



Gender Dynamics Analysis on Accessing and Exercising HLP Rights in Rohingya Camps

Key programmatic extracts and advocacy takeaways

1. Summary of the Study

This study was conducted by a Bangladeshi NGO, Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), in partnership with NRC Bangladesh, in October 2024. The primary objectives of this study were to identify key advocacy messaging and to provide recommendations for enhancing protection programmes and promoting gender equality in access to HLP rights to the relevant stakeholders.

A mixed-methods approach was used to collect and analyse data from 12 camps located in Teknaf and Ukhiya. It included **384 respondents** for quantitative analysis and **12 KIIs, 12 FGDs, and 7 case studies** for qualitative data. The quantitative data was analysed in Excel, while the qualitative data underwent a narrative analysis. The study reveals significant gender and socio-economic disparities in access to HLP rights. Most respondents were aged 25-35 (38.7%). Notably, 26.6% of the population reported disabilities, with women more affected than men. Educational levels showed significant gaps, as 64% lacked formal education, and women had higher illiteracy rates (84.1% in Teknaf, 81.0% in Ukhiya).

Findings highlight and provide extensive evidence on gender disparities in accessing HLP rights, for women and girls residing in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The entrenched patriarchal structures, financial dependency, and fear of exploitation, make it difficult for women to assert their rights effectively. Overcrowding, poor infrastructure, and a lack of privacy contribute to numerous challenges faced by women and girls, including inadequate sanitation, gender-based violence (GBV), and the absence of safe spaces. Barriers such as cultural norms and the lack of legal identity further exacerbate the conditions and vulnerabilities of women, particularly women-headed households.

2. Key findings

Some of the key programming considerations include:

Most vulnerable groups to be prioritised:

61.7% of respondents said that women are more frequently affected compared to men. The study exposes that women (13.3%) and widowed or divorced women (13.5%) face significant barriers, while people with disabilities (11.1%) and the elderly (9.6%) are also frequently identified as being vulnerable.

Women and girls in Teknaf are more vulnerable on HLP issues:

Women in Teknaf are particularly marginalised, with 83.9% reporting limited control, compared to women in Ukhiya with 65.8%. Gender disparity is also a prominent factor, with 58.7% of women in Teknaf believing men have more opportunities to acquire HLP rights, compared to only 1.6% who think the opportunities (between men and women) are equal.

LGBTQI+ community members are facing undue prejudice dealing with HLP challenges:

31.2% of respondents said that bias and prejudice against LGBTQI+ individuals was carried out by the mediators or community leaders. Dismissing their claims due to religious and cultural beliefs was also found to be prominent.

Awareness gap on HLP disparity against women:

Awareness of formal or informal avenues to acquire HLP rights was found to be limited, especially for women. As well, the study found significant differences between the camp locations. In Teknaf, only 18.1% of respondents are aware of such avenues, compared to 34.5% in Ukhiya. A substantial 63.5% of women in Teknaf report being unsure about available legal pathways, signalling a major information gap.

Access to Justice mechanism preferences in Teknaf and Ukhiya:

The reliance on *Majhis* for support was found evident across both areas' camps, with 35.7% of women in Teknaf and 34.1% in Ukhiya turning to them for HLP support. In contrast, religious leaders play a larger role in Teknaf (31.6%), while the Camp in Charge (CiC) holds more influence over these issues in Ukhiya (25.2%).

There is a higher reliance on informal sources in Teknaf, while semi-formal channels play a larger role in Ukhiya for information dissemination:

This study found that community leaders (28.3%) and religious figures (22%) are key sources of information for women in Teknaf, while in Ukhiya, the CiC is a more dominant source, especially for men (34.9%).

Social dynamics impact on women and girls' disparity:

Women also face specific barriers such as restricted movement (35.4% in Ukhiya), patriarchal structures (13.3% in Teknaf), and financial dependency on male relatives (8.7% in Teknaf and 11.4% in Ukhiya).

Who violates the HLP rights within camp area:

Host community members (17.2%), local authorities (13.0%), landowners (11.1%), are the main groups who violate these rights. Meanwhile, men are more likely to encounter land-grabbing (12.2%) and physical violence (20.7%) during property disputes. Armed groups often force eviction of the Rohingyas from where they live in the camp.

Men are more likely to be exposed to violence dealing with HLP disputes: Men are perceived as having more control over land and housing (32.1%). However, the threat of violence remains a significant concern for men, particularly in disputes involving encroachment, where they are most likely facing physical violence (20.7%).

Link between gender-based violence and HLP disputes, requiring specialised service including psychosocial support: Gender-based violence (GBV) is a key concern, with 21.5% of women in Teknaf and 16.9% in Ukhiya citing heightened GBV risks due to unequal HLP access. Mental health challenges are also prevalent, with 14.6% of women in Teknaf and 14.1% in Ukhiya reporting increased stress and anxiety linked to economic dependence and exposure to violence.

Effectiveness and allocation of legal aid programmes for women: In Ukhiya, 26.9% of women felt that resources were poorly allocated, compared to 19.4% in Teknaf. Additionally, 32.8% of women in Ukhiya and 30.6% in Teknaf believe that outreach efforts fail to address their needs. Insufficient legal support further exacerbates these challenges, with 19.5% of women in Teknaf and 12.6% in Ukhiya identifying it as a barrier.

Developed coping mechanisms: For example, quietly asserting their rights, seeking support from sympathetic male relatives (36.6%), and forming women's support groups. More than half of the respondents (54.8%) were found relying on NGOs for financial aid and support in navigating legal procedures, while some engaged in bartering or pooling resources to overcome economic challenges. To avoid administrative hurdles, women often bypass semi-formal systems (as CiC) or turn to intermediaries for help, for example a women leader and community group. There is significant potential to mobilise willing male leaders (53.1%, from the other data findings) as advocates for women's rights, which could significantly improve outcomes for Rohingya women seeking to assert their HLP rights.

The most common types of HLP violations: Rental disputes, forced evictions, land-grabbing, and restricted access to housing, lack of required identity documents, destruction of properties that disproportionately impact most vulnerable groups, limiting their mobility, safety, and ability to apply or claim their rights. A large portion of the population (42.9%) lived on public land without ownership claims by host community, and 39.8% paid rent, with women households more affected.

HLP consideration for restitution plan in Myanmar

The main concerns about the HLP rights stated by the respondents, if returned to Myanmar, include:

- fear of violence and retaliation (28.0%)
- fear of not being able to identify their previous land/house (21.2%)
- discrimination based on ethnicity (16.8%)
- loss of property (16.2%)

Nearly 80% of the respondents said that women will face more difficulties reclaiming their HLP rights in Myanmar. International legal support, community based legal aid, women focused restitution programmes, and involving female leaders in the process could be helpful in protecting HLP rights for women in Myanmar if returned.

3. Advocacy Recommendations

To the Government of Bangladesh:

1. **Clarify and formalise Land Tenure Agreements:** Working with local authorities and humanitarian agencies to develop and clarify legal frameworks applicable to camp areas and formalise land tenure agreements for Rohingya refugees.
2. **Ensure that any return and repatriation plans are gender sensitive:** Any repatriation planning, along with being voluntary, informed, safe and dignified, must also consider gender-intricate dimensions, provide legal aid regarding citizenship and address gender-based barriers to reclaiming HLP rights in Myanmar.

To Sectors, UN agencies and donors:

3. **Recognise HLP as a protection and cross-sector gender concern:** Support the mainstreaming of HLP across all sectors of humanitarian assistance. Recognise that HLP is a protection concern, especially for those from vulnerable groups (women, older people, transgender, people with disability, child-headed and woman-headed households etc.) highlighting that women and girls' HLP issues extend beyond housing and shelter, and encompass broader protection and legal empowerment needs. As one of the most vulnerable groups to serious HLP rights violations, women require representation and a voice in decision-making, representation and dispute resolution.
4. **Increase women's self-reliance opportunities:** Continued advocacy for women to access higher education, skills learning and income-generating opportunities to improve their economic standing as well as social status and self-reliance.
5. **Increase funding for protection services:** including legal aid for HLP and strengthening the capacity of NGOs and legal aid organisations to provide legal services to women in HLP-related disputes.

To NRC and other organisations:

6. **Engage male allies:** Involving men, especially community and religious leaders, in HLP-rights advocacy to foster a more supportive environment for women asserting their rights. Addressing patriarchal norms in camps requires engaging influential men and leaders with well-crafted strategies to shift community attitudes toward gender equality.
7. **Gender-sensitive programming and delivery:** Ensure that programmes consider the distinct needs of women, girls and the LGBTQI+ community. For example: offering services in women-friendly spaces and appropriate timings, promoting female counsellors/support workers and their representation in leadership roles and decision-making processes related to HLP issues.
8. **Gender-sensitive training for informal justice actors and partnerships with organisations engaged in women empowerment:** Provide training to community leaders (*Majhis, Imams*) and other informal justice system actors on gender equality and HLP rights, through partnership with organisations engaged in women's empowerment. This approach will mitigate bias and increase the fairness of dispute resolutions involving Rohingya women.