



## IN BRIEF

# COX'S BAZAR UPDATE

APRIL– DECEMBER 2023



Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana

### PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH UN WOMEN PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES (JANUARY-DECEMBER 2023)

#### Refugees of all genders and different abilities reached by UN Women Gender Volunteers



UN Women's Gender Volunteers continued to engage with community members throughout 2023 through household visits, group sessions, and outreach activities to promote gender equality and related services and support, contributing to community awareness and mobilization on gender issues. Through trainings and coaching sessions provided by UN Women Gender Field Officers on a regular basis, the Gender Volunteers enhanced their advocacy and community outreach skills.

#### Multi-purpose Women's Center(MPWC)



#### Services Provided in 8 MPWCs

Women and girls in the refugee camps and host community enhanced their knowledge of gender equality and their ability to promote women's rights through sessions promoting awareness of women's rights in the MPWCs. Both host community women and Rohingya women were supported to implement income-generating activities, including producing and selling handmade products, after participating in livelihoods-related training. Of these, 1,864 women (Rohingya: 232; host community: 1,632) started income generation activities, with an average monthly income of BDT 3,906 (USD 36) through producing and selling handmade products.

#### Second chance education



In the refugee camps 3, 4 Extension, 5, 18 and host communities of Teknaf, Ukhiya, and Cox's Bazar Sadar, women and adolescent girls participated in Second Chance Education (SCE) activities, including literacy, numeracy, and basic computer literacy. Altogether 72 women and adolescent girls successfully graduated from the SCE programme in 2023.

## EMPOWER WOMEN TO LEAD, INSPIRE AND THRIVE IN HOST COMMUNITIES



Ms. Hasina Begum in front of her grocery shop in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Photo: UN Women/Oxfam Bangladesh.



I started a small grocery shop in our village. While the profits are still modest, the business has started to flourish, with many villagers starting to buy their groceries from my shop.



Ms. Begum selling grocery from her shop in Teknaf, Bangladesh. Photo: UN Women/Oxfam Bangladesh.

Living in Teknaf, where women have limited access to basic services, information, education, and formal work and continue to have limited influence over decision-making, Hasina Begum has carved out a space for herself by establishing a small business.

Ms. Hasina Begum, a businesswoman, received financial assistance and business planning support from the Multi-Purpose Women's Centre (MPWC) in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar, to develop her own business.

 Read her story: <http://unwo.men/fkU150RE3o1>



## MARKET LINKAGE INITIATIVE THROUGH UN WOMEN



Rohingya refugee women making jute baskets, mats, vases, and trays at MPWC- Camp 4Ext. Photo: UN Women/ActionAid Bangladesh.

With support of UN Women, livelihood activities take place in the MPWCs located in Camp 4, 4 Extension and 18 operated by ActionAid Bangladesh. In accordance with national and international standards, the MPWCs provide holistic, multi-sectoral services and support for women and girls in the camps, many of whom are survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). These include psychosocial counseling, GBV case management, and livelihoods and learning activities, among others, to address both the protection and empowerment needs of women and girls.



Eco-friendly jute baskets, mats, vases, trays, and others made by Rohingya women and girls in MPWC- Camp 4. Photo: UN Women/ActionAid Bangladesh.

UN Women's partner, ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB), sources products for their outlet, Aaurhi-AAB, located in Gulshan-Dhaka from the products made by Rohingya women in the three camps where they operate MPWCs with UN Women support. In 2023, Rohingya women earned some income by filling orders from Aaurhi-AAB for various items such as laundry boxes (100), flower tubs (100), Kantha stitched pieces

(100), winter jackets (100), table runners (100), placemats (100), scarves (100), winter shawls (100), bamboo baskets (100), jute trays (100), jute mats (100), and tote bags (400), among others. An order for 500 Kantha stitched pieces was in progress at year end 2023 for the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce, destined for shipment to India.

Approximately 200 skilled Rohingya women and 20 transgender individuals are involved in these income generation activities, all of whom received training through the MPWC in Camp 4 Extension and have been since delivering quality products and meeting orders from diverse locations. In December 2023 alone, their combined earnings were estimated at approximately BDT 600,000 (USD 5,460), enhancing their economic resilience and contributing to addressing their needs in a sustainable and dignified manner.

## MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION



A total of 54 women and 35 men attended the dialogue event. Ms. Tapti Chakma, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Cox's Bazar, was the Chief Guest. Ms. Rokeya Kabir, Executive Director of Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS), chaired the programme. Ms. Silja Rajander, Head of UN Women Sub-Office in Cox's Bazar, along with representatives from Oxfam, business chambers, private sectors, and host community women leaders, also contributed to the discussion. Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana.

Partnerships play a key role in ensuring gender equality in the world of business. Dialogues and consultations, such as the one convened by Oxfam and BNPS, UN Women's partners in Cox's Bazar, on 19 July 2023, play an important role in levelling the playing field for women entrepreneurs. Key issues of social acceptance and limited finance and guidance for women entrepreneurs in Cox's Bazar were raised by women leaders at the event. "After participating in the event, I feel more confident," shared Ms. Monwara Pervin, Senior Vice President of the Women's Chamber in Cox's Bazar. As agreed by the participants, it is critical to engage more women in decision-making processes with both the private and public sector in Cox's Bazar.

## MEN ENGAGEMENT IN CAMP HIGHLIGHTS CHAMPIONING POSITIVE MASCULINITY

“ Before, I thought gender issues were only about women, but now I see how vital our role as men is in this fight,” reflects Karim (pseudonym), one of the male Gender Volunteers at Cox's Bazar, under the mentorship of Mr. Muhammed Aziz Ullah, UN Women's first male Gender Field Officer (GFO).

UN Women male Gender Volunteers play a vital role within their communities in raising awareness of and increasing male engagement in addressing gender issues. Mr. Aziz emphasizes, “Our society is far from fair. Men are often the perpetrators of GBV, with women and girls as the primary targets. In my capacity as a GFO, my goal is to engage men in preventing this violence, to encourage the ideals of 'good men,' and to challenge harmful gender norms.” The introduction of a male GFO is a deliberate move by UN Women to foster greater male involvement in the promotion of gender equal norms and behaviors, and to ensure that gender equality work is not seen as the responsibility of only women. Mr. Aziz's role entails mentoring around 40 male volunteers like Karim (pseudonym), supporting them to enhance their understanding of, and their role in promoting gender equitable gender roles and behaviors in their community through workshops, trainings, and outreach activities.

Mr. Aziz emphasizes, “Our society's imbalance stems from a narrow view of gender roles. Engaging men in this dialogue is not just about awareness, it is about action. We are here to redefine what it means to be allies in the fight against GBV and to promote equality.”



UN Women organized a chess competition during the 16 days of Activism against GBV in Camp 1E between male gender volunteers. Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana.

The impact of this approach is noticeable. Male volunteers increasingly take on nurturing roles and have become vocal advocates for gender equality within their communities. Through photography, chess competitions and other means they are conveying what positive masculinity looks like, like sharing household responsibilities and supporting women's leadership roles in the camps.

This shift, guided by Mr. Aziz's mentorship, is creating a ripple effect of change, transforming gender norms that are harmful for both men and women and fostering a more gender inclusive environment.

## ROHINGYA GIRLS CHALLENGE GENDER NORMS WITH CHESS IN COX'S BAZAR CAMPS



UN Women organized chess competitions during the 16 Days of Activism in Camp 1E between female gender volunteers. Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana.

UN Women introduced chess as a tool to empower Rohingya girls and challenge gender stereotypes in Cox's Bazar refugee camps. Traditionally seen as a male-dominated game, chess is now providing a platform for girls apply their critical thinking skills and participate in such recreational activities on an equal foot with boys. During the chess tournament held as part of the 16 Days of Activism campaign, Rohingya girls, wearing scarves with the message, "Empowered women empower generations," competed alongside boys.

The chess tournament was not just about checkmates and castling. It was a strategic move against GBV, shifting energy from harmful activities to a positive, collaborative sport. The chessboard became a safe space for open dialogue, where boys became allies and girls discovered their own strength and strategic thinking. "Chess helps us think beyond boundaries," said Ms. Jarina (pseudonym), a player from Camp 1E.

Through a series of orientation workshops leading to the tournament, UN Women engaged participants in thinking through the need for intentional actions to advance gender equality, like moving chess pieces on the chessboard. "Playing chess taught me that every move counts, just like every action in our community can make a difference in preventing violence against women and girls," said Mr. Hossain Ahmed (pseudonym) from Camp-1 West.

Inequality needs to be checkmated, one strategic move at a time, GFOs overseeing the competition emphasized. By challenging gender stereotypes, promoting strategic thinking, and fostering open conversations about GBV prevention, the young participants are moving piece by piece towards a future where equality is the new endgame.

## MEDIA ACTION FOR GENDER EQUALITY



(Left to right clockwise) Head of UN Women Sub-Office in Cox's Bazar, Ms. Silja Rajander (seated right), President of Cox's Bazar Press Club, Mr. Mohammed Abu Taher (seated middle) and Mr. Mainul Khan from the DW Akademie (seated left) with the first batch of participants at the Gender-responsive Journalism Training; additional second batch of training participants; ongoing training sessions. Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana.

"Through the Gender-responsive Journalism Workshop, I learned how to avoid creating divisions between men and women, and I feel better equipped to be influential in my future work as a journalist," stated Ms. Bandan Sarkar, a young reporter with Probal News in Cox's Bazar.

UN Women, in collaboration with the Deutsche Welle (DW) Akademie, organized two batches of Gender-Responsive Journalism Workshops. These were attended by 32 participants (16 women, 16 men), representing various media platforms in Cox's Bazar, including newspapers, radios, television stations and online news outlets.

Through the training, the participants learned skills in non-gender-biased language, how to draft positive narratives on gender equality issues, interactive discussions on the importance of gender representation in media, how to address sensitivity when interviewing survivors of GBV, and ethical standards in reporting.



A female local journalist in Cox's Bazar presenting during gender-responsive journalism training. Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana.

## TRAINING ON WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN COLLABORATION WITH UNFPA IN COX'S BAZAR



Attending the Women's Leadership Training in Cox's Bazar was pivotal for me. It sparked a transformation in my professional journey, nurturing self-awareness and the value of community support. I learned skills in power sharing, how to amplify my voice, and embrace change without fearing failure.

The training equipped me with skills and perspectives for effecting positive change in my organization. A crucial lesson was how to reject discrimination and the misuse of power at work. I am now resolute in standing against such behaviour and maintaining a harassment-free environment." This was shared by Ms. Shampa Goswami, Executive Director, PRERONA (Women Development Organization) Foundation, Kaligonj, Satkhira.



Ms. Reem Elmeleegy, GBV Specialist from UN Women, delivered a session on the Inter-agency Standing Committee for Humanitarian Coordination Gender with Age Marker and how this tool ensures gender equality as part at the planning stage. Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana.

The training on women's empowerment and leadership for the GBV Sub-Sector actors was held from 20-22 June 2023, as a collaborative effort of UN Women and UNFPA. The training focused on feminism, linking feminism and leadership, stereotypes and misconceptions about women's leadership capacity and women's rights.

Topics covered conflict management, emotional intelligence management, power, active communication as a leader, advocacy, localization, identifying locally relevant supportive practices, and the contributions of women-led organizations in 2023 Joint Response Plan (JRP): Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis.

👉 Link: <https://rohingyareponse.org/project/2023-jrp/>

## ENGAGING THE DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN AFFAIRS (DWA) ON GENDER IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION DISCUSSIONS IN COX'S BAZAR



(Right to left) Ms. Farida Pervin, former Director General of DWA, shares her views with Ms. Silja Rajander, Head of Sub-Office, Ms. Dilruba Haider, Co-chair of the National Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group along with representatives of the Cox's Bazar GiHA Working Group and women-led organizations. Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana.

On 14 September 2023, Ms. Farida Pervin, Director General of DWA met with members of the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Groups and with local women-led organizations. She discussed the importance of ensuring gender-responsive humanitarian actions which are field-driven. The discussions also focused on recognizing the important role of women-led and women's rights organizations; undertaking formative analysis to drive interventions that respond to gender dynamics in the field; and the need to move beyond sensitivity to gender transformation.

The national Working Group of GiHA stands ready to support the Cox's Bazar initiatives, Ms. Pervin emphasized. During her stay, she visited the MPWC in Ukhiya which is being supported by UN Women. Services offered in the Centre include women's empowerment through literacy and numeracy skills; livelihood skills development; business skills; basic health services, including sexual and reproductive health services; psychosocial counselling; and consciousness raising about women's rights, to strengthen their sense of self-worth and make their own choices.

"The activities of the MPWC in Ukhiya address vulnerable women's situations and are greatly appreciated," said Ms. Pervin.

## GENDER-RESPONSIVE POLICING WITHIN THE ROHINGYA REFUGEE CAMPS

In 2023, UN Women's partnership with the APBn in Cox's Bazar advanced discussions on the need for gender-responsive policing within the Rohingya refugee camps. At a meeting held on 16 October 2023 at APBn 8's office and attended by APBn Additional Director-General Mr. S. M. Fazlur Rahman and UN Women Programme Specialist Ms. Mehtap Tatar, UN Women agreed to continue to support the APBn through trainings on gender-responsive policing, coaching and mentoring of female APBn to enhance APBn's skills to ensure a gender lens in its work.

APBn officials expressed their commitment to strengthen gender-responsiveness within their operations, addressing challenges faced by female police officers in the camps. As a result, concrete plans were made for specialized training on GBV case management and reporting, and to support APBn to strengthen progress achieved by its Women and Children Police Help Desks.

UN Women GFOs play an important role in coaching Women and Children's Police Help Desks within the camps. Through monthly visits initiated in the second half of 2023, GFOs have identified crucial training needs of female APBn in areas such as GBV case management and referral pathways and have provided related coaching on skills necessary to effectively support GBV survivors.

To bridge identified gaps, UN Women organized an intensive four-day training in December on gender-responsive policing for 51 APBn members, including 20 female police officers. Participants enhanced their skills in adopting survivor-centred, trauma-informed, and perpetrator-focused approaches through the training, gaining a deeper understanding of GBV dynamics while learning to provide effective and compassionate support to survivors. Feedback collected from the participants on the training was positive, highlighting the value of the stress management elements incorporated into the training, also.



(From left, clockwise) In the middle, Mr. Amir Jafar, APBn Police, shared his remarks and sat beside Ms. Silja Rajander, Head of the Sub-Office, whose remarks highlighted the critical need for gender sensitivity in policing. Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana.



## UN WOMEN REGIONAL DIRECTOR a.i. VISITS COX'S BAZAR



(Middle of Left to right) Ms. Sarah Knibbs, Regional Director ad interim (ai) of UN Women Asia and the Pacific, along with Country Representative Ms. Gitanjali Singh and Head of the Sub-Office, Ms. Silja Ranjader, with other colleagues from Cox's Bazar, in front of the UN Women Sub Office, Photo: UN Women.



During this meeting Ms. Sarah Knibbs, expressed her appreciation of the Government of Bangladesh for the strong support and coordination it is providing to the Rohingya refugee response under the leadership of the Office of the Refugee Relief & Repatriation Commissioner, Cox's Bazar. Photo: UN Women.

Ms. Sarah Knibbs, Regional Director ad interim (ai), UN Women Asia and the Pacific visited Bangladesh from 9- 13 April 2023, along with the Country Representative Ms. Gitanjali Singh, to gain insights into the country's evolving context of gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE).

During her visit to Cox's Bazar, she met with the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner, Mr. Mohammed Mizanur Rahman and discussed the ongoing collaboration between UN Women and the government. She highlighted the contribution of Camp- in-Charges to create an environment where women can voice their concerns and seek resolution. In the camps, Ms. Knibbs joined a discussion with UN Women volunteers and women leaders from both the Rohingya and host community. Among the concerns raised were the increasing security risks for women and volunteers working in the camps. Despite the evident challenges, Ms. Knibbs said she was heartened by the progress made she observed in the refugee camps.



I was struck by the way people spoke of social norms change and the difference this work is making to their daily lives and their futures. I was impressed by the way volunteers and women leaders spoke of taking this to the next level through their networks.

UN Women Country Representative Ms. Gitanjali Singh, Deputy Country Representative Ms. Navanita Sinha, and the Operations Manager Ms. Reshma Khan Zaman visited Cox's Bazar and met with the team, gender volunteers and Multipurpose Women's Centers (MPWCs), observing activities including livelihood skills training, listening to the Rohingya women and girls, and engaging in interactive discussions with gender-diverse individuals in MPWC Camp 4.



(Left to right clockwise) Operations Manager, Ms. Reshma Khan Zaman with the Cox's Bazar Sub-Office team members; Deputy Country Representative, Ms. Navanita Sinha in discussion with gender-diverse individuals in MPWC-4; Country Representative, Ms Gitanjali Singh engaged in a conversation with gender volunteers at Camp 18. Photo: UN Women.

## THE HUMANITARIAN DEVELOPMENT NEXUS: FUNCTIONAL REVIEW OF UN WOMEN IN COX'S BAZAR



The Business Transformation team of UN Women Headquarters with the Cox's Bazar Sub-Office team. Photo: UN Women.

**“The session on visualizing our value proposition was very interactive. Through the exercise, I gained perspectives on the need to map the partners’ capacity, demands, and office capacity. It was easy for me to read, understand and remember our partners’ pains, gains and jobs.” Mr. Khurshidul Islam, Programme Associate, UN Women Cox’s Bazar.**

The Business Transformation Unit from UN Women Headquarters visited the Cox's Bazar Sub-Office and Dhaka Office to conduct a functional review of the Sub-Office on 9-18 July 2023. The review assessed the role of UN Women in Cox's Bazar and in country and how it can be best placed to deliver quality, sustainable and value-added services to the Rohingya refugees and the host community members in the protracted refugee crisis setting.

The interactive workshop during the mission included exercises such as analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, value-added analysis, capacity and demand mapping, responsibility assignment matrix analysis, business process engineering and financial resource review. The Business Transformation team recommended, through the functional review report, that the office should ensure positioning itself as the humanitarian-development-peace “nexus player” in Cox's Bazar, building on UN Women's triple mandate across programming, coordination and normative spheres.

As recommended, UN Women is working to develop the Sustainability Strategy to guide the transition of its response to the Rohingya refugee crisis to ensure the sustainability of results in the longer term, including through strengthened linkages with between the Sub-Office in Cox's Bazar and the Country Office in Dhaka.

## THEMATIC EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN BANGLADESH HUMANITARIAN PORTFOLIO IN COX'S BAZAR



UN Women established its Sub-Office in Cox's Bazar in 2018 in response to the 2017 Rohingya refugee influx, to implement humanitarian programming in the refugee camps and host community, and to support gender in humanitarian action coordination. The protracted nature of the crisis has led to changing and exacerbated needs and vulnerabilities (including GBV) among the Rohingya refugee and host community women and girls, underscoring the need for longer term solutions.

Against this backdrop, UN Women undertook a Thematic Evaluation in 2023 to examine its programmatic contributions to the Rohingya refugee response. The focus of the evaluation was on the Sida funded “Means to Lead: Empowering Rohingya refugee and host community women through leadership, learning and livelihoods.” The evaluation put forward altogether 14 recommendations, which UN Women is in the process of addressing.

Join the journey and download the evaluation free of charge, Link:



<https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?evaluationid=11627>

## COX'S BAZAR MARKS 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence commemoration in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana.

The campaign kicked off with a colourful launch event at the Cox's Bazar Cultural Center and continued at the Rohingya Refugee Response Camps. The largest gathering of gender equality actors and women-led organizations in 2023, an Open Dialogue on "Advancing Gender-responsive Camp Governance," organized under the overall banner of the 16 Days of Activism against GBV campaign, brought all together more than 500 people including government, UN, and civil society actors.



Participants raised their fists after a dialogue between Rohingya men and women with the 1W Camp-in-Charge during the Elimination of Violence against Women event at the camp. Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana.

Campaign events in the camps began on 26 November 2023, with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women at Camp 1 West. Here, survivor stories made the call for community-driven approaches to GBV prevention, emphasizing the need for greater outreach and dedicated resources.

On 29 November, Camp 9 celebrated the International Women Human Rights Defenders Day through art and storytelling. The activities resulted in highlighting the pivotal role of women's rights defenders, particularly advocating for the active involvement of adolescent girls.

The International Day for Persons with Disabilities on 3 December at Camp 18 shed the light on the intersections of disability and gender. Through thematic discussions and cultural performances, the event promoted inclusivity and celebrated diverse abilities.

World Volunteer Day on 5 December at Camp 5 Darbar Hall recognized the contributions and commitment of volunteers from both Rohingya and host communities. This fostered unity and a strong volunteer culture through traditional games and exhibitions.

World AIDS Day on 6 December at Camp 1 East employed an interactive chess tournament to bring community members together, with facilitated discussions on HIV/AIDS and related linkages with GBV, highlighting youth empowerment and the importance of male engagement.

The campaign concluded on 10 December with an International Human Rights Observation event at Camp 4. Discussions and artistic performances by community members advocated for human rights, with a focus on gender-responsive solutions.

Collectively, these events, organized by UN Women Cox's Bazar bringing diverse stakeholders and actors together at the camp level, contributed to strengthened community and sectoral engagement in efforts to create safer, more equitable environments for women and girls. These further showcased the resilience and collaborative spirit of the community.

Read and watch for more details 

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JANo8lJqWo>
- <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/stories/feature-story/2024/05/coxs-bazar-marks-16-days>



The Open Dialogue on "Advancing Gender-responsive Camp Governance" during 16 Days of Activism against GBV. Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana.

UN Women's Programme in Cox's Bazar is supported by:

