



DeCID paper N° 2

# Accounting for Gender-Specific Diversity through the Participatory Design Method in the Provision of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Facilities

Applying a Critical Feminist Analysis to OXFAM's Women's Social Architecture Project in Cox's Bazar Refugee Camps in Bangladesh

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This paper is part of an MSc dissertation submitted to the Bartlett Development Planning Unit at University College London. It was developed by the author as part of a fellowship with the DeCID project led by Principal Investigator, Dr Andrea Rigon. It is part of a dissertation fellowship arrangement where students work on a topic of interest to an external partner or research project. CatalyticAction is the partner and Joana Dabaj and Riccardo Conti are the partner's advisors.

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The DeCID project aims to develop a new approach for the participatory design of social infrastructure for children in urban areas affected by displacement. In partnership with humanitarian actors, local communities, municipalities and academics, the DeCID team developed a practical handbook to support those involved in the co-design. DeCID is a project led by The Bartlett Development Planning Unit (UCL) and CatalyticAction, and funded by UKRI through the Global Challenges Research Fund.

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## ABSTRACT

### Accounting for Gender-Specific Diversity through the Participatory Design Method in the Provision of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Facilities

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The recent enforced migration of large numbers of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh has disproportionately affected the underprivileged and the marginalised, thereby posing additional challenges to the relief effort of having to ensure an equitable distribution of scarce resources to a diverse group. Rohingya women, and adolescent girls in particular, who face particular barriers because of the intersectionality of their age and gender, have been considered as appropriate study material to investigate how Participatory Design (PD) methods deal with diversity in a displacement context. Since these barriers can be (re)produced through the safety and security of access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, OXFAM's Women's Social Architecture (WSA) project was chosen as a case study. This is a PD project, whose aim was to co-design socially conscious and culturally appropriate WASH facilities that would provide safe and secure access to Rohingya women and adolescent girls in Cox's Bazar refugee camps in Bangladesh. The paper identifies challenges and vulnerabilities relevant to the safety and security of access to WASH facilities, which are divided into groups according to four capability-associated dimensions adapted from a framework developed by GAGE 2017. The data is then critically analysed using Nancy Fraser's feminist social justice framework in terms of the extent to which the PD methods identified and addressed evidence of pre-existing gender-specific misrecognition and maldistribution leading to a disparity of participation within the 4 capability-associated dimensions. The analysis shows that the particular PD methods used by the WSA project identified gender-specific injustices in the WASH sector following the initial emergency response to the refugee crisis in all four dimensions and that parity of participation was generally restored through the interventions instituted by the project in most but not in all cases. The paper concludes with eight gender-specific recommendations, which were extracted from the critical feminist analysis, the first five of which relate to the emergency response and the last three to the PD process.



# 01

## INTRODUCTION

*“The [Rohinyas] most excluded persecuted minority in the world”*

OHCHR, 2017

Myanmar is located in Southeast Asia, bordering China to the north and Bangladesh to the west (Htin Aung, Steinberg and Aung-Thwin, 2020). The Rohingya people are a Muslim ethnic minority group from Myanmar that mostly live in the Rakhine State on the west coast (Chan, 2005). The Rohingyas have been victims of systematic discrimination causing severe persecution and targeted violence since the 19th century when Myanmar was under British colonial rule (Blakemore, 2019). After gaining its independence in 1948, the military dictatorship that followed resulted in a surge of virulent nationalism. The Rohingyas were denied representation and recognition as a distinct ethnic group, thus stripping them of their identity and basic human rights. Despite the holding of free elections and the return to power of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2015, the situation erupted in August 2017 when a violent military onslaught against the Rohingyas in the Rakhine State led to their forced displacement (ibid.). The military killed, maimed, raped, arrested and burnt entire villages culminating in the mass exodus to Bangladesh, and in particular to Cox Bazar, a town on the east coast. With no sign of the crisis abating, the refugees are now residing in formal and informal shelters.

The Rohingya crisis has disproportionately affected women, adolescent girls and other marginalised and diverse groups, such as the elderly and disabled. It is therefore the aim of this paper to explore intersectionality within the refugee community by focusing on women and adolescent girls. Women are generally underrepresented in society because of persisting gender inequalities (UN Women, 2018), while adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable because of the intersection of their age and gender at a time when they are undergoing pivotal physical and mental transformations (GAGE, 2017). They face major challenges, including gender-based violence (GBV), sexual and reproductive health (SRH) issues, unreasonable demands because of expected gender roles and restricted freedom of movement. Since these barriers can be (re)produced through the safety and security of access to WASH facilities, the paper will investigate whether their design is considered appropriate from the cultural and social point of view. It will then examine how an attempt was made to reduce these inequalities and create socially transformative change by providing improved facilities through a participatory design (PD) project chosen as a case study. The research questions are formulated to find out the extent to which the PD methods used in the case study were able to identify and address evidence of gender-specific injustice.

The paper is divided into five sections. Following the introduction, the second section presents the literature review, which defines the relevant terms, discusses the challenges and vulnerabilities associated with diversity and finally identifies the research gaps and sets the research questions. The third section briefly discusses the theory of feminist critique and the concept of intersectionality before describing Nancy Fraser's framework of distribution and recognition leading to parity of participation. The fourth section outlines the details of the Women's Social Architecture (WSA) project, which represents the case study, and uses Nancy Fraser's critical feminist approach to analyse the participatory design methods used in the project under the four capability-associated dimensions. The fifth and final section presents a recapitulation and the conclusions of the paper. The desk-based study limited the depth of detail and lack of data that could be subjected to analysis which presented issues in addressing intersectionality and risked overlooking hidden dynamics or making assumptions.

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**The crisis situation disproportionately affects women and girls and the most vulnerable and marginalised Rohingya population groups by reinforcing, perpetuating and exacerbating pre-existing persistent gender inequalities, gender-based violence and discrimination.**

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# 02

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a review of the relevant literature regarding the challenges that stem from diversity faced by women and adolescent girls in displacement contexts with particular reference to safety and security. These will be categorised into four dimensions: Voice and Agency, Bodily Integrity and Freedom from Violence, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Psychosocial Well-being. It will then discuss the PD methods being used to address these issues and will conclude by identifying the research gap and defining the research questions.

People are obliged to leave their homes for a variety of reasons, including natural disasters, civil wars, ethnic cleansing and droughts (Maria Pinto et al. 2014). Displacement can increase vulnerability and reduce resilience, which can be felt by both the home and host community. As Maria Pinto et al. (2014, p.851) declares,

*A vulnerable community is one in which the risk or shock compromises the capacity to preserve the structure of that community, while a resilient community is one that can absorb the shock and recover*

Within communities, some inequalities cause particular individuals or groups of individuals to be more vulnerable than others, such as socio-economic disparities, cultural differences, age and gender inequalities.

Approximately 52% of the Rohingya displaced population are women and girls (Plan International, Monash GPS, 2018). UN Women (2018, p.1) argues that:

*The crisis situation disproportionately affects women and girls and the most vulnerable and marginalised Rohingya population groups by reinforcing, perpetuating and exacerbating pre-existing persistent gender inequalities, gender-based violence and discrimination*

Adolescence, which the World Health Organisation (WHO) defines as the ages between 10-19 years, is an important period of growth and development where young people begin to form their sense of identity, experience new opportunities and develop extensive social networks (International Rescue Committee, 2017). However, the intersection of age and gender makes adolescent girls particularly vulnerable in this context.

Development strategies started to adopt a more gendered focus approach in more recent years. The Women In Development (WID) approach in the 1960s in Europe and North America aimed to better 'integrate women into economic development by focusing on the income generation for women' (Momsen, 2009, p.12). At this time

the international agenda equated eradicating poverty with economic productivity and made the assumption that women in the global south had the spare time to undertake such wealth-generating projects. This rather insular perspective was further criticised for assuming that women from different cultural and social backgrounds would all be similarly empowered through ‘gendered’ interventions, thereby ignoring diversity and in some cases creating even more inequality by overlooking the most vulnerable (Sulley, 2018). A shift in discourse in the 1970s from a labour-centred, quasi-Marxist understanding, placing the emphasis on resource redistribution, to more culture and identity-based conception, placing the emphasis on identity recognition (Fraser, 2007), led to the Gender and Development (GAD) approach. This focused on reshaping gender roles and relations that were embedded in unequal power structures. Momsen (2009) argues that the common overarching theme of gender is female subordination for all societies. How this power is expressed is dependent on the specific community, and thus gender roles and identities will vary in different social and spatial spheres.

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## Women and adolescent Rohingya refugees are particularly threatened and vulnerable due to the intersection of their age and gender.

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### 2.1 Security and Safety

*“The security of one person, one community, one nation rests on the decisions of many others”*

Commission on Human Security, 2003, p.2

There has been a long-standing debate in defining the terms ‘security’ and ‘safety’. Although security and safety have much in common, they are often confused and wrongly used interchangeably. Security refers to the protection of individuals whereas safety is understood as the feeling of being protected (HSE, 2018). Thus, security is the means or process and the level of safety is the outcome. The main distinction is that safety has an emotional dimension while security is seen more as a physical shield. Furthermore, Kuntze et al., (2015) contend security is an external affair with security measures protecting individuals from external threats, whereas safety is an internal feeling and an individual may feel unsafe even if there are security measures in place. Women and adolescent Rohingya refugees are particularly threatened and vulnerable due to the intersection of their age and gender. Their capacity to cope is out of their control and there are limited security measures in place from them. The following section will look deeper into the challenges and vulnerabilities Rohingya women and adolescent girls face which may contribute to them feeling unsafe.

## 2.2 Challenges and Vulnerabilities

### 2.2.1. Voice and Agency

The Voice and Agency theme explores the capacity of women and adolescent girls to participate meaningfully within the refugee camps (Guglielm et al., 2019). Adolescent girls often surrender voice and agency as conservative social norms and expectations force them to become more docile and obedient to maintain a good reputation (ibid.) and are therefore usually the last to be consulted and are provided with the least amount of information (UN Women, 2018). Their voice and agency are restricted by having limited access to public spaces and freedom of movement. This is particularly prevalent among those who have married early or do not attend school. Rohingya adolescent girls are 65% less likely to leave their camp area compared to boys (Guglielm et al., 2019). In a study conducted by GAGE, 2019 in Cox's Bazar, a 16-year-old girl commented: "We are not even allowed to go out, forget about becoming [a] doctor, [a] teacher" (Guglielm et al., 2019, p.6). Voice and Agency are highly dependent on age, with older girls who have reached puberty having less freedom of movement over boys and younger girls. For cultural reasons, older girls must be fully covered and carry umbrellas to veil themselves. Cultural and religious norms reduce the freedom of movement as soon as adolescent girls start menstruating (Guglielmi et al., 2020b). For example, the practice of purdah involves the seclusion of women and girls who have reached puberty from public spaces to avoid any communication with men (Guglielm et al., 2019). Although humanitarian aid agencies have set up gender quotas to promote female community engagement and social integration, many women are still restricted from participating in community meetings. Community made decisions are often taken by the elders or more senior members of the camp, thus presenting an intersection between gender and age hierarchies. Furthermore, there is a lack of female role models to show adolescent girls and young women alternative pathways. This stems partly from low female political representations, but also from the fact that local and personal leaders, including teachers, who can have a powerful influence on younger people, tend to be disproportionately male, with only 22.8% of all secondary teachers across all low-income countries being female (GAGE, 2017).

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**Adolescent girls often surrender voice and agency as conservative social norms and expectations force them to become more docile and obedient to maintain a good reputation.**

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### 2.2.2. Bodily Integrity and Freedom from Violence

Bodily Integrity and Freedom from Violence focus on the protection of women and adolescent girls from unconsented Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)(Gage, 2017). This refers to any ‘physical, emotional, psychological or sexual act that is done against a person’s will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relations’ (UNHCR, 2020 p.1). SGBV includes, but is not limited to, forms of sexual harassment, child marriage and domestic violence (Guglielmi et al., 2020b). These issues affect all age groups but are most prominent in adolescence. ACAPS (2019) found that across all camps in Cox’s Bazar adolescent girl participants had expressed a fear of harassment, with only 24% of girls feeling safe in the community (Guglielmi et al., 2020b). Although the sense of fear is heightened at night, many parents will not allow their daughters to walk around the camps due to safety concerns even during the day. An 18-year-old girl in Cox’s Bazar explained: “we don’t go anywhere because of boys” (Guglielmi et al., 2020b p.5). Multiple studies have highlighted the potential of the social stigma caused by harassment to jeopardise the marital prospects of the girls with the associated negative economic impact on the family finances (Girls Not Brides, 2016). Even when married, women and girls remain at risk from increasing levels of domestic violence, which has now become the norm in displaced communities and has been attributed to a lack of employment and financial pressures (House, 2019). Some unmarried adolescents are exposed to physical violence from their parents when they fail to meet cultural expectations and social norms.

### 2.2.3. Sexual and reproductive health (SRH)

The Sexual and Reproductive health (SRH) theme highlights knowledge, access and awareness regarding female bodily functions, including menstrual hygiene management (MHM), general health support and birth control. These result in high levels of maternal morbidity and mortality, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancy. Data collected by the ISCG in 2019 found a gap in SRH knowledge across all locations, with only 47% of older girls and 42% of married adolescents understanding contraception (ISCG WASH Cluster, 2020). Many studies report that adolescent boys are not exposed to information regarding female bodily changes. For example, a 14-year-old boy noted: “why would I know about girls?” (Guglielmi et al., 2020a, p.10) suggesting that the information may be gender-specific and superficial.

Adolescent girls are particularly challenged as they go through puberty due to the taboo attached to menstrual practices resulting in women being secretive and discreet during menstruation. Limited availability and access to safe, sanitary supplies can lead to women and girls being exposed to the risk of infection from poor, unhygienic menstrual practices. In recent years, the provision of information regarding MHM in Cox’s Bazar camps has improved due to ongoing support from humanitarian actors supplying information and sanitary materials. In 2019, over 90% of women and girls received MHM supplies, with 85% of them expressing no barriers in accessing them (ISCG WASH Cluster, 2020). Yet, it was reported that the distribution of materials

was not always consistent and some of the ‘hygiene kits’ did not cater for individual needs, instead, they were quantified to the average household.

Humanity & Inclusion (2019) reported that Rohingya girls are underrepresented in the camps due to cultural norms restricting them from accessing SRH and other safe space information services. Disabled women struggle to get access to health care services in the camps with 100% reporting either a lack of accessible facilities, long distances and lengthy wait times. Moreover, the same study highlighted a lack of knowledge within the agencies in identifying persons with disabilities and an inability to map out their location (ibid.).

#### **2.2.4. Psychosocial well-being**

Psychosocial well-being refers to the ‘internal emotional capacity and external social support’ (Gage, 2017, p.14) available for women and adolescent girls. According to WHO (2014), adolescent girls are more likely to suffer mental health disorders, including depression and anxiety than adolescent boys. There are multiple reasons for this, including rising oestrogen levels with puberty, menstruation-related bullying and lack of family support. GAGE (2017), found that married girls are much more likely to feel psychological distress because they report that their husbands fail to recognise their family’s needs. This is exacerbated by the fact that girls are culturally and socially restricted from leaving their homes, have concerns about child marriage and have reported experiencing menstruation-related harassment at school by peers and/or teachers adding to the level of stress (House, 2019). Furthermore, they have limited scope and opportunity to explore their interests and hobbies, especially when they start to have parental responsibilities. Their vulnerabilities to SGBV can add to their sense of fear, anxiety and psychosocial trauma.

### **2.3 Participatory Design Methods**

Over the years, PD methods have attempted to identify, engage and empower vulnerable groups and individuals in various development projects. Participation engages stakeholders, namely users, designers, developers and planners in a process to create a product that meets the needs and is appropriate for the users’ cultural, social, physical and emotional needs (Albadra et al., 2020). It can be understood as an ideology and taps into questions of ethics, politics, democracy and empowerment (Bannon and Ehn, 2012). However, Bannon and Ehn (2012) argue that there is ambiguity regarding the term ‘design methods’ due to the multitude of uses in the literature, meaning it can be misleading to determine the kind of process, practice or product the term refers to. PD can be understood as both a cooperative process and a strategy that results in an end product. The design methods are the tools and techniques used in the process. The tools aspect refers to the material components, like a traditional pen and paper design sketches and mapping. Alternatively, computerised software like AutoCAD is used to illustrate a design in 3D. PD has been praised for creating social cohesion and justice, enhanced financial efficiency and productivity,

building capacity, learning and promoting processes of democratisation and empowerment. It has been advocated for identifying a diverse range of needs and issues, previously unforeseen by architects. Bossen et al., (2010) claim PD offers the opportunity for empowerment through active engagement by providing voice and agency.

PD approaches in displacement contexts, however, may be challenging. For example, participants may have limited knowledge about design and may struggle to conceptualise their needs (Albadra et al., 2020). Hussain, Sanders and Steinert (2012), argue the importance of ensuring that the process is context-specific, taking into account the challenges in the different cultural practices, language and time needed to be invested in gaining the trust and engagement of the participants. This not only applies geographically between countries but also within communities where there can be a diverse range of people of differing needs and requirements. Furthermore, PD approaches, especially those that have been institutionalised, have been criticised for assuming that the community is homogeneous. This is problematic since communities are incredibly complex and diverse, and PD may overlook characteristics essential to identifying the problem. Additionally, Platteau (2004) argues that many participatory style projects are vulnerable to elite capture at the local level, which is a form of corruption where resources are given to those who are seen as more superior, leaving the marginalised unable to withstand the pressures and influences of the local elite.

## 2.4 Research Questions and Aims

The literature review has identified the main challenges that women and adolescent girls face in displacement contexts in terms of accessing safe and secure spaces, as outlined in the four themes. It has also revealed how PD methods are being used in communities as a way of identifying, engaging and empowering the most vulnerable. However, what is lacking is an understanding of how PD methods identify and address evidence of gender-specific barriers in a displacement context, which is what this paper aims to achieve. Since these barriers can be (re)produced through the safety and security of access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, the research questions will be addressed specifically to OXFAM's Women's Social Architecture (WSA) project. The questions are as follows:

- To what extent does the participatory design of safe spaces, with particular reference to the provision of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), address the challenges and vulnerabilities associated with diversity in a displacement context?
- What evidence of gender-specific injustice does the participatory design method used in the OXFAM Women Social Architecture (WSA) project identify?
- To what extent and how does the participatory design method used in the OXFAM Women Social Architecture (WSA) project address any gender-specific injustices identified?

# 03

## ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This section introduces Nancy Fraser's trivalent framework that underpins the analysis of how PD methods achieve parity of participation in terms of diversity, with particular reference to the provision of safe access to WASH facilities to women and adolescent girls, as depicted in a case study. It begins with defining the notions of 'gender' and 'gender equality' and moves onto a brief account of the historical shift in emphasis from redistribution to recognition. It then goes on to highlight the importance of taking both recognition as well as redistribution into account before ending by giving a brief description of each of the three separate dimensions of Fraser's framework.

### 3.1. Feminist Critique: Gender Equality

Gender and feminist theory have made a significant contribution to international development paradigms and discourses in exploring how cultural and social interrelationships determine the status of women in society (Drolet, 2010). Although gender theory and feminist theories are closely interrelated, they are distinguishable. Gender theory examines gender as a social construction and explores the relationships between different genders in a given context (Jule, 2014) and is concerned with the transformation of unequal gender relations. Feminist theory puts women at the centre of analysis, rejecting the practice of androcentric perspectives and using a woman's experience as the starting point (Jule, 2014). Both are used to critically analyse the gendered role, relations and distribution of power.

There are competing interpretations as to the meaning of the term 'gender'. Butler (1990, p.3) argues that "it becomes impossible to separate 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is inevitably produced and maintained". She contends that the concept of gender should be seen as a dynamic entity that can be (re)produced. There are also competing interpretations as to the meaning of the term 'gender equality'. For some, this translates into equality in numbers, for example in France, where *parité* dictates that women occupy half of the seats in legislative assemblies (Fraser, 2007). Momsen (2009), on the other hand, states that gender equality does not mean equal numbers of male and females participating in every activity but rather that both women and men have equal opportunities. Gender equality requires removing barriers, including discrimination, oppression and subordination and providing women with a voice, agency and empowerment to allow them to have the same opportunities that men have. Fraser (2007) argues that equality is about overcoming social hierarchies by challenging the dominant capitalist structure, stating that there can not be the emancipation of women without radical structural reform.

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**People live multiple, layered identities derived from social relations, history and the operation of structures of power. People are members of more than one community at the same time and can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege.**

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### **3.2. Intersecting Identities**

Development programmes that take gender equality into account now recognise that women may have intersecting inequalities, different needs, aspirations and face different challenges. Feminist researchers claim that women's trajectories are defined by intersections of different class, age, ethnicity and religious characteristics, which determine their life experiences and opportunities. AWID (2004, p.2) argues that

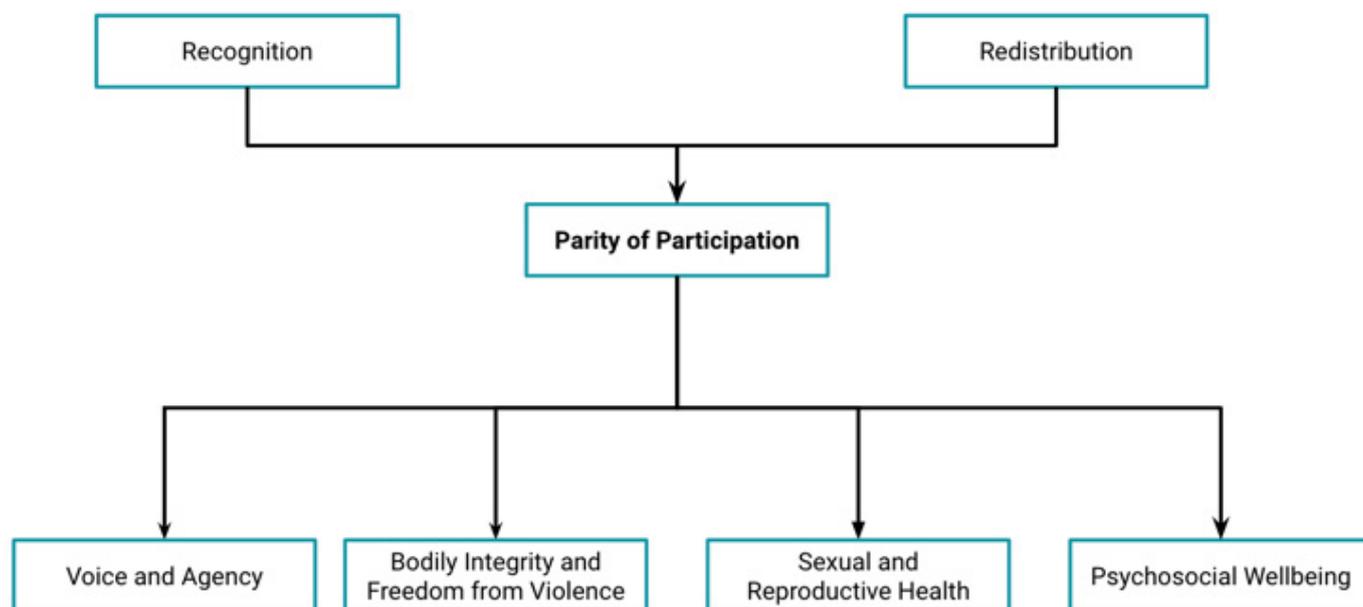
*people live multiple, layered identities derived from social relations, history and the operation of structures of power. People are members of more than one community at the same time and can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege.*

This concept, which was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, is now known as intersectionality and has since taken a central role in feminist literature. AWID (2004) contends that the concept of intersectionality as a theoretical paradigm helps highlight the fact that women who advocate for equal rights are not promoting their own self-interests but are trying to establish their fundamental human rights. However, the concept has sparked a degree of controversy with some people arguing that it promotes solipsism and a 'conspiracy theory of victimisation' (Coaston, 2019 p.1). Furthermore, Enarsson (2015) notes that over time the approach has become increasingly technocratic and thus warns that it is losing its 'practical application of a radical political position' (Enarsson, 2015 p.5). She declares that it is not enough for the development sector to simply acknowledge the presence of intersectionality, but there is also the need to re-politicise it and to shift it beyond the theoretical sphere towards a feminist political agenda. The concept of intersectionality is used in the analytical framework because it helps in understanding systems of power, as Samudzi argues "(a) 'woman' is not a catchall category that alone defines all our relationships to power" (Taylor, 2019, p1) Adopting an intersectional perspective will help to explore the relationship of all women, representing all experiences and will be used in conjunction with Nancy Fraser's social justice framework.

### 3.3. Nancy Fraser’s Social Justice Framework: Distribution, Recognition and Parity of Participation

Fraser has raised concerns that the historical shift in focus in feminist ideology from redistribution to recognition described earlier, mirroring the general shift in the prevailing Zeitgeist in social justice, risks losing many of the gains made by redistribution. She claims that the two concepts are not mutually exclusive but rather they should be used together to allow for equitable participation in the developmental process for the whole range of intersecting identities described above. She, therefore, proposes an analytical framework, which not only uses the two dimensions of distribution and recognition, but also the derived third dimension of parity of participation to address the issues associated in women’s subordination. Fraser’s framework will be used to explain how PD methods attempt to address the challenges that stem from diversity in a displacement context in terms of accessing safe spaces and depicted within the previously described dimensions of Voice and Agency, Bodily Integrity and Freedom from Violence, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.**  
Analytical Framework  
(Adapted from Fraser, 2009 and GAGE 2017)



#### 3.3.1. Distribution

John Rawls was the first to place the notion of distribution in his ‘difference principle’, which requires that any unequal distribution of wealth and income be such that those who are worse off are better off than they would have been under any other system of distribution. However, feminist critiques, including the work of Fraser (1998), render the framework as incomplete, as she argues that the sole use of the distributive principle ignores the gender identity of

women. Societal structures typically predetermine that males have greater opportunities to access higher paid professional occupations resulting in a gender-specific division of labour that grants men more opportunities to access higher paid jobs than women. Fraser (2007) contrasts 'productive' labour, which is appropriately remunerated by society, with 'reproductive' labour, which is the kind of unpaid work practised within the private sphere of the household and is typical of a woman's role, as in child-rearing or performing other household duties. Thus, Momsen (2009) postulates that when considering women's roles in development it is important to fully understand the integration of the division of labour within the household. Using the distribution lens on its own is, according to Fraser (2007), insufficient in creating social justice for diverse groups, such as women, and must therefore be complemented by the dimension of recognition.

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**For parity of participation to work, forms of maldistribution and misrecognition must be resolved. [...] Only once both interdependent distributional and recognitional dimensions are met through participatory processes involving all stakeholders will parity of participation be achieved.**

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### **3.3.2. Recognition**

The recognition lens looks at the status differentiation of society, which is rooted in androcentrism that culturally marginalises femininity. Androcentrism is where the social construction of norms have an authoritative nature associated with masculinity and the disparagement of things perceived as feminine. Fraser (2007) argues that androcentric patterns are entrenched in government policy, law and also penetrate popular culture and social interaction. As a consequence, women become the subordinate gender and are more vulnerable to SGBV, microaggressions, exclusion, marginalisation, objectification and trivialisation. Fraser (2007) denotes that these are injustices of misrecognition. She defines recognition as a worldview where the 'assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect' (Fraser, 1998, p.1). It has been questioned as to whether recognition is an issue of justice, with Honneth and Taylor understanding it as a matter of self-realisation. Fraser (1998) disagrees, stating that recognition and distribution should be treated as a bivalent conception of justice encompassing both into a broader framework.

### 3.3.3 Parity of Participation

According to Fraser (1998) justice requires social arrangements that permit all adult members of society to interact with one another as peers. For parity of participation to work, forms of maldistribution and misrecognition must be resolved, as illustrated in the top half of figure 1. Fraser (2007) contends that maldistribution should be addressed first by ensuring that the political-economic inequalities, which result from the exploitation and marginalisation of women, are removed. Misrecognition should then be resolved by removing the androcentric values rooted in institutionalised patterns, which create a culturally defined hierarchy of status by changing social behaviour and interaction. Only once both interdependent distributional and recognitional dimensions are met through participatory processes involving all stakeholders will parity of participation be achieved. In encouraging an intersectional perspective, a participatory approach is effective as it fosters inclusion by involving and engaging all the stakeholders through mechanisms, such as the use of focus groups, community meetings, interviews and co-mapping. But, it can be ineffective if the government attempts to simplify conflicting objectives into a linear process. There is no simple way to solve complex and diverse conditions but what is needed is to decide a process capable of handling it (Involve, 2005).

The analysis of the case study project providing improved safe access to Rohingya refugee women and adolescent girls to WASH facilities will use Nancy Fraser's framework. The framework will assess whether an increased recognition for the refugee's needs, paired with an equal distribution of the facilities will encourage parity participation and in turn address the main challenges and vulnerabilities (see Figure 1 bottom half of the diagram).

# 04

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

At the beginning of the Rohingya refugee crisis in 2017, the emergency response teams from NGOs, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and government organisations made a great effort to install WASH facilities around the camps. As of May 2019, 38 active WASH partners were dealing with the crisis over 34 camps (Farrington, 2019), which included Unicef, Oxfam, Care International, HelpAge, Save the Children and CDD. Despite their greatest efforts, however, with 47,000 latrines having been constructed in 2019 (House, 2019), there was still insufficient WASH infrastructure with a failure to meet the basic water needs of over 299,000 refugees. In the same year, over 37,200 people were in high need of sanitation facilities and 17,400 in high need of hygiene kits (ACAPS, 2019) (see Figure 2). Furthermore, as will be discussed later, little account was taken of the intersectionality of a diverse population during the emergency response phase of the design process of these facilities, resulting in reports of shame, stress, SGBV, stigma, embarrassment, loss of dignity, risk to health and safety, social tension, reduced quality of life and depression within the refugee camps (House, 2019).

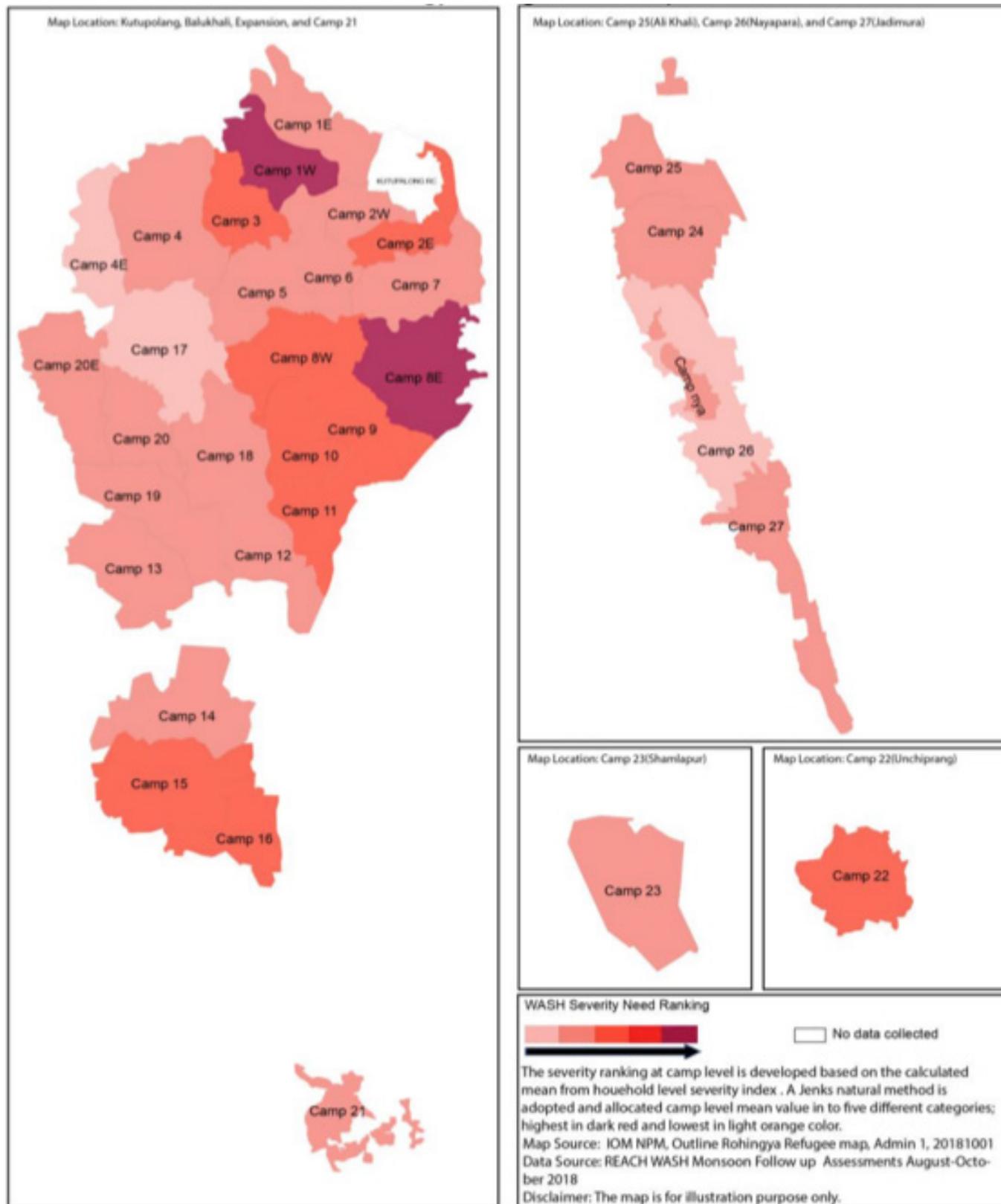
### 4.1. The Women’s Social Architecture Project (WSA)

The Women’s Social Architecture (WSA) project was a participatory design pilot implemented by Oxfam, which used a feminist approach to improve the design of WASH facilities for Rohingya women and adolescent girls in the Cox’s Bazar refugee camps. The term ‘Social Architecture’ has been defined by Oxfam as (Llyod, 2020, p.7):

*the expertise of architects in the design of WASH facilities, enabling and involving people (particularly women and girls) using the idea that behaviour can be influenced by a person’s environment. The process involves an in-depth consultation with users around their social norms, culture and the issues they face in the emergency context, and a creative, participatory design process to build WASH facilities that address these*

The project focused on providing women with safe WASH facilities including bathing cubicles, laundry, drying spaces and latrines. The feminist approach put women at the centre of planning and development, prioritising their needs and challenging the status quo. The Oxfam WSA team was guided by Oxfam’s Public Health Promotion Coordinator and involved staff from Public Health Promotion, Public Health Engineering, Protection and Gender Teams, two British architecture students and two Bangladeshi female architects, Rohingya women, adolescent girls and men.

**Figure 2.**  
 Rohingya Refugees  
 Site Map. Overall WASH  
 Needs Severity Ranking.  
 (ACAPS, 2019)



The process was separated into three phases. Phase 1 was centred around data collection and research and was completed in May and June 2018 (Lloyd, 2020). It consisted of key informant interviews with Oxfam staff, donors, community leaders, focus group discussions with Rohingya women refugees, architect field visits, the production of technical drawings and modelling design and inter-agency workshops. Phase 2 focused on the physical construction of the facilities, which involved bringing in a further two female architects from BRAC, further focus group discussions with women refugees from the four communities and the presentation of the final designs. It culminated in the construction of a total of three facilities, two in Kutapalong and one in Unchiprang (ibid.). The WSA project is currently in Phase 3, its final stage, which involves scaling up and includes stakeholder mapping, mobilisation, community consultation and reviews on the current facilities. It is gathering information on the need for further improvements and modifications, maintenance and evaluation before handing the facilities over to the community (ibid.)

The following section will proceed to analyse how the PD process addresses the challenges regarding access to safe spaces faced by the Rohingya women and adolescent girls refugees using the four dimensions discussed earlier in the literature review.

## **4.2. Voice and Agency**

### **4.2.1. Evidence of Pre-Existing Gender-Specific Injustice**

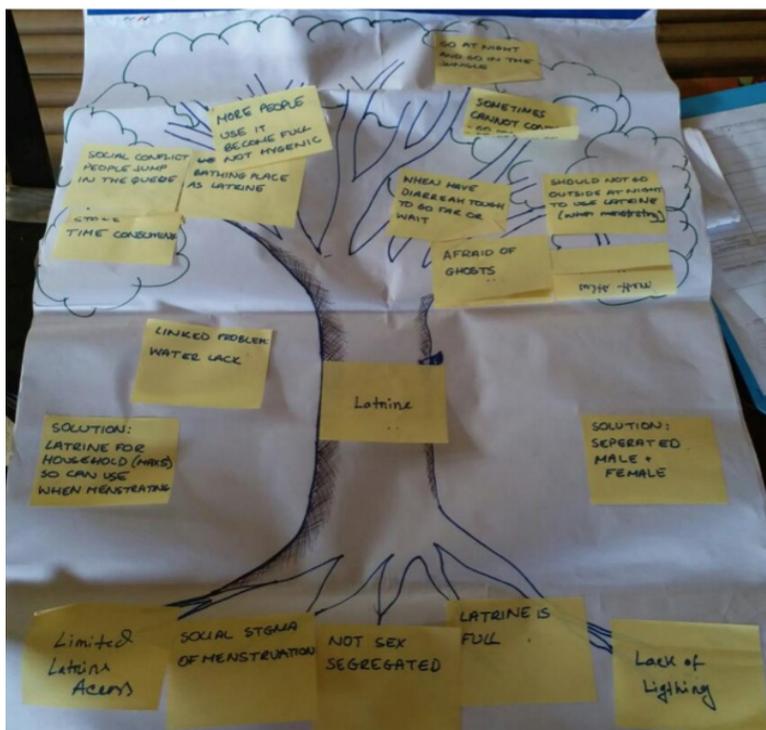
One of the main findings of the focus group discussions in phase 1 of the project was an apparent initial lack of consultation with the women and girls in terms of setting up the WASH facilities. This was attributed to the rapid influx of refugees requiring an emergency response with the emphasis being given to the technical and engineering aspects of the construction of as many facilities as possible rather than worrying about diversity-associated issues. As a key informant testified, attention was placed on quantity over quality, yet this was not considered to be an adequate response by another informant who commented that ‘regardless of how fast you want to do something, take a few minutes, consult and document’ (Farrington, 2019, p.301). Even when it came to upgrading the facilities to semi-permanent structures the views of the women refugees may still not have been taken into account since the male engineers expressed the view, which is a shared norm, between Bangladeshi and Rohingya communities, ‘that women do not make decisions.’ (Farrington, 2019, p.302). This kind of attitude is also consistent with the perception that refugee women and adolescent girls should conform to social expectations and represents evidence of a lack of recognition of the value of the female voice in an androcentric society. It also often leads to maldistribution, since the women and girls would have been less likely to use the facilities made available to them because of the safety and security concerns outlined below.

Multiple examples came out of the interviews with the key informants, which demonstrate evidence of maldistribution and misrecognition leading to a disparity of participation. In the approval stage of the WASH facilities, the officials were all male and as one key informant noted, “everything is filtered through our own experience of what we think women will have a problem with” (Farrington, 2019, p.303). Thus the decision to implement shared toilet facilities in the camps possibly put many women and adolescent girls in a vulnerable position, with some choosing not to use them. Another key informant articulated that “men decide everything” (Farrington, 2019, p.302), for example when choosing to ignore signs labelling segregated latrines reserved only for women. Furthermore, there was evidence that the disparity of participation was institutionally motivated, as another key informant denoted that “many agencies see this [considerations of gendered needs] as an additional thing, rather than a cross-cutting issue” (Farrington, 2019, p.303), therefore valuing the women’s needs as an addition rather than a priority and expressed the need for a transformative cultural change.

### 4.2.2. Towards Gender-Specific Justice

Voice and Agency were provided to the women and adolescent girls through regular meetings, workshops and PD methods, with over 50 meetings arranged in some communities (House, 2019). Some of the in-depth meetings with adolescent girls were conducted separately from the women to encourage engagement and participation. Following the initial discussions of phase 1, the WSA research team conducted priority ranking and problem and solution tree exercises (see Figure 3) with the female refugee participants to identify the most pressing issues (ibid). Three out of four groups prioritised the latrines for reasons of access, privacy and dignity. The majority of adolescent girls ranked water points as being the biggest problem because they were deemed unsafe with high levels of harassment. The problem and solution tree exercise conducted in each group was designed to determine the root causes and consequences. Some of the initial solutions suggested designating the facilities to smaller groups of people so that the actions of the men could be better controlled, increasing the amount and quality of lighting, providing same-sex facilities, as well as privacy screens, and ensuring regular cleaning and maintenance. The participatory approach helped the research team get a deeper understanding of the issues involved with diversity resulting in a more tailored approach towards addressing their needs.

**Figure 3.** Problem Tree made with women in Unchiprang. (OXFAM, 2018)





The project review highlighted the fact that most participants were pleased with the results as many of the features requested, such as door locks, handrails and mirrors were delivered. Not everyone was entirely satisfied, however, with one woman reporting that though she took part in around 10 meetings, some of the features requested and approved by the architects were not included in the final construction. She stated that the consultations “were useful as we got what we asked for, though not the jugs, brushes and soap dish we asked for” (Lloyd, 2020, p.26). Additionally, in camp 4 extension it was agreed that a signpost would indicate that this was a female-only facility but though this was written in English, there was no Burmese translation (Lloyd, 2020). This may represent a lack of systemic insight into the intersectionality of the group as it had been assumed that everyone knew some basic English. A need for better appreciation of group diversity may also be suggested by the fact that some women described being empowered by the participatory process, while others reported attending the meetings only because they were asked to. Questions may also be raised as to whether more could have been done to encourage the refugees, who insisted on calling it the ‘Oxfam facility’, to take more ownership of the project. Although the facilities were popular with the women and adolescent girls who were fortunate enough to be allocated to them, social tensions and resentment arose for those who were not allowed access to a WASH facility despite taking part in the project resulting in an unintended distributional injustice (ibid.). The review did not raise this point but the female architects may well have served as important role models for the women and adolescent girls they had contact with.

### **4.3. Bodily Integrity and Freedom from Violence**

#### **4.3.1. Evidence of Pre-existing Gender-Specific Injustice**

The women and adolescent girls interviewed felt that insufficient attention was placed on their safety and security when walking to the facilities, especially during the night (Farrington, 2019). Multiple studies have documented evidence of recognitional injustice in terms of a failure to acknowledge the specific vulnerabilities associated with the female identity, and of distributional injustice in terms of the men seemingly having unimpaired access compared to the women. A study done in 2018 by REACH found that as many as 57% felt unsafe when using WASH facilities at night, meaning that some had to bathe, urinate and even defecate in their shelters (House, 2020). Adolescent girls, especially those practising purdah, felt particularly uncomfortable collecting water when men were present at the water points (Farrington, 2019). The long-distance to the water points created issues with Ozu, the ritual cleansing before prayer, as they were not able to travel back home without being seen by men. The complete lack of working lights contributed to their sense of vulnerability in terms of SGBV. For example, one woman in camp 19 said “If I’m in the latrine and I realise that there is a man waiting outside I don’t feel like getting out. I just stay inside the latrine until the man goes away” (Farrington, 2019, p.306). Some women interviewed even reported abstaining from eating at night and gave less food to their children to avoid having to go to the latrines late at night (Farrington, 2019).

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## Adolescent girls, especially those practising purdah, felt particularly uncomfortable collecting water when men were present at the water points.

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The locations of the facilities were reported as being unsafe and inconvenient by the women and adolescent girls. For example, the long distance between the campsites and water points and the absence of large enough buckets meant they had to go back and forth repeatedly, thus putting themselves in a vulnerable position. Furthermore, many of the water points were located some distance away from the laundry facilities. This is another example of a distributional injustice as it disproportionately impacts women and girls, who tend to take on roles involving domestic chores, such as washing and cleaning, due to social and gender norms. It is also important to consider that they might take on the extra burden of carrying water for elderly and disabled women, who would be unable to cover the long distances themselves and would be unlikely to be assisted by men, thus adding further to the distributional gender-based injustice. The lack of taking into consideration the needs of the elderly and the disabled may also represent an example of recognitional injustice as it fails to recognise the diversity of less-abled bodies. Many of those interviewed said that the conditions were better in Myanmar as the water facilities were closer to home and were shared with a much smaller group of people.

### 4.3.2. Towards Gender-Specific Justice

In achieving the best understanding of the living conditions of the refugees in their setting the architects went on transect walks, a PD method that involves walking through the community with those participating in the project to observe and discuss the use of the infrastructure, as well as to map it out together (Farrington, 2019). This provided the architects with a better idea of the current facilities, geographical location and site constraints. For example, during the transect walk-in Camp 22, they noticed that plants and vegetation were growing around the latrines, which was meant to increase privacy and minimise erosion. This, however, made it hard for the women and girls to navigate around the plants at night, particularly the disabled and the elderly. This anecdote is an example of how the use of PD methods, namely transect walks, can help identify barriers, which disproportionately affect certain groups, thus taking into account the intersectionality of the community leading to a redistribution of the resource, such as cutting the vegetation to allow for safe access.

In response to evidence of recognitional injustice mentioned in the previous section, the team appear to have made every effort to deal with the specific vulnerabilities of the women and adolescent girls by encouraging them to participate fully in the design process. The use

of cardboard, plasticine and clay models helped them better visualise the proposed structures. The approach seemed to work well since the female refugees came up with a multitude of ideas. These included separate male and female facilities, roofs that allowed natural light but also privacy, concrete floors, door locks, shelves, hooks, mirror, discrete drainage and MHM space, full height doors with no cracks or gaps, a place to sit and handrails (Lloyd, 2020). Furthermore, they suggested combining the bathing and laundry facilities to make them more accessible, especially for those with physical disabilities or who were pregnant. Separate bathing cubicles were requested and for them to be shared with a maximum of 10 families. Further discussions involved the design of ventilation systems and access to direct sunlight and drainage so they could dry their reusable sanitary cloths privately and discreetly. For the Unchiprang facility, an ‘S’ shaped design was chosen and agreed on as it combined privacy with sufficient space. It was agreed to construct the walls out of iron sheets with a plastic roof and handrails were fitted along the corridor and a hand-basin was fitted with a mirror. The project review determined that most of the women and adolescent girls reported that they were pleased with the results and felt safe using the latrines at night. Not all of the women’s requests appear to have been met, however. For example, no raised path to the latrines was built as asked for and no allowance was made for an inside area for hanging menstrual cloths (ibid).

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**Some women interviewed even reported abstaining from eating at night and gave less food to their children to avoid having to go to the latrines late at night.**

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## **4.4. Sexual and Reproductive Health**

### **4.4.1. Evidence of Pre-existing Gender-Specific Injustice**

The women and adolescent girls interviewed reported that not enough attention was placed in the provision of the original facilities on their SRH, which compromised their dignity and again represents evidence of diversity-associated recognitional injustice in terms of a failure to acknowledge the specific vulnerabilities related to the female identity (Lloyd, 2020). It is also evidence of diversity-associated distributional injustice in terms of not only ignoring the gender-specific needs of the women in relation to their SRH but also in terms of the fact that the men seemed to have unrestricted access to the WASH facilities. The women and adolescent girls recounted problems with MHM due to the lack of space to wash sanitary cloths in privacy, which left many feeling

uncomfortable washing their clothes in front of men. As a result, some had to resort to makeshift laundry spaces in their own homes resulting in foul smells and stagnant water thereby posing unnecessary health risks. Furthermore, the lack of laundry space encouraged them to wash their clothes less often, which was unhygienic, particularly for menstrual-wear. They also described significant issues with lack of privacy. For example, some of the bathing spaces situated at the bottom of the hill did not have roofs and/or fencing, which left them feeling exposed (Farrington, 2019). Other studies showed that the women and adolescent girls had difficulty getting to the distribution centres to collect menstrual hygiene items and accessing relevant information on how to manage their menstrual cycle, which would have been an issue for the adolescent girls (House, 2019).

#### **4.4.2. Towards Gender-Specific Justice**

Many of the suggestions for improving the WASH facilities coming out of the participatory process of the focus group meetings were geared towards addressing the recognitional and distributional injustices identified by these groups in relation to menstruation and hygiene. Furthermore, there is evidence that the staff placed great emphasis on this issue during the participatory process. For example, during one of the review meetings with the architects, the team members stressed the importance of having sufficient space for MHM within the latrine and pointed out where they thought this should be positioned. The architects noted that this had not been put down as a request by the women in the focus group, and rather than accept the suggestions made by the staff without question, insisted on convening a second meeting so this issue could be discussed further. The refugee women and adolescent girls were then able to confirm that though they had not mentioned space for MHM in their initial discussions with the architects, they acknowledged that they needed somewhere to wash their menstrual cloths. They expressed the opinion, however, that they would prefer to do this within the laundry space attached to the facility, rather than within the latrine as had been suggested by the team members. This is a good example of the participatory process giving full recognition to the opinions of the diverse group, rather than others making decisions on their behalf, thus avoiding a potential recognitional injustice, and also a distributional one by providing them with something that did not quite match their needs. The outcome was that the final design of the combined screened unit for toilets, bathing and laundry facilities, included a space for the drying of menstrual cloths. However, in the final project review Lloyd (2020) reported that the MHM space was not made available to all the camps due to lack of space but the women interviewed seemed to be happy drying their clothes in their shelters, thus mitigating a potential distribution injustice.

## 4.5. Psychosocial Well-Being

### 4.5.1. Evidence of Pre-existing Gender-Specific Injustice

Although diversity-associated psychosocial well-being issues were not explicitly reported by the focus groups, there is indirect evidence to suggest their presence based on the diversity-associated injustices prevalent in the community. Examples include anxiety and stress-induced by SGBV, menstruation-related bullying in adolescent girls and the shaming or stigmatising of orphans in the absence of parental support and supervision. Furthermore, there are indications in some of the key participant interviews, such as in the statement that follows, that the team members may have been concerned about the psychosocial well-being of the female refugees. In Camp 4 Extension, where some had asked for a mirror that was not subsequently supplied, the Public Health Promoter commented:

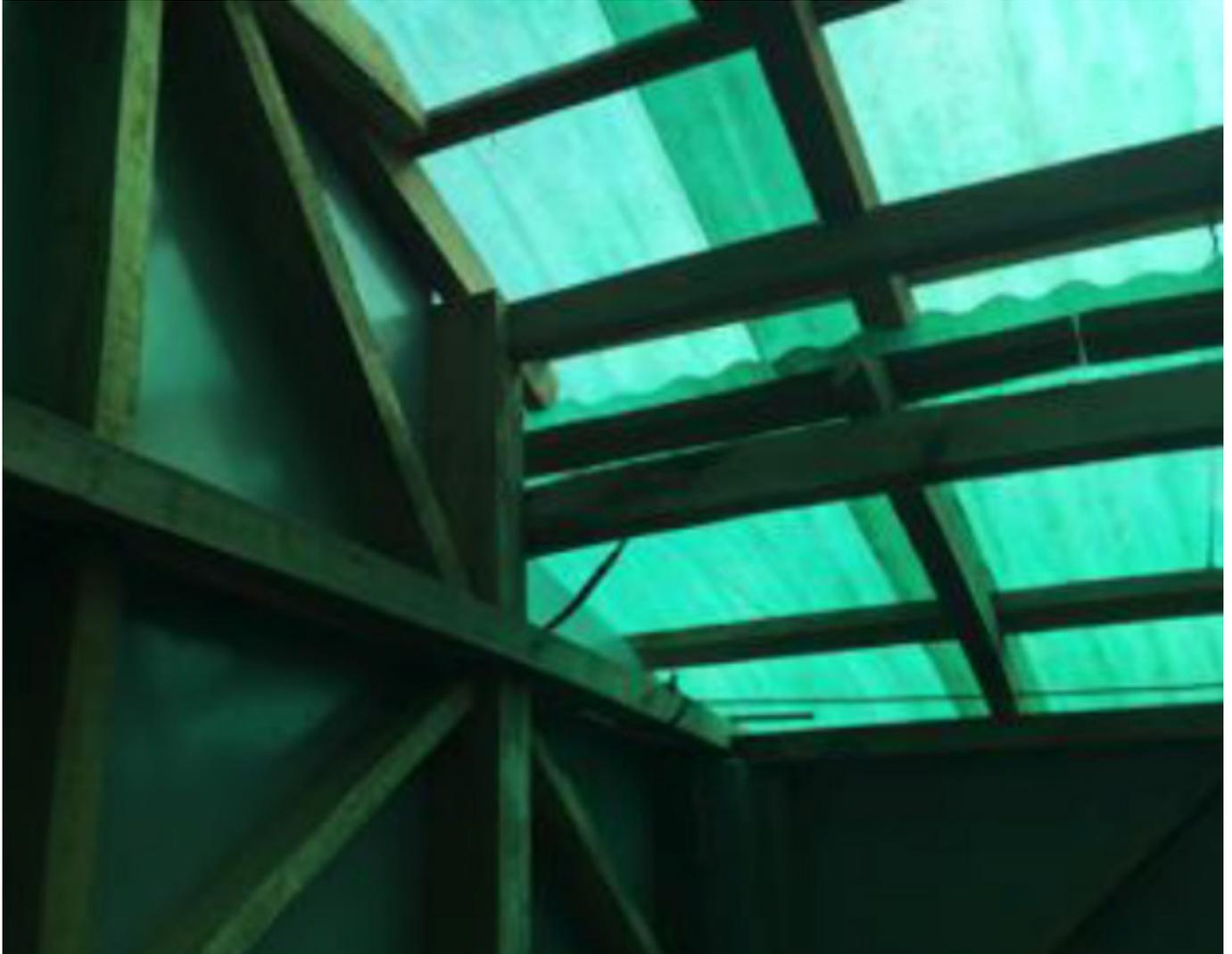
*The site management manager was against having a mirror: users might harm themselves using the glass of the mirror or children can break the mirror and hurt themselves and if these happened, OXFAM would be entirely responsible for this. As a result, during the next consultations, this had been discussed with the groups and agreed not to set up a mirror*

Lloyd, 2020, p.39

### 4.5.2. Towards Gender-Specific Justice

Even before the start of the project, Oxfam had already taken measures to mitigate diversity-associated injustices by establishing listening groups and protection committees in the camps. Listening groups are open forums that allow the diverse community of refugees to reflect and feedback to Oxfam officials, who then pass the information onto the WASH Sector teams and who in turn feedback to the listening groups. Protection Committees are specialised groups created by the Protection Teams, which bring all stakeholders together in emergencies and offer refugees a secure space for them to speak out. Since Oxfam had been working closely with the refugees in the locations chosen for the project and had built a close relationship with them already, it proved helpful for the project team to engage with the participants in the focus groups and to receive honest and informative answers when asking sensitive questions during phase 1 of the project. Many of the suggestions for improving the WASH facilities coming out of the focus group meetings related to psychosocial well-being issues to do with safety and security concerns, and were geared towards addressing the diversity-associated distributional and recognitional injustices described above. Examples include the provision of security features, such as locks, fencing and iron sheets for the walls, but also the use of transparent plastic latrine roofs, which allowed sufficient light in and protected the women's privacy at the same time (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5.**  
Camp 4 Extension. Walls and Roof Providing Light, Shelter and Privacy. (Lloyd, 2020)



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**The aim of the WSA project was to co-design socially conscious and culturally appropriate WASH facilities that would be safely accessible to Rohingya women and adolescent girls.**

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# 05

## CONCLUSION

The aim of the WSA project was to co-design socially conscious and culturally appropriate WASH facilities that would be safely accessible to Rohingya women and adolescent girls in Cox's Bazar refugee camps in Bangladesh. This paper used Nancy Fraser's critical feminist approach to analyse how and the extent to which the PD methods used in the WSA project were able to identify and address evidence of gender-specific maldistribution and misrecognition leading to a disparity of participation. Any identified challenges and vulnerabilities, and the interventions used to try to address them, were then grouped under four capability-associated dimensions adapted from a conceptual framework designed by GAGE (2017). The four dimensions are Voice and Agency, Bodily Integrity and Freedom from Violence, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Psychosocial Well-Being. The analysis, which is summarised below for each of the four capability dimensions, showed how the PD methods used by the WSA project identified evidence of pre-existing maldistribution and misrecognition in the WASH sector following the initial emergency response to the refugee crisis, and that parity of participation was generally restored through the project's PD interventions in most but not in all cases.

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**The PD methods used in restoring Voice and Agency went a long way towards achieving parity of participation for the Rohingya women and adolescent girl refugees.**

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Evidence of pre-existing lack of Voice and Agency came from the interviews with the key informants, which suggested that the diversity-associated injustice may have been in part due to the urgency of the initial response allowing no time for consultation, the ingrained cultural prejudices of the male engineers and a lack of full awareness of the importance of recognising diversity from the supporting agencies. The PD methods used in restoring Voice and Agency went a long way towards achieving parity of participation for the Rohingya women and adolescent girl refugees, even if they did not manage to do so completely. Success came through the organisation of regular meetings and working groups, the use of priority ranking and problem/solution tree exercises, cardboard modelling and AutoCAD. These

methods did not provide full Voice and Agency, however, as they failed to meet both requirements of distribution and recognition specified by Fraser (2007) on every occasion. For example, not everything requested by the refugees was supplied for and not everyone was given access to the upgraded facilities, even if they were part of the project. There was also some evidence of a lack of awareness of the importance of recognising diversity amongst the agencies.

The main issues related to achieving Bodily Integrity and Freedom from Violence identified by the focus group interviews regarded safety and security, such as the remoteness of the location of the WASH facilities and lack of lighting at night. The key informant interviews found some evidence of a lack of awareness of the cultural and religious practices of the Rohingya community, such as the rituals of Purdah and Ozu, by those involved in the initial emergency response. The PD methods used in restoring Bodily Integrity and Freedom from Violence, included transect walks to identify less remote and safer locations, co-creating cardboard and plasticine models to engage the participants and appropriate modifications to the design, such as using plastic roofs and secure metal walls. However, once again, these objectives were not fully met as some of the resources requested by the women, such as a raised path leading to the latrines, were omitted from the final construction.

Furthermore, evidence from the focus groups suggested that not enough attention had been given initially to issues relating to Sexual and Reproductive Health. Gender-specific injustices stemmed from the fact that few allowances appear to have been made in allocating space for menstrual health management (MHM), resulting in unhygienic practices in the women's shelters, lack of privacy, and loss of dignity. There were additional difficulties with the supply and distribution of menstruation-related products. The PD methods worked well in attempting to achieve SRH. Even when the women and adolescent girls did not bring up the issue of allocating space for MHM, this was picked up by the team members, but rather than impose their views, the methods worked well in allowing the refugees to make the final suggestions. Once again, however, the objectives were not fully met since the cramped conditions in the camps meant that not all facilities could be allocated MHM space.

Issues relating to Psychosocial Well-Being were not explicitly reported during the focus interviews, there was however substantial indirect evidence of diversity-associated anxieties stemming from SGBV and the bullying of menstruating girls and orphans. There was also a suggestion in some of the comments made by the team members in withholding glass mirrors from the facilities that the refugees might wish to hurt themselves, though this was not entirely clear. Oxfam had already built strong relationships with the refugees through listening groups and protection committees, which greatly facilitated the PD methods used in the WSA project. Many of the suggestions related to psychosocial well-being issues addressed safety and security concerns, such as the provisions of locks and fencing and transparent plastic roof sheeting.

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