



WFP in Cox's Bazar | Gender Brief

Since 25 August 2017, more than 745,000 Rohingya refugees have fled Myanmar and crossed into Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Not only has the pace of new arrivals made this the fastest growing refugee crisis, the concentration of refugees in Cox's Bazar is one of the densest in the world. And **52 percent** of the refugee population are **women** (Inter-Sector Coordination Group).

WFP in Cox's Bazar—In Numbers¹

General Food Distribution (350,000 beneficiaries)



52 percent are women.

Out of the 770 staff engaged it is estimated that at least **50 percent** are women.

E-Vouchers (504,000 beneficiaries)



89 percent of all principal recipients are women.

Nutrition Assistance (All beneficiaries are pregnant and breastfeeding women and Children under five (CU5))



Refugee women: **31,884**
Host community women: **1,500**

Out of the 2000 staff volunteers engaged at least **60 percent** are women.

School Feeding (Beneficiaries: 144,000 in host, 220,000 refugees)



In the camps, **50 percent** of students are girls, and in the host community, **53 percent** are girls.

40 percent of the school management committee are women.

Why incorporate gender perspective?

- Gender perspective facilitates a **bottom-up approach** and a more **inclusive community level participation** to programming.
- In the host community, **Enhancing Food Security and Nutrition (EFSN)** project targeted **20,000** women over a period of **24 months**. Participants receive cash for training to initiate income generating activities. This is complemented with regular group consultations to discuss major challenges women face in the local communities. Till now, women groups have saved over USD 557,000 in their respective group bank accounts.
- In the camps, **Self reliance Programme** targeted 14,000 individuals, mostly women, to strengthen capacities and build self-resilience through portable skills training.

Where do we stand?

- WFP assistance cards are issued in the name of the **senior woman** of the household, which contributes to enhanced decision making capabilities of women and control over resources.
- Every general food assistance point, and Help Desks are facilitated by at least **one women staff/volunteer**, which serves as a safe haven for women.
- Nutrition assistance is provided for **pregnant and breastfeeding women and children under five** to improve nutritional and food security status.
- In the school feeding programme, It has been noted that **attendance rate** increased by **81 percent** for girls in host community schools.
- 11 WFP beneficiaries from the Livelihoods Programme are participating to the **Farmers' Market** pilot project in the camps. They sell their crops to an average of 25,000 refugees every month.

¹Figures as of February 2020.

➔ The Way Forward

- WFP plans to transition 100 percent of refugee population to e-voucher modality thereby providing more choices to the beneficiaries and enhancing dignity.
- Develop more inclusive programmes, such as **FAO and WFP growing partnership**, wherein local supply chain — host community farmers, including women — can be integrated to provide additional food assistance to refugees through the Farmers' Market. In 2020, more markets are planned around the camps.
- In 2020, the self-reliance for refugees programme will engage an additional **25,000 participants**, targeting vulnerable households across the camps, and the EFSN programme will target an **additional 10,000 women**.
- Increase participation of women volunteers in disaster risk reduction and site maintenance works. Presently, over **10 percent volunteers in Disaster Risk Reduction (cash for work)** are female.
- Engage in wider **public advocacy** for gender mainstreaming, in line with this WFP organized a cooking competition (with the minimum food basket and cooking stoves) on women's day between all the head of offices of UN agencies in Cox's Bazar.



From Farm to Markets: A Journey re-told



Stepping out of their courtyards, they have re-discovered their potential and redefined their identities.

"Markets have always been seen as a 'man's place'. For women to go to the market is very rare. Let's not talk about selling vegetables in a market place. That is almost impossible for any woman in my society" says Popi Barua (25)

an Enhanced Food Security and Nutrition (EFSN) beneficiary, participating in WFP Farmers' Market pilot initiative.

It was around 4 pm when we met with Popi. It was the end of her first day at the WFP Farmers' Market and she was packing what was left of her eggplants. ***"Today was exhausting, but I was very happy to be selling my vegetables to Rohingyas who do not have access to them easily"***.

We were very captivated by how enthusiastic and popular she was at the market. We noticed that she has most of the fresh-looking vegetables out of all traders in the market. When she finally finished with the day, she told us about her observations:

"Today I studied the behaviour of customers, and from tomorrow I will make sure to bring more cucumbers cauliflower, bananas and chili. These are the most popular and were my top sellers."

Popi Barua is among the **11 other WFP female farmers** selling on a daily basis in the Farmers' Market. They were selected by their EFSN groups based on their people-skills, their geographical location, and availability during the day.

After going back to speak with her just within three week's time, we noticed she had the most customers out of all 24 traders and farmers..

We struggled to get a few minutes of her time to talk to her, until her husband took over the sales. ***"My wife has always had a business mentality. She is great at it and I am only here to help and support her."***

Popi also explained to us that the vegetables are not only hers, but other EFSN participants' as well.

"I convince them to give me their crops and the I repay them at the end of the day. I can see I am having a positive impact in my community. They look up to me for selling so many vegetables everyday."



Bridging Boundaries: A conversation between a refugee and Bangladeshi worker

In many ways their lifestyles might be different, but their food habits, culture and religion speaks of the sympathy that goes beyond territorial boundaries. Alma Tahir, living in Jamtoli village in the host community, is a participant in the Enhancing Food Security and Nutrition Programme (EFSN). Close to Alma's EFSN group discussion site, is the learning centre where Nur, a refugee woman, takes her two daughters enrolled in the school feeding programme.

Though they barely know each other, now they turn into one another's confidante. From household chores to relationship with their husbands, the conversation takes off.

On being quizzed about whether they would like to explore starting a business together, after a moment's silence, they reflect that "it would actually be cost-effective and interesting".

As moments pass by, Nur reflects how through "a tiresome journey of walking through the jungles we reached Cox's Bazar, which has transformed into our safe haven".

Though far from circumstances with which home

Nur knows the length and breadth of the refugee camps, while Alma has thorough understanding of the villages. If they could join hands, their venture would reach considerable heights.

Through **Safe Access to Fuel and Energy Project (SAFE) Plus**, WFP, with IOM and FAO, provides Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) which helps circumvent women and adolescent girls from the host community, as well as refugees, from resorting to negative coping strategies, a primary protection concern in the camps. Additionally, access to sustainable fuel builds a smoke free environment for cooking. Over **14,000 households in the host community** have received LPGs via SAFE so far, as well as 67,000 households in the camps.

"The toughest times of our lives, 2017 influx, has taught us to endure and develop a sense of tolerance. At the end of the day, we are all humans, and we need to constantly break boundaries, however subtly, wrapped with silence"

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Alma Tahir, with her EFSN group. They meet every week to discuss their problems and undertake basic literacy trainings, complemented with sessions where they just speak of their problems and come up with ways to handle them.

16 Days of Activism: Women at the forefront of fighting Gender-Based Violence



Breaking silences

As part of the global 2019 **16 days of activism against gender-based violence** campaign, WFP in Cox's Bazar brought together series of events throughout the sixteen days including awareness sessions with Rohingya women and men, cultural evening, inter-agency women Solidarity and Networking Event and more.

An innovative activity from the livelihoods programme's training centres in the host villages in Cox's Bazar:

The session started with a group discussion where participants opened up about the specific challenges they faced and how joining the programme and forming the group has been of immense help. Each one of them had overcome unfathomable challenges and struggles but the spirit of striving through has made them come this far.

This was followed by a participatory game, where participants were made to walk from one side of the track to the other while balancing a marble on a spoon.

"Having an income gave me the confidence to stand-up for myself and my rights".

On the track, there were obstacles with written phrases such as "Sexual violence", "Rape", "Orthodox traditions". At a later stage, the obstacles were removed, which made reaching the finish line much easier.

In the discussions that followed, they shared examples from their lives of how similar obstacles make life more and more difficult but one has to keep striving and reach the finish line, at the end.



Power is everywhere!

Reeka Barua lives with her two young children: a 16 year old boy, and a 7 year old girl, and husband.

"My husband used to find me very weak and ill-treat me whenever I would ask him for money. But now, ever since he has started accompanying me to the group discussions, he respects my rights, and I feel he has begun to understand my role and position in the house."

Reeka used to find herself at the receiving end but after she started her own business of vegetable gardening, life has changed significantly.

One of the 20,000 other participants of WFP's livelihoods programme where participants from the host community are provided with life-skills training and supported with grants to start their own businesses, she finds herself much more confident and self-dependent now:

"I want to promote more and more women like me to participate in these activities and earn their own living. I promise to spread the word and do my bit to better the situation."



WFP organized a friendly football match as part of the 16 days of activism between male WFP staff and Rohingyas. The objective was to create awareness to the community on gender based violence related concerns especially to the youth who can play a big role in fighting the vice.

Sneak peek: 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence



Rohingya men participating in a friendly football match that was followed by a discussion relating to Gender-Based Violence.



Host community women expressing themselves through art, an essential tool for expression.



A group discussion organized by the Gender unit, where more than 15 women spoke about the daily challenges they face in their communities and how have they been able to overcome those.



Emotional performance during the WFP cultural event about experiences of victims of acid attacks.



The opening day of the 16 days of activism at WFP. A morning full of discussions, games and artistry!

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