As the Rohingya Response of Bangladesh nears the two-year mark, 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 is 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, MuktI (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

95% Said, “WGSS workers are highly protective of my confidentiality”

B. JUSTICE AT WGSS

47% Reported having full opportunity to report

HOW?

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

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;

29%

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 stated 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 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.