



IN BRIEF July – September 2019

UPDATES FROM UN WOMEN COX'S BAZAR



Photo: UN Women/ Allison Joyce

5th Multi-Purpose Women's Centre (MPWC) launched in Camp 5, Ukhiya

On 24 July, UN Women inaugurated its 5th MPWC in camp 5, Ukhiya, together with BRAC. Kazi Mohammad Mozammel Hoque, Additional Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner, attended as chief guest and highlighted the space would provide Rohingya women with the opportunity to access services, livelihoods, learning and leadership opportunities and information.



Shoko Ishikawa, UN Women Bangladesh Country Representative, Mohammad Ashraful Afsar, Additional Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner, Kazi Mohammad Mozammel Hoque, BRAC Head of Sub-Office, and key representatives from the Bangladesh Police, Donors, UN and INGOs attended the inauguration. Photo: UN Women

This particular Women's Centre was deliberately built away from the main road for easier access for women that live in the inner area of the camp. Rohingya women view the MPWC's as a sanctuary from the chaos of camp life; a place where they can share experiences, build community, and feel safe. The MPWC was built with financial support from the Governments of UK, Japan and Canada.

Camps-in-Charges (CiCs) support staff trained through Joint Capacity Sharing Initiative

Over 200 support staff (guards, cleaners, information officers, admin staff) from the Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC) Camps-in-Charges (CiCs) joined induction training sessions from 3-12 September as part of the Joint Capacity Sharing Initiative supported by the Site Management Sector, Cox's Bazar. UN Women on behalf of the Gender in Humanitarian Action working group, facilitated a component of these trainings which focused specifically on gender, age and diversity.

Over the next year, more comprehensive and advanced trainings will also be provided to CiCs, their deputies and assistants. UN Women will lead the gender, age and diversity dedicated sessions under this joint initiative.



Seven sessions of the one-day core induction were delivered to approx. 25 CiC support staff per batch, on 3rd, 4th, 5th and 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th September. Photo: UN Women / Marie Sophie Pettersson

UN Women receives invaluable support from the Governments of Canada, Germany, Japan, Sweden, the National Committees for UN Women in Australia, Japan, Iceland, Singapore, Sweden and USA, as well as the Tingari Silverton Foundation and Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), towards delivering a humanitarian response in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh for Rohingya refugee and host community women and girls.

Learning Forum brings humanitarian actors together to reflect upon the achievements, challenges and gaps in response efforts

A learning forum co-hosted by the Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) Gender Hub and the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group, co-chaired by UN Women and UNHCR, was held on 3 September. The event titled **“Reflections on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls 2 years into the Rohingya Response: Achievements, Challenges and Way Forward”**, was attended by over 90 stakeholders active in the crisis response, including senior representatives from the Strategic Executive Group (SEG), the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), Heads of Sub-Offices, I/NGOs, CSOs, donors, and UN agencies. The ISCG Gender Hub, supported by Global Affairs Canada in line with Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy, is managed by UN Women and aims to strengthen gender-responsiveness of the coordinated Rohingya crisis response including through technical assistance, capacity development and knowledge management.



Shoko Ishikawa, UN Women Bangladesh Country Representative, in her opening remarks, highlighted the impressive IASC Gender and Age Marker (GAM) score of 74% as an attestation of significant contributions to Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG), however urged all to remain committed in monitoring indicators. Photo: UN Women/ Julian D’Silva

The event was opened by the UN Women Bangladesh Country Representative, Shoko Ishikawa, and Phedra Moon Morris, Head of Aid, High Commission of Canada. Discussions were shaped by [the six gender equality commitments](#) endorsed by the Strategic Executive Group (SEG) Co-chairs in 2018, with a view to identifying ways forward that government, humanitarian partners and donors should undertake to translate these into actions for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. A presentation on the Gender Hub’s analysis of the status of the implementation of these commitments was led by the ISCG Senior Coordinator, Nicole Epting.



Various gender specific publications, and visual material produced by NGOs and UN agencies were displayed at the event. Photo: UN Women / Julian D’Silva

Individual accounts of Rohingya female volunteers and other humanitarian actors – about the experience and challenges faced in the crisis so far in the Rohingya crisis response – were read out through story telling sessions. Plenary and group discussions saw recommendations being documented in terms of immediate and longer-term actions. Asa Torkelsson, UNFPA Representative facilitated an interactive summary session, and Steven Corliss, UNHCR Country Representative and SEG co-chair, and Paul O’Hagan, Humanitarian Advisor, DFID provided closing remarks. [Gender Reflection: Two years of the Rohingya Refugee Response](#) is now available based on inputs from the forum.

Further updates from UN Women Cox's Bazar

- On 16 July, UN Women - in partnership with Oxfam, ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB), Legal Action Worldwide and Rohingya Women's Welfare Society (RWWS) organized a **gathering of Rohingya women leaders** from new and old camps representing their different women's leader networks. The meeting which was also attended by the UN Resident Coordinator discussed common challenges, issues, demands and how to come together under one network to plan joint action to address these together for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. "If men have two arms, women have two arms too. We didn't know



Rohingya women leaders & humanitarian actors gather around in the UN Women MPWC, camp 4. Photo: UN Women / Allison Joyce

- we have rights before, but we have now learned about equality and discrimination, and will demand that our rights be respected" said one Rohingya Women leader. "I am so happy to be able to express myself like this today", said another with a big smile on her face. **Participants agreed to establish an informal umbrella network of Rohingya women leaders' and to meet regularly on a monthly basis.** A second meeting took place on 20 August with more focused discussions around the governance structure for the network and its key priority action areas including promoting women's leadership and decision-making, women's economic empowerment, education and addressing gender-based violence.
- In the context of the international Grand Bargain agreement which aims to improve the delivery and efficiency of aid and to work more directly with local and national responders, UN Women is conducting a research project on **Gender Transformative Humanitarian Action, Participation and Localization**. A UN Women team of researchers were on a field research mission in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar between 29 July – 16 August, to inform what is a participatory and community centered global study which also focuses on displacement crises in Colombia, Uganda and Jordan. They engaged affected women and men, community leaders and humanitarian actors among others and explored the community-based understandings of the complexities and contradictions around 'gender-transformative' interventions, towards contributing to conceptual clarity on what localization-focused and participation-centered approaches in refugee settings can look like and how these interventions can be further strengthened. The final study report will be published later this year.
 - A **tree plantation exercise** with support from the Site Management Sector and CiCs was carried out on 5 & 6 August, in and around all the five MPWC's administered by UN Women in partnership with BRAC and Action Aid Bangladesh. A variety of over 900 trees and flora were planted, including plumeria flowers, amalaki, gamhar and others for a greener environment in the camp surrounding areas.



The tree planting took place inside the MPWCs as well as MPWC surrounding areas. Photos: UN Women /BRAC

- **Advanced training for the Mental Health Service centre (MHSC) and One-Stop Crisis Centre (OCC) staff on protection** was rendered on 27-28 August, with support from UN Women in partnership with AAB. The key objectives of the 2-day training event training was to raise awareness among participants on different issues related to gender equality and protection and encourage participants to initiate positive practice in relation to gender equality and protection in their private and public spheres. 43 participants (16 female, 27 male) attended as trainees, from the OCC, Ministry of Women and Childrens Affairs (MoWCA), including fora members, AAB staff, psychosocial support (PSS) volunteers and other actors in Cox's Bazar.

Spotlight: Shamima Akter Jahan sparks a debate on women leading in the Rohingya crisis response



Meet Shamima Akter Jahan, Assistant Camp-in-charge (CiC). She is the first woman ever to carry out this role under the Office of The Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), underscoring the under-representation of women. Among other duties, she works to protect Rohingya refugees, particularly women and girls, from injustices such as Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). “I wanted to work in the camps”, she says with gusto.

A graduate in physics for both her degrees at Dhaka University, she was also an avid debater and a primary school teacher, before successfully passing a competitive selection and training process to be a member of the Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Cadre. Her father, a freedom fighter, fought during the Bangladesh Liberation War – a revolution and armed conflict which caused her mother to flee her home at the tender age of 9 – circumstantial accounts of which have influenced her as a person and helped relate to the plight of Rohingya refugees arriving in Cox’s Bazar in 2017.



Shamima Akter Jahan. Photo: UN Women / Allison Joyce

Shamima’s career transition is significant because it is a rare feat in Bangladesh. First, she was met with some resistance from the local administrative office to transfer out to Cox’s Bazar during a district posting in Bhola. Determined to be actively involved in the crisis response, she was eventually released but found herself limited to a desk job for 5 months in the RRRC office, prior to being deployed in 2 West, 2 East and Kutupalong refugee camps in 2018 as an assistant CiC. The experience however provided a grounding on matters related to camp governance. Looking back, she reckons this perhaps was a test for readiness to work in the refugee camps, especially as a female employee.

ON WORKING WITH MOSTLY MALE COLLEAGUES, SHAMIMA REMARKS: “THEY ARE ALL MALE, BUT THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR AS A WHOLE AND REFUGEE POPULATION HERE IS FEMALE-DOMINATED, MAKING MY JOB NECESSARY AND PERHAPS LESS COMPLICATED – BUT WE NEED ADDITIONAL FEMALE CICS”.

The refugee women and girls in Kutupalong, a camp in existence for nearly 3 decades, had never seen a female CiC, prompting a high number of visits to Shamima’s field desk - at which point the need for more female CiC’s dawned on her. She recalls, “while refugees appreciated my availability as a female CiC, people from NGOs etc. initially took a while to warm up to me”.

Unique challenges faced by scores of Rohingya women and girls who form more than 56% of the refugee population, indicates the urgency that more female CiC’s must be enlisted - considering women refugees are comfortable sharing their concerns only with female first responders. Child protection, 6-7 SGBV cases daily, conflict mediation, WASH and education are some of the aspects Shamima navigates through to ensure refugee women and girls, as well as men and boys, have a fair outcome to their problems. Marriages among Rohingya refugees in the camps go through an approval process overseen by CiC authorities, where a registration card is presented. She informs that child marriage remains a pressing issue to address, and cases where the age of adolescent girls as well as boys are deliberately overstated on the registration card, mostly due to parental influence and pressures, are frequently detected.

Shamima recommends a focus on raising gender awareness among Rohingya males, particularly youth, to address root causes behind discrimination against refugee women and girls. She also advises that UN Women expands its presence in all 34 camps, with interventions in gender equality, women empowerment, social cohesion, education and skills training. She urges the International community to, “build the identities of the Rohingya refugees, and help them return to their homeland with rights and citizenship”, adding, “of course we will work with them on the same too”.

UN Women will be seconding 5 gender officers to five Camps-in-Charges (CiCs) in Cox’s Bazar to ensure gender responsive governance and service delivery in the camps. In the upcoming year, UN Women will also provide gender training to CiCs, as well as assistant CiCs and their support staff, as part of the Joint Capacity Sharing Initiative led by the Site Management Sector, to bolster gender mainstreaming efforts.

Community leadership demonstrating change and progress



Roshida, a Rohingya community leader, steps out to work. Photo: UN Women / Allison Joyce

Roshida, 40, works as a Mahji (community leader) in Nayapara camp, and shares -

“Camp life has been very different. I'm happy that everyone respects me. They come to me when they have problems and if I can't solve them, I go to the Camp-in-Charge (CiC). People treat me as an authority figure and come to me

first, and I'm happy that I'm breaking barriers, but there are people who still don't allow women to step outside. There were no female volunteers before me, and people gave me a hard time. After I was elected, I convinced a lot of people that women can work and have power. I always try to protect women. We now have 50 women volunteers, out of about 200 men. Women go door to door fixing problems and providing information.”

She works on practical problems such as broken houses, and issues to do with water. It's been about nine months since Roshida has carried the role of a Mahji and she looks after 100 houses. “The biggest problem I run into again and again is men saying that women working outside the house is against the culture.”

A photo book documenting the lives of Rohingya women, their suffering and resilience, and UN Women's work was developed this quarter, essentially showcasing high resolution photographs and short stories of Rohingya refugees, as well as humanitarian actors in Cox's Bazar. Contributions from the Government of Japan and the People of Japan made this possible.

The e-copy of the photo book, titled “*I am better than before but inside my heart lies so much pain*” – *Stories of Rohingya women seeking refuge in Cox's Bazar*, can be viewed on UN Women's website: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/bangladesh>

The above account of Roshida, a Rohingya community leader is an extract from the photo book.

