ibid.*

²⁴ Mahr is a payment, in the form of money or possessions paid by the groom, to the bride at the time of Islamic marriage. Mahr is typically specified in the marriage contract signed during marriage (IOM, 2020, *ibid.*).

there is space for humanitarians to engage with religious teachings that promote physical and material wellbeing, as well as examples from Islamic history that show women's participation in society, education, and business. Because religion is open to interpretation, there were different interpretations between groups. For example, participants in a couple FGDs with religious school teachers from the Rohingya community showed strong resistance to women's engagement in NGO work outside of their homes and social participation.

KIIs and community consultations also noted that some NGOs have actively incorporated positive religious teachings into gender awareness sessions. Awareness messages grounded on positive religious interpretations are viewed as a valid and effective diffusion strategy, particularly to those holding more conservative gender norms.



“NGO employees visit the blocks to tell men not to commit violence against women. They inform them that women have a high status in Islam and that men should treat us with respect. Now, the understanding of men in our society has improved because of the efforts of NGOs.” (Rohingya Community, Changers, Volunteer Women, FGD 1-03)

“God has given my husband [the wisdom] to understand the difficulties in me. Apart from the law, it is Sunnah to help the wife. Our Prophet Muhammad used to help his wives and by understanding that, husbands are now helping their wives. They did not know much about religion before. Now, the teaching of religion is increasing.” (Host Community, Changers, Volunteer Women, FGD 2-13)

While traditional gender norms persist, and are justified as religious, younger groups with more exposure to new norms or different religious interpretations have different perspectives, priorities, and approaches. While some view this as an inevitable part of change, others find it difficult.



“Those traditional norms have no special importance or effect if they are not preserved or practiced... There is no evidence and proofs for those norms in our holy texts... Only some people regard them to be important. And some people do not give much importance to these traditional norms.” (Rohingya Community, Changers, Volunteer Men, FGD 1-17)

There are many teachings that could be incorporated into “do no harm” training in both the Quran and the Sunnah. This provides ample space for the re-evaluation and re-interpretation of religious texts in the new context.

Interpretations of Islam vary between the Rohingya and the host community as well as within communities. These differences can lead to misunderstandings. Each consultation with religious groups showed a mixed understanding of Islamic teachings and how they should be practised. Some Imams are very supportive of preventing and mediating harmful practices, whereas others demonstrate strong opposition to gender activities. Findings from the FGDs also showed that the level of support from community leaders differs.



NPM enumerator conducting a survey with Rohingya woman respondent.
Photo credit: IOM

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Humanitarian Programming

1. **Strengthen gender programming and implementing capacity** by building on the existing human capital, particularly in women's leadership and rights, at the community and organisational level. **This must include Rohingya and host community volunteers, women leaders, women-led civil society organisations (WLOs), and frontline staff of local/national non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** through cross-sectoral, regular, and coherent pass-on/refresher training to enhance and share the existing skills and knowledge by the GiHA WG and sectors/working groups.
2. Develop a **comprehensive Gender Activity Map (such as 5W)**, including all local and national actors with a regular updates and knowledge sharing plan. Ensure all sectors and actors register the information of their stand-alone gender and gender mainstreaming activities and collectively track the changes and progress regularly. GiHA WG should coordinate this effort.
3. Identify and share **knowledge and lessons learned from successful gender programming and gender-mainstreaming interventions** (best practices case mapping), led by GiHA WG and sectors or, working groups.
4. **Continue to track gender dynamics over time**, using standardized and well-defined indicators (for example: women's wellbeing, participation in leadership, economic empowerment, education levels) to measure and track the impact of gender interventions at different levels, and dimensions.
5. **Utilize the expertise and experiences of WLOs and local and national NGOs** to identify, develop, and disseminate coordinated and standardised, culturally sensitive, and effective communication messages for transformative changes.
6. **Increase preventive (in addition to responsive)** measures to reduce harmful practices such as GBV, child marriage, dowry, and polygamy.
7. **Increase investments and efforts on building social cohesion** between the Bangladesh host community and Rohingya community, as well as inter-block communities within the camps.
8. Given that religion and religious adherence is important to both communities, **there is more areas for humanitarians to engage with religious teachings that promote physical and material wellbeing.**

Influencers for Positive Changes

1. Tailor gender transformative messaging and programming to **empower the individuals (men, women, and other diverse genders) most likely to influence** different levels and members of the communities.
2. **Establish a group of men and women religious leaders and experts** from both communities to discuss Islamic teachings on human rights, gender equality and respectful relationships that can be positively translated. Invite leading religious leaders from Bangladesh who are proponents of women's rights to develop and disseminate rights-based communication messages that are religiously and culturally acceptable by both communities.
3. **Strengthen volunteers and leaders' capacity** to have an adequate understanding of gender equality and skills to disseminate rights-based messages to the communities.
4. **Engage community influencers to build their understanding and respect** for gender diverse populations and support them to further sensitise communities about the **rights of gender diverse populations and Hijras**.

Roles of Governing Bodies, Recommendations for Advocacy by Actors within the Humanitarian Response

1. Maximize learnings from **the experience and expertise of the Bangladesh Government in promoting gender equality** and in bridging religious teachings and gender equality principles.
2. Advocate the Office of the Refugee Relief & Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) **to create an enabling institutional environment for WROs and WLOs** to implement a wider range of gender activities that address all dimensions of empowerment for women, men, and other diverse genders.
3. Advocate for **more extensive and fairer institutional and legal interventions** to reduce child marriage, dowry, divorce, polygamy and other forms of GBV, including GBV against the gender diverse population including Hijras.
4. Advocate for **sensitization and training on a range of gender issues for Camp in Charges (CiCs) and union counsellors to ensure approval of gender interventions by humanitarian actors. As well to strengthen CiC's engagement for more consistent application of legal frameworks.**
5. **Advocate for increased women's representation within CiCs, union counsellors, police officers and women advocates (lawyers)** to provide more accessible institutional services and legal supports for women in both communities.

Women's Empowerment: Livelihoods and Leadership

1. **Expand gender-responsive interventions beyond the individual to address structural level changes**, including power relationships within households and communities, capacities for community led change, and governance and institutions. The GiHA WG to lead advocacy and policy on this.
2. Continue to advocate for translating existing women's leadership into formal political representation, by **restarting block level elections to expand women's participation in formal camp governance processes**. To be implemented in partnership between government and humanitarian actors, alongside WLOs.
3. Community members including women, men, and people with diverse genders **must be engaged in the design** of socially acceptable gender transformative programming.
4. Continue to address, advocate for, and **provide protection to, Rohingya women leaders, community volunteers and WLO members** in the camp. Guarantee Do No Harm principles are upheld and any threats as a result of their activism is mitigated to ensure their security, safety, and freedom.
5. To promote feelings of safety and reduce social stress, **tailor livelihoods activities for Rohingya women to take place at the family and block level**.
6. Expand economic activities for the host community to **target the most marginalized, especially undereducated families**, who feel they are not benefiting from existing humanitarian job creation.

Men and Boys' Engagement is a Prerequisite, Not an Option

1. **Increase engagement of men and boys to support gender programming** by ensuring their access to social and educational opportunities and spaces to interact with male champions/change agents/role models.
2. **Broaden men and boys' engagement on gender issues beyond GBV**, for example into sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), and polygamy and dowry prevention.
3. **Strengthen community-level sensitisation through increasing the number of male change agents and continuing to build their capacity and understanding** on gender equality issues by providing regular refresher sessions and training opportunities.
4. **Motivate and engage key influencers identified by the community** such as educated community members, union members, Imams, and Majhis to lead positive changes in the gender dynamics.

5. Enhance work with traditional keepers of gender norms such as elders and religious leaders in discussions on gender equality issues.

Research and Assessments

1. Conduct an **organisational capacity and capability assessment** of programming and implementation on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls **by local governmental institutions (camp/union level)** to identify the areas that require technical support.
2. Expand gender analysis on the **impacts of gender interventions on the perceptions of the affected populations and local and national actors.**
3. Ensure inclusion of intersectionality, men and boys' engagement, women's leadership, institutional engagement, and expanded inclusion of people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) in future gender research.
4. Conduct research on **post-displacement gendered burdens from social psychology or behavioural science perspective**, to identify strategies for do no harm gender programming, in particular entry points for Rohingya women to engage in socio-economic activities more actively with less social pressure and emotional burden.
5. Invest in **gender research capacity**, particularly Rohingya enumerators, facilitators, translators, and analysts, for improved quality and accuracy in communication and data collection.



Women's session during 16 Days of Activism.
Photo credit: Rezoana Chowdhury/CARE

6. CONCLUSION

Gender programming as a social intervention, addressing the diverse needs of the affected population and evaluating its impacts, is complex and challenging, particularly in a humanitarian setting where urgent survival needs are prioritised. This study observed relatively meaningful and positive shifts in gender dynamics among both the Rohingya and the host community, despite the persistence of certain harmful norms and practices. We also discovered unexpected consequences of gender interventions and read subtle ambivalent feelings towards rapid change.

Women's economic participation was perceived as the most significant change, which contributed to changes in norms and practices. Deliberate affirmative actions and women-targeted service provision, institutional interventions to protect women, and community sensitisation engaging men and boys appear to be key drivers of change in the gender dynamics. However, these interventions rely on individual and responsive measures, including individual women's empowerment and capacity development and case-based protective measures. More preventive measures at the individual, community, societal, and institutional levels are needed to reduce the harmful practices that persist and further facilitate current progress.



A father helps his daughter put on her mask.
Photo credit: Md Dipu/HAP

While some people consider changes in gender norms and practices empowering, others feel forced to participate in non-gender-conforming activities and feel that it violates their *Izzot*. Women, bear the brunt of physical, social, and emotional burdens by engaging in these new roles, along with increased tensions due to men's inability to engage in productive activities. There is an urgent need to revisit conventional approaches of women-targeted and affirmative actions considering the invisible consequences of new gendered burdens.

Humanitarian responses often see rapid social structure change as an opportunity to engage women in more active and productive roles, assuming that women's social and economic empowerment is only a good thing. Where this strategy seems to be successful to some extent, women's individual empowerment does not always translate into power balance or shift or automatically lead to women's formal and political participation. It also does not ensure women's safety. Groups with multiple vulnerabilities including gender diverse populations and hijras require special attention incorporating tailored services and better legal protection.

There are also voices that claim the changes are not positive or significant. While it may seem the process is slow to service providers, incremental change allows for the affected community to adapt. In the eyes of the community members consulted, many changes have been rapid and overwhelming. Many community members (particularly women) have created their own spaces and opportunities and have found different ways to adapt to and cope with the radical changes experienced.

This analysis calls for a new approach to gender-responsive strategy and programming that is grounded in the diverse values, perceptions, and experiences of the affected communities beyond conventional service-needs-gap-based interventions. It emphasises the importance of innovative ways to measure or track changes in gender dynamics despite challenges.



Photo credit: Amos Halder/UNHCR

7. ANNEXES

A. Systematic Secondary Data Review Protocol

Among 2,023 documents produced on Rohingya displacement, 44 documents were screened for review according to the criteria below.

1. Search terms: gender, women and girls, men and boys, socially diverse group (SDG), Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sexual Characteristics (SOGIESC), hijra SGBV, GBV, IVP, SRHR and other relevant terms

2. Sources:

- Humanitarianresponse.org
- Reliefweb.int
- Google search
- ACAPS's metadatabase

3. Inclusion/exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria

- Assessment, analysis reports, strategies, gender briefs, planning and policy guidelines (not intervention guidelines)
- Limited to the topic of Rohingya displacement analysis in Bangladesh and Cox's Bazar
- Published in English
- Published between 2017 July (onset of the crisis) to 2021 Dec.

Exclusion criteria

- Situation reports and updates (recurrent monitoring data), TORs, news releases, newsletters, others
- Academic papers
- Discuss multiple country/crisis cases

B. Key Informant Profile

Total	21 KIs with 23 interviewees 13 organisations
Organisation types	7 National or Local NGOs 4 International NGOs 2 UN agencies
Gender	13 Women/8 men/2 Hijras
Years of experience in Cox's Bazar	21 KI with more than 3 years 2 KI with 6 months to 1 year
Position	17 gender officers and managers (including SGBV case workers) 2 Rohingya volunteers 4 other sector officers and managers
Methods	18 in-person interviews 3 online interviews

C. Survey Sampling Criteria and Strategy

Camp selection criteria		
Geographic location	Kutupalong RC/Kutupalong Balukhali Extended Camp (most densely populated area)	
Arrival time	Camps established after 2017 influx	
Host community selection criteria		
Geographic location	Communities near the selected camp	
Sampling and respondent selection		
	Rohingya camps	Host communities
Young Women (18-30: single)	25	28
Young Women (18-30: married)	23	32
Adult women (30-60: married)	25	30
Adult women (30-60: single)	24	29
Elderly women (60+)	26	25
Total women each community	123	144
Young men (18-30: single)	90	28
Young men (18-30: married)	28	27
Adult men (30-60: married)	30	26
Adult men (30-60: single)	25	23
Elderly men (60+)	37	25
Total men each camp	150	129
Total in one camp/union	273	273
Total survey respondents	546	

Community			Gender			GAP (Gender Activity Participants)		
Rohingya Camp	273	50%	Woman	267	49%	Yes	231	42%
Host community	273	50%	Man	279	51%	No	315	58%
Total	546	100%	Total	546	100%	Total	546	100%

D. FGD Profile of Keepers and Changers: Total 42 FGDs

FGD Code	FGD gender	Location	Changer/ Keeper	Group name
Rohingya community in total 20				
101	Women	Camp 1W	Changer	Community volunteer
102	Women	Camp 1W	Keeper	Taaleem members
103	Women	Camp 4	Changer	Community volunteer
104	Women	Camp 4	Keeper	Mother-in-laws
105	Men	Camp 11	Changer	Community volunteer
106	Men	Camp 11	Keeper	Imams
107	Men	Camp 12	Changer	Community Watch Group
108	Men	Camp 12	Keeper	Teachers at Religious schools
109	Men	Camp 7	Keeper	Imams
110	Men	Camp 7	Changer	Men engaged in gender activities
111	Third gender	Camp 1W	Changer	Hijra community (re-conducted-> 121)
112	Women	Camp 1W	Keeper	Taaleem members
113	Women	Camp 11	Changer	Taaleem members Women Religious Leader
114	Women	Camp 11	Keeper	Mother-in-laws
115	Women	Camp 12	Changer	Community Watch Group
116	Women	Camp 12	Keeper	Traditional Birth Attendants
117	Men	Camp 4	Changer	Community volunteer
118	Men	Camp 4	Keeper	Imam, Elderly Men
119	Women	Camp 7	Changer	Women-household heads (widows / divorcees)
120	Women	Camp 7	Keeper	Mother-in-laws
121	Third gender	Palongkhali	Changer	Hijras

FGD Code	FGD gender	Location	Changer/ Keeper	Group name
Host community in total 22				
201	Men	Haldiapalong	Keepers	Elderly religious people
202	Men	Haldiapalong	Changers	Teachers and Educated people
203	Women	Haldiapalong	Keepers	Elderly religious people
204	Women	Haldiapalong	Changers	Teachers and Educated people
205	Men	Rajapalong	Changers	Community volunteers
206	Women	Rajapalong	Keepers	Housewives
207	Men	Palongkhali	Changers	Community volunteers
208	Women	Palongkhali	Keepers	Housewives
209	Women	Whykong	Keepers	Mother-in-laws
210	Men	Whykong	Keepers	Older men (over 50)
211	Women	Whykong	Changers	Community Volunteers
212	Men	Whykong	Changers	Community Volunteers
213	Women	Palongkhali	Changers	Community Volunteers
214	Women	Palongkhali	Keepers	Housewives
215	Men	Palongkhali	Changers	Teachers and Union Parishad members
216	Men	Palongkhali		Older men (over 50)
217	Men	Rajapalong	Changers	Students (SSC Passed + graduate)
218	Men	Rajapalong	Keepers	Older men (over 50)
219	Women	Rajapalong	Changers	Students (SSC Passed)
220	Women	Rajapalong	Keepers	Housewives
221	Women	Camp 4	Changers	Midwives (Bangladeshi women working in the camp)
222	Third Gender	Kutupalong	Changers	Hijras



GiHA WG

GENDER IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION
WORKING GROUP COX'S BAZAR

