

As the Rohingya Response of Bangladesh nears third year, the response has evolved from immediate emergency life-saving provisions to other supports (protection, health, nutrition etc). One aspect of this crisis is that majority are women and children (52% women & girls, 55% children under 18) (Rohingya Response Gender Analysis, Lulia, Mita et al, 2018). Thus, responses specific to needs of women and girls are of crucial importance. At the heart of this are Women and Girls' Safe Space (WGSS) locally called *shantikhana* (Center of Peace). As UNFPA defines:

**“A safe space is a formal or informal place where women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe. The term ‘safe,’ in the present context, refers to the absence of trauma, excessive stress, violence (or fear of violence), or abuse. It is a space where women and girls, being the intended beneficiaries, feel comfortable and enjoy the freedom to express themselves without the fear of judgment or harm.”**

CARE Bangladesh conducted an inter-agency study that analyzes collective experience of organizations serving survivors of GBV and other Rohingya women visiting WGSS to understand key successes, good practice, challenges and way-forward. The study was conducted in 3 stages:

## 1. METHODOLOGY

### A. SATISFACTION SURVEY

140 respondents from 4 camps  
17 WGSS frontline staff from 4 organizations: CARE, ActionAid, Muktl (for UNFPA) and BNWLA

### B. PRACTITIONERS' EXPERIENCE

Group discussion and workshop  
17 WGSS frontline staff: outreach workers, case workers, WGSS Volunteers

### C. EXPERTS' CONSULTATION

28 GBV professionals from 15 organizations representing 38 WGSS across 16 camps  
Learning, Challenges and Future

## 2. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

\*Findings are a representation of either 4 organizations from the satisfaction survey and inter-agency consultation with experts from 15 organizations including CARE Bangladesh.

### SERVICE AND ATTENDANCE

Average visits: 60 women & girls per week  
Service Portfolio: 42 different services and activities ranging from Psychosocial and recreational activities to support to GBV survivors.  
Camp-wise referral networks for services and inter-organizational coordination



### A. WOMEN FEEL SAFE AT WGSS

**97%** Feel Safe at WGSS

#### WHY?

- 84%** It is a women-only space/ men are NOT allowed
- 26%** Nearby home/ can travel alone
- 21%** What I say remains secret (Confidentiality/Privacy)
- 21%** Share both physical and mental problems

### B. MOST POPULAR SERVICES

**93%** Satisfied with services

#### Top 5 Recall

- 49%** Recreational activities/ sharing with others
- 39%** Response to GBV
- 39%** Women-specific health-services
- 36%** Technical Trainings
- 22%** Livelihood activities

### C. FAMILIES BENEFIT ALSO

**47%** Users are getting services that benefit their family members

#### Change Family Habits

- 64%** Cleanliness and personal hygiene
- 33%** Negative effects of child marriage, early marriage, forced marriage and polygamy
- 21%** Learned about livelihoods that involves self and family



### 3. HOW THE WOMEN CHANGED AT WGSS

#### A. CHANGE COMMUNITY

- 35% Learned how to help other women
- 46% Spread awareness on cleanliness & hygiene
- 20% Encouraged other women to come to WGSS
- 12% Learned about personal rights and freedoms

"A neighbor of mine was regularly assaulted by her husband and I heard it. After sharing it at *shantikhana*, I brought her there where she received counselling and took her to Camp-in-charge where they took steps to stop it from happening again."  
~ A woman in Camp 15

#### B. CHANGE WITHIN FAMILY

- 81% Changed habits on nutrition and hygiene
- 17% Joint decision-making

#### C. CHANGE TO SELF

- 82% Recover their mental peace, process the trauma of displacement
- 23% Mentally transform/ eye-opening experience/ broadened horizon
- 16% Reduced family discord due to managing stress better

### 4. RESPONSIVENESS AND QUALITY OF STAFF

Said, "WGSS workers are highly protective of my confidentiality"

95%

#### A. SPEAK UP AND GET SERVICE

- 61% Learn to seek healthcare services
- 43% GBV survivors' response and services
- 18% Disaster preparedness information

#### B. JUSTICE AT WGSS

47% Reported having full opportunity to report  
**HOW?**

44% When I came with problem, they cooperatively/ jointly/ arbitration, solved it.

29% They try to address incidents. If they can't, Apara (WGSS case workers) show us the way/ refer us to those who can provide Good/fair judgement;

#### C. OBSTACLES: MEN'S VIEWPOINT

27% Men have negative opinion about WGSS

#### WHY?

Women who visit WGSS will become disobedient

Women will not maintain modesty if they go outside regularly

Women will indulge in gossip and create trouble at home

They will start making demands on us; bringing discord to our home

### 5. WHAT THE EXPERTS' SAID

#### A. LEARNING: WHAT WORKS

- Community engagement enhances effectiveness of WGSS
- Balancing women's issues with life and livelihood skills creates an attractive service package
- Interpersonal relationships with other organizations increases effectiveness of referral systems

As a "woman-only" space, WGSS created curiosity among men & boys in communities - resulting in damaging rumors and pestering by boys around WGSS. So, the organization "NGO FORUM" shut down operation for one day and opened it to all in community. Guided tour through WGSS sated curiosity, cleared suspicions and operations became smoother

#### B. FUTURE: RECOMMENDATIONS

**Activities & Services:** Multi-purpose center that builds entrepreneurship and leadership. However, others prefer WGSS remain focused on Psychosocial Support Services (PSS) and GBV response.

**Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, Learning:** Structured Data Collection Tool, coordinated legal support, increased sharing of best practices and exchange visits among practitioners.

**Coordination:** CIC & GBV subsector coordination to finalize SOP (In process for over 1.5yrs) and Memo of WGSS services, updated referral pathways and updating inter-agency referral form.

**Capacity:** Orientation on GBV concepts and practice for CIC, Law Enforcement and healthcare professionals.

