



ANALYSIS OF GENDER WITH AGE MARKER DATA IN COX'S BAZAR

**Use of Gender and Age Marker in the 2023 Joint
Response Plan for the Rohingya Refugee
Humanitarian Crisis – Report**

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ABSTRACT

The Gender with Age Marker (GAM) has proven to be a useful tool in humanitarian responses, including Cox's Bazar. However, the very high number of GAM 4 codes prompted this analysis of its use in the Joint Response Plan (JRP) to assess how it is used, how well the process of reviewing the GAM code went, and how its application could be improved

GiHA Working group

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Abbreviations

AAP	Accountability to affected populations
GA	Gender advisor
GAM	Gender with Age Marker
GBV	Gender-based violence
GBV-SS	Gender-based violence sub-sector
GEEWG	Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls
GFP	Gender Focal Points
GIHA	Gender in Humanitarian Action
JRP	Joint Response Plan
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
PSEA	Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse
SCCCM	Shelter, Camp Coordination and Camp Management
SOGIESC	Sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics
SWG	Sector working group
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene

1. Background and Aim of the Report

Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by disasters and conflicts but are also active agents and contributors to humanitarian efforts, including in the Rohingya response in Cox's Bazar. The Rohingya refugee crisis is a protection crisis, with significantly gendered nature, and for the humanitarian response, the Gender with Age Marker (GAM) provides a key tool for ensuring that humanitarian actors meet the needs of women, girls and gender diverse persons, of persons living with disabilities as well as of age groups with particular needs and vulnerabilities.¹

First introduced in 2015, the Gender with Age Marker (GAM) provides a practical tool for humanitarian personnel, supporting them to integrate gender, age and disability perspectives consistently in project appeals. As such, the main purpose of the GAM is to support reflection and learning at project design phase. Simultaneously, GAM data should provide key information on the extent to which gender, age and disability are addressed by humanitarian programming in Cox's Bazar, and worldwide².

The aim of this report is to critically review the use of the GAM in the applications to the Joint Response Plan (JRP) 2024 in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, and provide recommendations on how the marker's use to promote gender transformative humanitarian action could be better furthered. The impetus for the review comes from the experiences of implementing the GAM in the JRP processes since 2018, and analyses in 2022 and 2023, as in both cases an extraordinarily high number of projects had achieved the highest code (GAM 4).

The high percentage (91 % GAM 4 out of 165 projects submitted for the 2024 JRP) shows, on the positive side, a high level of aspiration amongst applicants to reach a high GAM code. However, there is a risk that the use of the GAM code creates a perverse incentive for applicants to assess their integration of gender perspectives higher than warranted by the planned activities, in essence risking making the GAM process merely a box-ticking exercise. To reduce this risk, as part of the peer review process in Cox's Bazar, the JRP includes a GAM review of all individual GAM reports and related project proposals submitted to the sectors/sub-sectors, in which the GAM codes³ are reviewed against the GAM reports and related project appeals, and feedback is provided on the accuracy, and to improve the integration of gender perspectives within the project appeals.

Methodology

This report is based on a review of relevant background literature, a review of the 2023 JRP GAM review sheets from all sectors/sub-sectors as prepared by the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GiHA WG) members (ref: Annex 1), as well as e-mail communication and interviews with 12 of the GiHA WG GAM reviewers. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom, Teams or Google Meet in January and February 2024. Whilst the content of the interviews has been essential to the formulation of this report, respondents were granted anonymity in order to allow for frank discussions.

¹ For more background, see for example UN Women (2020) [Funding For Gender Equality And The Empowerment Of Women And Girls In Humanitarian Programming, Case Study: Bangladesh](#)

² [IASC Gender with Age Marker](#)

³ The GAM codes are autogenerated by the OCHA online system, based on the inputs provided by applicant agencies, which based on the GAM review appear to have in many instances exaggerated the extent of focus placed on gender considerations within the project appeals. [IASC Gender with Age Marker](#)

In order to validate the emerging findings, these were presented and discussed in the monthly GiHA meetings, and their feedback informed the drafting of the report. The draft report was reviewed and commented on by UN Women, and the draft was also shared with all of the GAM reviewers involved in the JRP process for their inputs.

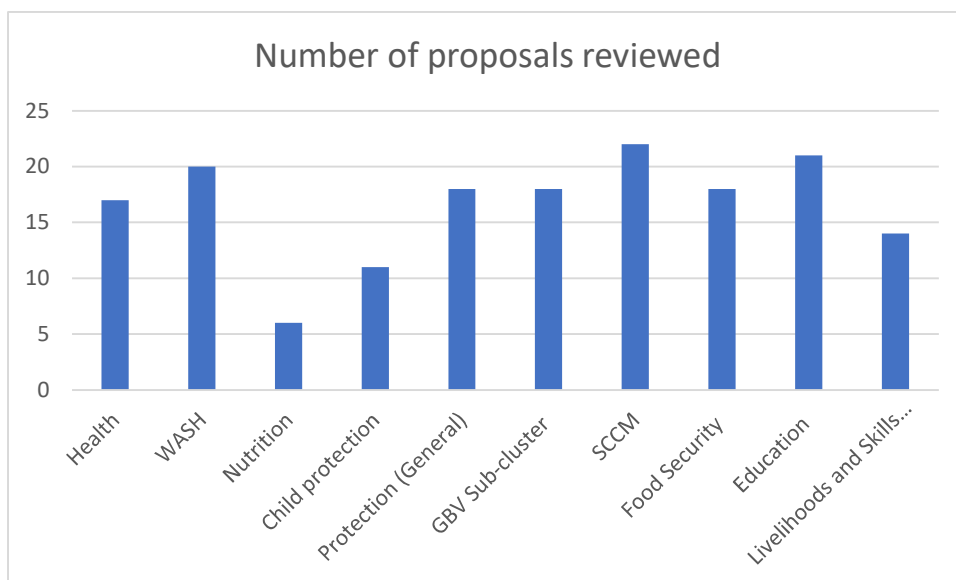
2. The application of the GAM in the JRP 2023

Prior to the JRP application process and the preparation and submission of project appeals with attendant GAM reports, staff from applicant organisations were given trainings on the use of the GAM, and GiHA WG members and Gender Focal Points (GFPs) were given a 2-hour training on how to review the use of the marker in applications. This was conducted as a 'Training of Trainers' type training for GiHA WG GAM reviewers, which was conducted online rather than in person due to the upcoming elections and 'hartals' (strikes). The trained GiHA WG GAM reviewers then went on to provide follow-up training session(s) to SWG members⁴. Furthermore, GAM reviewers were given a pre-prepared excel worksheet for their GAM reviews, with dropdown menus to assist them in the evaluation.

In the 2023 JRP process, a total of 175 of submissions were reviewed by GiHA WG membership, 10 of which were incomplete (i.e. the GAM reviewers marked the applications as missing documents/data, and therefore did not review them), from the health; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); nutrition; child protection; protection (General); gender-based violence sub-sector (GBV-SS); shelter, camp coordination and camp management (SCCCM); food security; education; livelihoods and skills development.

Of the reviewed submissions, 91 % had the initial system-generated code of GAM 4, and 9 % GAM 3. No proposals were coded as less than GAM 3.

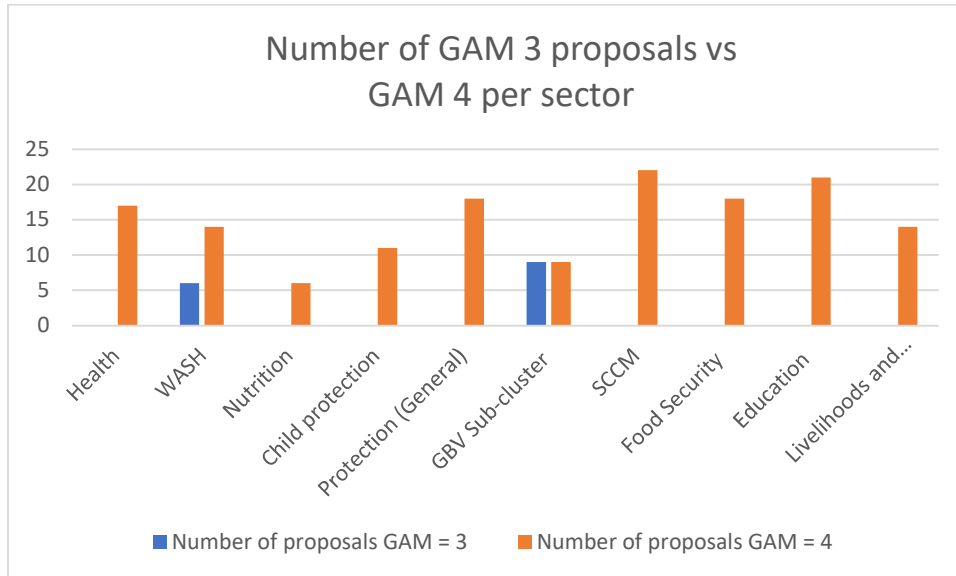
Table 1: Proposals reviewed per sector



⁴ For some SWGs, GiHA WG members provided only a brief session on the GAM using the PPT presentation prepared by the GiHA WG (UNICEF and UN Women). Others dedicated more time: f.ex. the Education SWG dedicated a full day to a GAM training.

The only sectors with GAM 3 proposals were GBV-SS (50% GAM 3) and WASH (30% GAM 3), as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: GAM 3 vs GAM 4 codes per sector



The extraordinarily high codes overall raise several questions around the accuracy of coding, especially as the review process showed a repeated gaps and inconsistencies between the codes and actual proposed activities.

2.1 Key findings- use of GAM in 2023 JRP applications

The overwhelming consensus amongst GAM reviewers was that the remarkably high proportion of GAM 4 codes does not reflect the reality of implementation on the ground. As raised by the GiHA WG members, the application of the GAM at the design phase of JRP project appeals should be complimented with tracking attention to gender considerations at implementation phase and through monitoring results achieved, for example through spot checks.

In terms of the applications submitted, one overall positive finding was that the vast majority of applications (94 % or 165 out of 175) were submitted were complete, accompanied by a GAM report, which has been a requirement throughout the Rohingya refugee response since the 2017 crisis occurred. However, both the JRP review worksheets and subsequent interviews underscored GAM reviewers' concerns with the quality of the applications with respect to the integration of gender and age perspectives into the actual proposals and, further downstream, into programming. The consensus amongst GAM reviewers was that applicants saw GAM 4 as the code to achieve, and while the overwhelming majority of proposals coded themselves in a way as to achieve this, there was a mismatch between the GAM code and the actual project proposal, including both in terms of planned programming activities and budgets allocated.

Concerns raised by the GAM reviewers with respect to the actual project proposals included the impression that in some cases, tools such as Chat GPT were being used to create the GAM report, without an actual thought-through integration of gender, age and disability perspectives. Needs and/or gender analyses were often found to be either lacking or inadequate. Furthermore, planned monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) tended to focus on activities and outputs without

necessarily paying attention to gender-relevant results, and with little tracking of outcomes or impacts. GAM reviewers felt that the online system, most of the questions of which require selecting options from drop down menus, based on which the GAM code was automatically generated made it too easy to achieve a code of 4, and that the GAM was limited in terms of capturing more in-depth information. On the other hand, applicants being more careful (or realistic) in discerning between the age, sex/gender identity and disability categories of beneficiaries will end up with a lower score. Several GAM reviewers also felt that the application forms themselves did not give applicants enough space to go into detail on gender integration in a more nuanced manner, even if the project appeal template does include separate sections for example for age and disability, accountability to affected populations (AAP) and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA).

A recurrent issue noted by GAM reviewers both in the review templates and interviews was that applicants seemed to lack an understanding what an actual application of gender- and age-responsive approaches means in practice for implementation, processes, systems, and MEL. GAM reviewers identified the greatest gaps in thinking through how to design interventions that take both age and gender into account; addressing the intersections of gender and disabilities; and designing and implementing programming that is responsive to the needs and vulnerabilities of persons of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). One respondent however also noted that some applicants, especially local organisations, may actually be implementing more nuanced approaches to integrating gender and age in their programming, but may have struggled to articulate this in their applications.

Beyond the potential false incentivisation of applicants to aim for a GAM 4 code and capacity gaps, GAM reviewers identified several other possible factors for the mismatch between proposals and self-generated GAM code. These included the possibility due to that different people were in charge of preparing the GAM report (and thereby responsible for the GAM code) and writing the actual proposals; that applicant organisations did not always send the right people to the GAM trainings organized by the GiHA members for sectors; and that due to high staff turnover, previously trained staff may have left before the beginning of the JRP process. Concerns arose about the lack of involvement of GFPs or gender advisors (GA) in the preparatory phase, with limited influence given on project appeals, leading to weak linkage and engagement.

Interviewed GAM reviewers across the board felt that more, more in-depth, more practice-oriented, and more longer-term training and capacity building on GAM as well as gender mainstreaming as a twin track approach more broadly should be given to JRP applicants. There was a broad consensus amongst respondents that this should happen throughout the year, and not just before the JRP. Further, given staff turnover, there may be a need to repeat trainings over the course of the year.

The GAM codes of the GBV-SS applications were given particular attention in this review process, as it was the sub-sector which had the lowest percentage of GAM 4 codes (see Table 2), whilst also being the one of the sub-sectors where one might expect there to be a higher level of gender expertise than in some other sectors.

The lower percentage of GAM 4 codes in the GBV-SS should emphatically *not* be viewed as some kind of a failure. Rather, conversely, it likely reflects a more realistic scoring by applicants than in other sectors, even if the 50:50 split between GAM 3 and GAM 4 is quite high, given the gender-specific focus of proposals, and may be inaccurate. In addition to applicants being more self-critical of the degree to which they coded themselves, there may also be in-built features in the calculation of GAM codes that disadvantage more critical applicants due to the conflation of age and gender inclusivity in the marker. What was also notable in JRP GAM review templates was that the GBV-SS GAM reviewers' comments tended to be more in-depth and more critical than in other sectors.

2.2 Key findings – review process

An analysis of the GAM code review worksheets also showed quite different degrees to which GAM reviewers gave critical feedback, both in terms of quality and quantity. There were also inconsistencies and differences in how GAM reviewers coded the proposals both between and within sectors. A final code of 1 (yes)⁵ to the question on the accuracy of the code was relatively often given by GAM reviewers even if the more in-depth review of the various GAM dimensions assessed by the GAM reviewer would have suggested otherwise (ref: Annex 2: GAM review template).

In the interviews, GAM reviewers were also asked about their own experience of the review process itself, in order to identify possible lessons learned, gaps, or challenges, as well as good practices that may have emerged. GAM reviewers had different levels of expertise and experience, and especially those involved in the JRP for the first time felt that the training given was too short, further complicated by the online format of the training, which was less conducive to interactive learning. Newly constituted in 2023, the GiHA WG also included new sector focal point members of the GiHA WG unfamiliar with the GAM. Building on the same process employed by the GiHA WG in 2022, the GAM review in 2023 of the 2024 JRP project appeals and related GAM reports was undertaken by GAM reviewers many of whom were not familiar with the marker, and several respondents felt that not all of their colleagues fully understood the task at hand. The review process also came at a busy time, and as most GAM reviewers are responsible for a wide range of other activities as well, many struggled to prioritise and find adequate time for the review.

On the whole, the template prepared to capture the results of the review process was seen as a very helpful tool for the review process (ref: Annex 2). Some respondents however requested more guidance and clarity on how to calculate the revised GAM code, and several suggested having more space for more in-depth comments.

3. Recommendations

Based on the review and subsequent discussions and written feedback, this report makes the following recommendations for the JRP process, the GAM review process and subsequent tracking of implementation

3.1 JRP Application process

- Communicate to applicants more clearly what the aim of the use of a GAM marker is and that the goal should not be to reach a GAM 4 code for its own sake.
- Earlier, more frequent, and more in-depth training on the GAM coupled with practical guidance demonstrating how to mainstream gender into projects through a twin-track approach inclusive of key, dedicated gender equality interventions relevant to specific sectors, and integrated approaches, and guidance on how to place special focus on gender and age, gender and disabilities inclusion, and diverse SOGIESC.
- Strengthen the capacities of applicants in conducting needs and gender analyses, as well as in integrating these into programme design, implementation and MEL, including through updating/developing gender mainstreaming tipsheets for the sectors/sub-sectors.

⁵ The question being phrased as “GAM is filled accurately, and the GAM code is accurate, Select 1 (Yes) or 0 (no)” in the template

- Ensure applicant organisations fully involve GFPs/GAs in their application process
- Strengthen GAM-JRP alignment by adding a section specifying the proposal's contribution to GEEWG in the JRP project appeal template.
- Maintaining a database of the previous years' GAM reports of appealing partners, and conducting comparison on degree to project appeal descriptions show that results have been achieved vis-a-vis previous years' plans.

3.2 Review process

- Provide more in-depth training for GAM reviewers in-person and consider measures to ensure more time for the GAM review process, including through ensuring GiHA WG membership responsibilities are reflected in the job descriptions of GiHA WG members.
- Ensure more consistency of how proposals are reviewed, both between and within sectors, by providing more guidance to GAM reviewers on how to comment, and how to calculate post-review GAM codes.
- Facilitate discussions between sectors to share experiences and good practices, for example approaches used by the GBV-SS.
- Assess time and human resources requirements for review and consider back-up support needs.
- Engage with sector working group (SWG) coordinators to assess any other bottlenecks or challenges that need to be addressed.

3.3 Tracking implementation

- Pilot and encourage the use of the GAM during project implementation and MEL. Conduct voluntary spot checks to assess if the high GAM code is indeed reflected in the various stages of implementation and the MEL data. (Checks should be conducted at the half-way point of implementation to allow for necessary adjustments).
- Track GEEWG impact alongside funding, identify needs for gender-transformative programming, and strengthen tracking progress on gender equality results across sectors.
- Reach out to IASC TT on GE for global comparison of experiences with using the GAM, and commence discussions if a de-coupling of gender, age and disabilities might be sensible when using the marker, to better reflect work in particular sectors. Discussions should also cover challenges in ensuring accuracy of the GAM, given that the GAM is used at global level to track extent of focus on GEEWG. Guidance is thus needed to ensure more reliable reporting, and to ensure that the advice of GFPs preparing GAM reports is taken into account in preparing project appeals.
- Propose for the global project appeal template to include dedicated section for gender.

Annex 1: GAM Reviewers

Sector Gender Focal Person -	GFP
Education	Fahmida (Plan International) Tazreen (UNICEF)
Livelihood and Skills Development	Fatema Kaniz (BRAC) Biomola
Food Security	Fariha (Action Aid Bangladesh) Sadiku (WFP)
Protection (General)	Shohel (Bandhu) Rowshan (Rescue)
GBV SS WASH	Bilkish (CARE) Priyanka (UNFPA) Saline (NGO Forum)
Child Protection	Sifat (STC) Rovaiya (UNICEF)
SCCCM	Bashar (BRAC)
Nutrition	Tasmiah (SHED)
Health	Dr Hassan (WHO)