

Summary Analysis of Consultations with Women on Elections

By Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group Women's Leadership Task Force

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Data source: Questionnaire used along with consultations with women on upcoming elections, related to camps where elections are yet to take place and where they have already taken place – a total of 41 FGDs conducted with women from 16 camps.

Facilitator observations to note:

- Women coming to the women safe spaces/centres are likely to be more positive and accepting of female leadership
- Power dynamics in the community are defined by people who have money and in general imams, majhis and community volunteers.
- Gender stereotyping is existent and apparent
- In a few focus group consultations, a small minority number of women strongly discouraged the notion of women being leaders

General observations and short analysis from summary findings:

- The no. of elected women groups consulted is low.
- Gender stereotyping from within family members (e.g. husbands, parents) and community members, is evident. Socio-cultural norms, previous ways of living in Myanmar etc. may be highlighted as reasons why. In the answers of some respondents, the sense of neglect and powerlessness is apparent.
- Women's concerns are not being adequately met and addressed in camps and being and becoming a female leader poses considerable challenges, particularly for Persons with Disabilities (PWD's).
- Community members have clear and significant expectations of leaders. There is also a clear need (and obvious benefits) identified on women's participation in elections as leaders and voters, for e.g. advantages of: access, building lines of communication, addressing GBV issues and concerns
- There is a need to improve voter education and knowledge on election processes in general throughout the camps – as women and overall Rohingya populations have never before experienced participating in an election process.
- Financial incentives may appear to serve as a motivational point for women leaders to participate in elections and the role as a leader. Most however, are driven with a genuine desire to serve community and society and address concerns.

The below is a summary of responses gathered from consultations, highlighting key words captures, observations and notes with mention of organizations who conducted the FGDs, and location.

Consultations with women and adolescent girls, including women volunteers, in camps where elections have yet to take place

Locations: Camp 2 east/west, 3, 4, 5, 8west, 12, 15, 17, 18, 19, 22,

Organizations: Oxfam, CARE, IOM, AAB, UN Women, BRAC, Mukti, Jago Nari Unnayan Sangsta, Relief International, TAI/UNHCR

1. What do you expect from a good community leader?

Female discussion group:

Communication skills (good listener and not talk too over or down to others), Respect for community members, can identify problems, Honesty (is not corrupt and doesn't accept bribes), Caring, Patient, Not angry or aggressive, Representative, Supportive, Accessible, Confident, Gender sensitive, non-discriminating and unbiased, understands and addresses women issues (including GBV), is well informed (news, incidents, available services in camps) and shares accordingly, collects a list of non-food items (NFI) and/or food items (FI), proactive in addressing issues and solving problems reported, works to improve services and facilities and conditions in camps (including WASH, health, shelter, cyclone/monsoon issues, site management, GBV), willing to move anywhere in camps at any time as necessary.

2. Role of leader/ how do you think a leader can help their community people?

Female discussion group:

Good listener, can communicate, can liaise with CiC and agencies / NGOs, equality, keep community members abreast of camp benefits and opportunities rendered, collect information and feedback from community about their needs/demands/issues, spokesperson for all community members including women and the most marginalized, good and just mediator of conflicts and violence cases including GBV/harassment/domestic violence, will approve marriages of Rohingya people, if someone becomes ill they can ensure they get proper treatment, if someone faces problems to get food or if someone lost important documents they can help them to collect it. He/she must think about girl's safety & security. If roads & houses are damaged, he/she will take initiative to fix it. Provide playground and education for children.

3. What do believe makes someone a good community leader?

Female discussion group:

Confidence and the ability to make hard decisions and identify new opportunities are mentioned as highly desirable. Other key traits captured include: impartial, sound judgement, good / polite behavior, being pious, education, patience, unrestricted/non-impaired mobility, good mediator, fair and inclusive spokesperson, honesty, non-corrupt.

Understand that leadership is about taking responsibilities not power.

Few also mentioned they should be married.

Notes: 2 groups mentioned Majhis make good leaders.

4. Do you think women can be good community leader too? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Female discussion group:

The majority answered yes, citing reasons– they care more than men (empathy), patient in solving problems, are polite, have better access to share messages and collect information from women, will be more fair and inclusive of women, can comfortably talk about sensitive women’s health and GBV-related issues, will be better spokespersons for women, and they also highlighted that many women are already working as volunteers, teachers and informal community leaders in the camps and would be make camp leaders.

However – a bit below half said that there are restrictions for women due to socio-cultural norms and gendered restrictions on their decision making/bargaining power and mobility, women’s segregation from men, as well as their lower levels of education.

A minority of women said no, citing – women leaders don’t maintain wearing a purdah / veil, are of questionable character, have affairs with NGO employees and have an attitude problem (arrogance).

Notes:

- a. Few women disagreed initially, given that during their time in Myanmar they did not experience having a female leader within their community, however upon discussion among the respective focus group were convinced by other group members to change their stance.
- b. Women expressed they are not comfortable sharing their problems with male leaders. Victims subject to domestic abuse and violence / physical torture can’t show their scars and injury marks to men, and so suffer in silence.
- c. Conflict between husband and wife is escalated to Majhi’s who offer solutions and unite partners / spouses without the wife’s consent.
- d. Expectations from women leaders:
 - Will be a better listener to women’s issues and needs, including GBV/DV and women’s needs for economic opportunities and engaged in decision making.
 - She will be a better mediator of GBV/DV cases
 - Will be a better spokesperson for women and speak up on women’s rights issues, and women’s need for equitable access to relief and services etc with CiCs etc
 - Will be more fair and inclusive of women in consultations and

5. In your view, how should humanitarian organizations and the Government engage with community leaders?**Female discussion group:**

Should address: -protection, education, road construction, shelter, health, NFI, GBV, access to justice -issue smartcard (sometimes refugees lose their card, needed at distribution centers for collecting rations, causing a long wait. Younger children suffer as a result.

-A minority expressed the need for repatriation which humanitarian organizations and the Government should address

Notes: A small no. of respondents said they didn’t know how

6. What are your recommendations for upcoming elections in other camps in terms of ensuring women’s participation as both voters and electoral candidates?**Female discussion group:**

- increased messaging and sensitization across camps on upcoming election and the need for women’s equal participation as voters and candidates – to include topics on gender equality and women’s rights

- Separate voter booths for men and women
- Proximity of polling stations (nearer to their homes or potentially introducing household level voting box option)
- Meet with CiCs, Majhis and religious leaders to ensure women’s participation through awareness raising with all camp members
- Reduce / address gender discrimination and ensure protection mechanism in place to prevent harassment of women during voting process and at/around polling stations.
- UN/NGOs to convene and consult with potential women leaders and their families to encourage women to vote and stand for elections
- Bangladesh Police and CiCs to take role to ensure elections take place in safe, inclusive and fair manner – engaging both women and men authorities.

Notes: Some women informed men would not allow them and/or they have to convince their husbands and obtain their approval to participate. Few women said they’d rather want jobs than participate in elections.

1 Group in camp 12 provided no answers

Consultations with elected women

Locations: camp 24, 26 and 4 extension

Organization: Oxfam, IOM, UN Women/AAB, Relief International

1. Why did you vie for elections as a candidate?

Elected women discussion group:

Contribute for the betterment of communities and to serve my people. Because there were no other female candidate so I wanted to represent women.

For the group of 10 PWDs (consulted by IOM) - 8 people said that their rights are not usually respected in the community because of their disabilities. Now by holding a leadership role they will work with all kinds of people.

2. What was the perception of your family and community members? Were they supportive or were there any negative reactions?

Elected women discussion group:

Perception is in positive light. They have increased respect from family and society. They didn’t express any negative reactions nor make any adverse comments, especially as they had the approval of CiCs and had been given ID cards.

For the group of 10 PWDs (consulted by IOM) – 1 respondent mentioned she received a lot of encouragement from her husband.6 respondents mentioned a lack of recognition as a leader was experienced by them in their community.

3. Who is supporting your work with the community as an elected community leader? How?

Elected women discussion group:

Family and community through different ways. Male leaders have been helpful, along with CiC's. Camp 26 also mentioned majhis have supported them. For the group of PWDs (consulted by IOM) – an elderly majhi has been sharing information with her and involving her in community meetings.

4. What has been the challenges for you and other elected women in performing this role?

Elected women discussion group:

None mentioned for one group, citing help from religious members of their community has helped mitigate issues.

For the group of PWDs (consulted by IOM), negative perceptions have been received where some community people have stated 'there is nothing a PWD can get done'

5. What are your main roles and functions in this elected position?

Elected women discussion group:

Do good for community people and solve problems in their block. Address issues to do with rations by communicating with the respective agency. Address issues to do with water, damage done to house, injustices against women, help pregnant women, mitigate violence and conflict, liaise with CiC's, site management and engage NGOs.

The group of PWDs (consulted by IOM) also highlighted most of the above.

6. Do you feel you are able to manage the time to perform this role? If yes, how?

Elected women discussion group:

Family has been supportive. In camp 26, women mentioned that daughter help with managing household chores. The motivation to manage time is there to create a good impression – and to avoid people criticizing them or faulting them for not participating because they are women.

7. Do you feel you are able to help improve living conditions in the camp in your new role, including for women and girls? If yes, How?

Elected women discussion group:

Yes, the effort and impact are there to see. They try to link NGOs with female volunteers, as well as link Rohingya women with livelihood related activities rendered by the development community. They also play a role in mediating any family conflicts. For more complex issues they liaise with site management and CiCs.

8. Do you feel you need any support in order to be able to better perform your role? If Yes, what kind of support do you need?

Elected women discussion group:

Yes, they require support as they do not have financial resources to carry out required tasks. NGOs are urged to inform them before and when relief and benefits are distributed. Support from CiCs was highlighted. They would like to get paid in order to better justify dedicating time to this role.

For the group of PWDs (consulted by IOM) the following support was mentioned as required: - ID card of the role -Vest- Umbrella- Assisting Devices-Transportation costs - Introduce them to all the community people of the camp. - Introduce them to all office staff and CIC. - Arrange monthly meetings

9. What has been the impact of the elections in your camp on women and girls?

Elected women discussion group:

Good impact, they mentioned that being a leader has increased their status as a woman in their community and family. In camp 26 they mentioned that “*Now the women and girls are free to move anywhere. Now they are not captive as like before.*” The group of PWDs (consulted by IOM) shared that there has been an increase in the no. of referrals. Also, women are more interested in learning about election processes and participating.

10. Is your life better or worse now than before the elections?

Elected women discussion group:

Life is better post elections due to a network that has been developed and is growing and women leaders feel they now get more respect, honour and importance in the community. However, they would prefer not carrying out any leadership role without the provision of a salary – and rather spend time with their family.

11. What are your recommendations for the upcoming elections in other camps in terms of improving women’s participation?

Elected women discussion group:

Participation of women in elections is urged – an increase in numbers will help obtain increased benefit and services in camp areas. Provide salary and allowance to elected leaders. Give value to the opinion of community people.

Consultations with women and adolescent girls, including women volunteers, in camps where elections took place about the impact and lessons learnt from the camp elections

Locations: Camp 26 (Block C), 4 ext. ,24, 20 ext,

Organizations: AAB, UN Women, IOM (WGSS), Relief International

1.Are you aware that elections have taken place in your camp?

Volunteers discussion group:

In one focus group, among 11 participants - 5 were informed about election which was held 3 years ago, while the rest knew about the election held last year. IOM’s consultation in camp 24 reported all 10 participants were aware elections took place in their camp. Women consulted in camp 4 extension were not all aware of the elections.

2. Were women engaged in the elections? If so how? If not, why not?

Volunteers discussion group:

Women were engaged in elections, however most of the elected women acted in the role of majhi's prior to elections, and hence found a lot of encouragement from their communities. IOM's consultation in camp 24 mentions some women were engaged by NGOs. In camp 4 extension women volunteers consulted by UN Women mentioned that they were aware about recent elections that had taken place in the camp and had understood that women above 18 had the right to vote, but explained that most women hadn't been allowed by their husbands to vote because they were not allowed to walk outside. They mentioned that only women 40 years and above, and female household heads living without a husband, or women with "good supportive husbands" had been allowed by their families to vote.

3. Do you know if any women were elected? What has been the benefits of having women in this role? What has been the challenges?

Volunteers discussion group:

Most are aware of elected women, as well as knowing PWD's are also among leaders. They voted for their elections and realize their votes helped leaders win. The liaison with the NGO sector has improved because of women leaders, availing them benefits and better recognition of their rights, as a result. Women consulted by UN Women in camp 4 extension said they were not aware of any women being elected in camp 4 extension.

In camp 26, women said that are better leaders than men sometimes because they are better at solving problems and are more approachable than men, better communicators and can better talk to all people in camps including women. They said that now they have women elected they can express our problems to women block leaders whereas they couldn't talk to a men leaders before.

In terms of challenges, maintaining a balance with familial life was cited along with socio-cultural views and history where Rohingya women were not allowed in leadership roles. Other challenges mentioned are on women receiving less importance, gender stereotyping, and difficulty in building alliances with decision makers. One focus group reported that sometimes women leaders avoid them and are ineffective, and observe they are less powerful than men.

4. What has been the impact of the elections in your camp? And specifically, on women and girls?

Volunteers discussion group:

Reduction of early marriages and conflict among community, and the presence of schools in some areas.

One focus group reported the impact on majhi's as being evident – suggesting majhi's as a result of the elections are in a lesser influential role (seeing lower social power). There has been an increase in the no. of women and girls approaching them with information post elections. One of the focus group discussions revealed mixed responses to this question.

5. Is your life better or worse now than before the elections?

Volunteers discussion group:

Better for most. They mentioned that there is more discipline now after elections. Some participations expressed the need for leaders to improve their knowledge on camp realities and situations. 3 participants consulted by IOM informed their life has not changed at all.

6. Do you prefer the new system of elections to the old appointment of majhi?

Volunteers discussion group:

A majority of respondents answered yes. The new system is strongly preferred over the previously held majhi system – women have more rights and say in the new system.

7. Did you feel encouraged by your family and camp community to stand as a candidate? If not, why not? If yes, in what way? What factors shaped your decision to stand/not stand? What are your recommendations for the upcoming elections in other camps in terms of improving women's participation?

Volunteers discussion group:

A mixed response was received for the first question. If yes, they want to be able to help their community people, given the capacity and role of a leader. Women who previously did not want to compete in elections due to familial obligations and time, are now however readier to participate. Women are recommended to vote and help candidates win, towards the betterment of society, in particular for women voters themselves. Other recommendations include an improvement on voter education / availability of information, and providing awareness sessions on women's rights, particularly among male and religious leaders.

2 women highlighted the lack of support from family members and community as a reason for discouragement to participate as a candidate, mainly due to being a person with disability, and being dependent.