ALiGN | Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms

RESEARCH REPORT

Arts-based approaches for addressing GBV in humanitarian crises

Lessons from the Rohingya response in Bangladesh



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About Mukti Cox's Bazar

Founded in 1996, Mukti Cox's Bazar is a rights-based humanitarian and development organisation dedicated to advancing gender equality, social justice and the empowerment of women and girls. Based in Bangladesh, it works to dismantle structural inequalities, strengthen women's agency, and build inclusive, resilient communities where every person can live with dignity, equality and freedom from discrimination. Understanding that gender inequality intersects with poverty, disability, displacement and other forms of social exclusion to disproportionately affect women and girls, the organisation places them at the centre of its interventions while also engaging men, boys, families and communities as partners in transforming harmful gender norms and power relations. These interventions are carried out by a diverse workforce of approximately 3,895 personnel, nearly 63% of whom are women, including 2,716 paid volunteers.

Over the past three decades, Mukti Cox's Bazar has implemented more than 90 development and humanitarian programmes, from short-term efforts to multi-year initiatives, with the support of national and international donors, United Nations agencies and development partners. Its integrated programming spans gender equality and women's empowerment, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, education, health and nutrition, sexual and reproductive health and rights, child protection, and community development. When the large-scale displacement of Rohingya people from Myanmar began in August 2017, Mukti Cox's Bazar became one of the first Bangladeshi organisations to respond with life-saving humanitarian assistance. It has since played a leading role in delivering gender-responsive and protection-focused services to the Rohingya, also known as Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs), and the host communities in Cox's Bazar district. Underpinning all of this is a conviction that sustainable development is only possible when women and girls, together with their families and communities, are empowered to lead, participate and shape the decisions that affect their lives.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ALIGN	Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms
CAI	Community Arts Initiative
CiC	Camp-in-Charge
CPPC	Centrality of Protection in Protracted Crises (project)
FDMN	Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals
FGD	Focus group discussion
GBV	Gender-based violence
GBViE	Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies (programme)
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDI	In-depth interview
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISCG	Inter-Sector Coordination Group
JRP	Joint Response Plan
KAP	Knowledge, attitudes and practices
KII	Key informant interview
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NGOAB	NGO Affairs Bureau
RRRC	Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFS	Women Friendly Space

Executive summary

Since August 2017, close to one million Rohingya, referred to by the Government of Bangladesh as Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs), have lived in the camps of Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh, in one of the world's largest and most protracted refugee situations. Displacement carries gendered consequences. Statelessness, encampment, restricted mobility and dependence on assistance reorganise daily life in ways that affect women, men, girls and boys differently, within a social order that was already strongly gendered before flight. After years of awareness-raising in the camps, gender inequality and gender-based violence (GBV) persist not because information is lacking but because of shared social expectations, the sanctions attached to breaking them, and the authority of those who enforce them. Two further pressures now converge. The 2025–26 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya crisis is substantially underfunded, and gender equality work faces a wider climate of resistance and backlash. These pressures imply shrinking space for gender advocacy and shrinking resources to sustain it.

The study

Against this background, Mukti Cox's Bazar, supported by ODI Global's Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (ALIGN) platform, carried out a mixed-methods study in four Rohingya camps (Camps 8 West, 12, 22 and 24) between January and April 2026. The study asked how and to what extent arts-based approaches have contributed to addressing GBV among the Rohingya FDMNs, and what early indications of durability and continuation they have shown amid global aid cuts and reduced support for women's rights. Three secondary questions guided the analysis. They asked whether and how the approaches helped transform the gender norms that underpin GBV; whether they helped Rohingya FDMNs challenge the shrinking space for gender advocacy, promote community dialogue and resist backlash against gender equality; and what factors and conditions allow arts-based GBV prevention to remain feasible, culturally relevant, safe, and potentially sustainable and scalable despite backlash and diminishing aid.

Three interventions, each using a different art form, were examined through two streams of data. The first stream was a longitudinal evaluation of a Nakshi Kantha handicraft intervention (a traditional hand-embroidered quilt) newly co-designed with Rohingya community members. A mixed-gender cohort of 24 participants across the four camps produced 16 message-bearing quilts and completed a baseline survey of knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) in January 2026. Of the 24, 23 completed both endline surveys (endline 1 in February 2026 and endline 2 in April 2026), and the longitudinal stream's analysis is based on these 23 participants, together with 8 focus group discussions and 15 in-depth interviews. The second stream was a cross-sectional comparison covering two established Mukti Cox's Bazar initiatives, a mural arts intervention under the Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies (GBViE) programme and a folk song intervention under the Centrality of Protection in Protracted Crises (CPPC) project. It surveyed 80 respondents (40 involved in these interventions, comprising 20 mural arts and 20 folk song respondents, and 40 not involved), supplemented by eight key informant interviews (four with Rohingya community leaders and four with humanitarian professionals) and structured observation of two mural sites and two folk song sessions.

Data were collected by a trained all-female enumeration team, with ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the Institute of Health Economics, University of Dhaka. Sampling was purposive, and the sample size was small. Survey results are interpreted as descriptive patterns and associations, not as causal or generalisable estimates, and the regression models used are exploratory. Throughout, domain scores are index values on a 0–100 scale, and question-level results are the percentage of respondents giving a favourable (gender-equitable) response.

Main findings

Changes in knowledge, attitudes and norms

In the longitudinal stream, the Nakshi Kantha cohort entered the study already knowledgeable about GBV. The baseline KAP survey was administered immediately after the co-design workshops; therefore, it is best interpreted as the starting point of the quilt production period instead of as a measure taken before any exposure to the intervention (Section 4.8). The gains reported below are changes over that period. The GBV knowledge domain score stood at 87.5 at baseline, whereas gender-equitable attitudes on male authority were far less common. By endline 2, most domain scores had improved. GBV knowledge rose from 87.5 to 100, with every one of the eight forms of GBV asked about recognised by all participants. Support for women's mobility and economic equity rose from 60.9 to 80.2, support for shared decision-making power from 59.4 to 78.3, rejection of harmful masculinity norms from 47.8 to 66.7, and overall support for gender-equitable norms from 62.9 to 77.4. When analysing each question, the largest gains were the following. Rejection of male authority and control rose from 13% to 73.9%, support for women's and girls' safety in public spaces from 43.5% to 91.3%, rejection of male control over women from 21.7% to 65.2%, and acceptance that men can show emotions from 39.1% to 82.6%. Several of these gains appeared only at endline 2. All of these figures describe what participants reported knowing and believing; observed changes in daily practice lie outside what the survey captured. Some questions did not improve. Support for confidential help-seeking (Q33) fell, and the male control questions, despite recording the largest gains, still finished among the lowest absolute levels at endline 2.

In the cross-sectional stream, the comparison of arts-involved and non-involved respondents supports a more cautious interpretation. Involvement in the mural and folk song interventions was associated with more communication and confidence, not with uniformly more gender-equitable attitudes. Arts-involved respondents scored higher on support for women's mobility and economic equity (66.9 against 59.4 among the non-involved) and on the two domains that most directly concern speaking and acting, namely dialogue on GBV (85.2 against 57.9) and agency regarding seeking help in cases of GBV (88.1 against 77.2). For each of these three differences, the exploratory regression returned $p < 0.05$. Arts-involved respondents also scored higher on GBV knowledge (90.0 against 84.1), a difference that did not reach $p < 0.05$. They scored lower on support for confidentiality and survivor-centred services and on rejection of harmful masculinity norms, again with $p < 0.05$ in the exploratory model. These p-values are model-based measures of the strength of evidence in this sample instead of population-level inference. The 20 mural arts respondents and the 20 folk song respondents scored similarly on most norm domains. Participation was voluntary and depended on where the activities took place, so these differences may reflect who was able and inclined to take part as much as any effect of the arts.

Observation of the co-design workshops and the follow-up discussions showed that the mixed-gender format of the Nakshi Kantha intervention itself crossed an established gendered boundary. Nakshi Kantha is a feminine-coded handicraft, and the men who joined were crossing that boundary before any message was stitched into the cloth; men who initially felt shy later described explaining the designs to their neighbours without hesitation. Change occurred through memory, reflection and reinterpretation. Participants expressed experiences of loss, protection and hope through shared symbols (a raised hand for help-seeking, a burning doll for a childhood lost to early marriage), which allowed sensitive topics to be discussed without each person revealing their own story and turned the quilts into objects through which the messages were remembered, re-explained and reinterpreted. Change linked to arts-based engagement may follow gradual or non-linear paths, and evaluations that stop at a single early endline may miss it. The changes recorded are best described as localised rather than transformative.

Dialogue on GBV and help-seeking

In both streams of data, the clearest contribution of the interventions was to make GBV easier to talk about. In the cross-sectional comparison, arts-involved respondents scored 85.2 on the dialogue on GBV domain against 57.9 among the non-involved, the largest gap in the comparison. Part of this gap reflects exposure to the interventions themselves, because the domain includes questions tied to that exposure. At the question level, every arts-involved respondent reported sharing messages about gender equality, safety, or GBV with others, against 27.5% of the non-involved, and 95% reported discussing these topics with family members, against 72.5%. In the Nakshi Kantha cohort, the proportion who had shared such messages stood at 91.3% at baseline and reached 100% by endline 1, staying at that level through endline 2. Scores on the agency regarding seeking help in cases of GBV domain (confidence in guiding someone to help, and comfort in reporting or seeking support) were also higher among arts-involved respondents (88.1 against 77.2). These are differences in reported confidence to seek and offer help. Conversations travelled through participants' everyday relationships, as husbands, children, neighbours and elders came to watch the quilts being made and asked about the stories behind the designs.

Stigma and confidential help-seeking

By endline 2, support for confidential help-seeking (Q33, agreement that it is better to look for confidential help than to keep harm inside the family) had fallen sharply in the Nakshi Kantha cohort, from 52.2% to 17.4% of participants giving a favourable response. The score for perceptions of stigma against GBV survivors, which records agreement that social stigma and fear of shame stop people in the camp from seeking help (a higher score meaning that stigma is felt more strongly as a barrier), rose from 40.6 to 68.1. The cross-sectional comparison indicates the same direction. Arts-involved respondents felt this stigma more strongly (45.8) than the non-involved (29.2), although the gap does not persist after adjusting for sex, age, and education, and is interpreted as descriptive. One interpretation is that, as participants discussed GBV more openly, they became more aware of the social risks of disclosure. Two less favourable interpretations (that trust in the confidentiality of available support itself declined, or that conditions in the camps changed as aid contracted) remain open on this evidence. All three interpretations point to the same implication. Arts-based GBV prevention work must stay connected to confidential, survivor-centred services and referral pathways so that making violence easier to talk about is matched by somewhere safe for that talk to go.

Safe spaces and backlash

Participation in the Nakshi Kantha co-design workshops became possible because they were negotiated within existing gender norms. The work was seen as respectable, the venues felt safe, and husbands gave permission. The intervention expanded women's room for participation by operating within norms of male approval and by reconciling mixed-gender work with purdah (women's modesty and separation from unrelated men). In this sense, increased dialogue on GBV that the intervention opened up occurred within existing social limits. The intervention offered a socially acceptable route to participate, speak, and share GBV messages without confronting all gendered restrictions at once.

Backlash nonetheless arose. In the Nakshi Kantha intervention, it took the form of gossip, victim-blaming, and religious objections that mixed-gender group work was against Sharia. Around the wider arts-based GBV prevention work in one of the mural-affiliated camps, it went further, with the Women Friendly Space (Shantikhana) labelled in disparaging language and community volunteers physically assaulted.[1] Participants navigated resistance through calm explanation, demonstration, avoiding quarrels, giving examples from camp life, asking a *majhi* (Rohingya community leader) to intervene, framing the work as a way to earn, and working through trusted intermediaries. These strategies are

1 This account was given retrospectively in a key informant interview with a humanitarian professional and refers to events the informant placed approximately 6-7 years earlier, during earlier community arts and Women Friendly Space activities.

consistent with the process of vernacularisation described in Section 2.3, in which messages are reframed in terms already recognised within the community. Staff implementing the interventions took a similar approach, replacing charged words with calls for respect, peace, and family wellbeing, and engaging Camp-in-Charge offices, *majhis*, imams and elders early on. Resistance of this intensity tends to appear when an intervention is perceived to threaten existing arrangements of who may move, be seen, and speak. When resistance hardens from disagreement into harm, it becomes a safeguarding concern, and arts-based GBV prevention work must be planned, resourced and supervised as safeguarding work before it is treated as communication or awareness-raising work. The evidence on this question (whether the approaches helped challenge the shrinking space for gender advocacy) consequently concerns maintaining or opening spaces for dialogue and navigating backlash.

Reach of the three art forms

Arts-based approaches should not be assessed as a single method. What each art form achieves depends on how it reaches people, namely on the interaction of the message, its engagement potential, the space in which it appears, how visible it is, and how safe it is to engage with. The report describes this as an intervention's 'access geometry' (who can see, hear, perform, repeat, and discuss a message, and at what risk). The three art forms did different work, with different people, in different spaces. The two murals, placed inside women-only Women Friendly Spaces, gave women and children repeated visual exposure to gender-equality messages, and both murals had faded in the four years since they were painted. The folk songs, performed publicly by all-male groups in open community spaces, reached men effectively (an audience that GBV prevention needs to reach), but women were not performers, and few could join the audience because of mobility norms (some listened from beside their shelters). Nakshi Kantha created the deepest small-group reflection through making, storytelling, and discussion, and its wider reach depended on participants' own family and neighbourhood networks and on whether the work could continue.

Cultural relevance and sustainability

Cultural relevance came from familiarity. In the Nakshi Kantha cohort, the score for the potential and cultural fit of arts-based approaches domain rose from 76.8 at baseline to 89.1 at endline 2, and it was also high among mural arts and folk song respondents. The interventions drew on a handicraft, everyday imagery, and an oral performance tradition that the community already valued. They fitted the ways in which the community communicates and remembers. For Nakshi Kantha, the chance to learn a skill that could bring an income also made taking part easier to accept. But the cultural frames that made the activities acceptable also constrained some of the messages and the forms participation could take, and limited how far the messages could challenge existing norms.

Over the study period, the share of Nakshi Kantha participants who had recently seen community arts activity fell from 78.3% at endline 1 to 8.7% at endline 2, while key informants reported substantial programme and funding contraction. Where participation is partly sustained by incentives, funding cuts reach beyond the number of events; they make it harder to bring people along on the longer process of social change. Participants' own conversations nonetheless continued. This is the study's most direct evidence that they maintained a modest space for dialogue as the wider space for gender advocacy shrank. Continuation depends on identifiable conditions (materials, childcare, safe access, fair payment, market links, permission and trust), and the study identifies a tension in sustainability. The art form most able to continue with the least support (home-based Nakshi Kantha) is also the one most easily absorbed into existing restrictions on women, and without some form of facilitation, the reflection and guided dialogue that gave the craft its GBV-prevention content may not be reproduced. Sustainability must never come to mean unsupported continuation, which would transfer the costs and risks of sensitive work to the community the work is meant to serve.

Implications

Six implications follow for programming and policy:

- Arts-based GBV prevention work can be framed and supported as a way to increase conversation on GBV and to support norm negotiation, and should always be connected to confidential, survivor-centred services.
- Such work should be multi-pronged from the outset, pairing work with women with deliberate, accountability-oriented engagement of men and of the reference groups (imams, *majhis*, elders, husbands, etc.) whose expectations hold norms in place, because change that does not reach the reference group stops with the participants.
- Each art form needs its own design, with message, audience, siting, visibility, and safety planned form by form so that messages reach the people they are meant for.
- Safeguarding belongs at inception and should include strategies to anticipate and respond to resistance and backlash.
- Continuation must be costed realistically, covering the materials, childcare, safe access, fair payment, market links, and permissions on which participants said it depends.
- Interventions should be designed for cultural fit from the start, working through art forms, idioms, and messengers the community already values, while recognising that the frames that make participation acceptable can also limit what can be said and how far messages travel.

Across the three interventions, participants found different ways to raise, remember, and discuss GBV-related issues. The spaces for discussion were limited and remained dependent on protection and continued support. In a protracted crisis in which such spaces are closing, keeping them open and connected to protection services remains necessary.

1 Introduction

Following the influx from Myanmar in August 2017, close to one million Rohingya, referred to by the Government of Bangladesh as Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs), have lived primarily in camps in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh, in one of the world's largest and most protracted refugee situations (ISCG, 2025). Displacement carries gendered consequences because statelessness, encampment, restricted mobility, and dependence on assistance reorganise daily life in ways that affect women, men, girls and boys differently, and they do so within a normative order that was already gendered before flight.

The risk of gender-based violence (GBV) rises in situations of forced displacement (IASC, 2015). For Rohingya women and girls, violence is shaped both by displacement itself and the expectations placed on them through gender norms governing mobility, economic activity, honour, marriage, domestic decision-making, and public participation (Akhter and Kusakabe, 2014; Coyle et al., 2020; UNHCR et al., 2020). Unequal gender norms are at the centre of GBV, as they normalise control, restriction and silence. Social norms relate not only to individuals' beliefs and attitudes but also to shared expectations about what others do and approve, the sanctions[2] attached to non-compliance, and the cultural and economic context in which decisions are made (Marcus and Harper, 2014; Bicchieri, 2017; Cislaghi and Heise, 2019).

Arts-based approaches offer one pathway for addressing unequal gender norms. Creative forms such as handicrafts, music and visual art can provide culturally grounded, comparatively low input,[3] emotionally engaging, and less confrontational ways to raise difficult topics than other forms of activism. Yet the evidence base on the effectiveness of these approaches remains thin and uneven. A recent mapping of arts-based initiatives for gender equality by Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (ALIGN) found that only a minority had ever been evaluated in any form, and that evaluation has concentrated overwhelmingly on theatre (Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2025). Little is known about how different art forms work, who they reach, what risks they carry, and what conditions allow them to continue in displacement settings.

This mixed-methods study was carried out in four Rohingya camps (Camp 8 West, Camp 12, Camp 22, and Camp 24) in Cox's Bazar between January and April 2026. The study examined three arts-based interventions, each using a different art form:

- A traditional handicraft (Nakshi Kantha)[4] intervention co-designed with Rohingya community members.
- A visual arts (mural) intervention implemented by Mukti Cox's Bazar under the Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies (GBViE) programme.
- A folk song intervention, also implemented by Mukti Cox's Bazar, under the Centrality of Protection in Protracted Crises (CPPC) project.

2 The social penalties (gossip, ridicule, blame, exclusion, or harm) that people expect to face if they break a norm.

3 This refers to the material and logistical resources an activity requires.

4 A traditional hand-embroidered quilt of Bangladesh and north-east India.

Figure 1 The three arts-based interventions



Rohingya participants in a Nakshi Kantha co-design workshop (top); a folk song session in progress (bottom left); and a mural on the wall of a Women Friendly Space (WFS) (bottom right).

The three interventions were examined in terms of their potential to contribute to gender norm change.[5] The Nakshi Kantha intervention was examined through a longitudinal evaluation with a cohort of 24 participants. The participants produced 16 message-bearing quilts and took part in a baseline and two endline surveys (the longitudinal evaluation is based on the 23 who completed all three surveys) as well as 8 focus group discussions and 15 in-depth interviews. The mural and folk song interventions were examined through a cross-sectional comparison of 80 people (40 participants and 40 non-participants), supplemented by four key informant interviews (KIIs) with Rohingya community leaders and four with humanitarian professionals working in the camps, as well as four structured observations of mural sites (two) and folk song sessions (two).

5 Arts-based interventions should be understood as complementary to, rather than a substitute for, survivor-centred GBV prevention and response services, which remain governed by established humanitarian standards (GBV Area of Responsibility, 2019).

This study was conducted at a moment in time when two pressures were converging. The first was the contraction of humanitarian resources. The 2025–26 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya[6] crisis has remained substantially underfunded with implications for staffing, services, and outreach in the camps (ISCG, 2026). The Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) stated that there was increasing pressure on protection services, including child protection and GBV prevention, mitigation, and response services (ISCG, 2025). As of 31 December 2025, the overall 2025 response was only 46% funded, and the Protection sector, including Child Protection and GBV, had received only 29% of its requested funds (ISCG, 2026).

The second pressure was the wider climate of organised resistance and backlash[7] against gender equality work, documented across a range of country settings (Edström et al., 2024). In the Rohingya camps, this wider pattern is reflected in restrictive gender norms that can confine women and girls to their homes, as well as in threats faced by women leaders engaged in work on gender-based violence, child marriage, literacy, legal awareness, and women's leadership (UN Women, 2025). Armed groups have also reinforced patriarchal expectations and used threats of abduction and sexual violence against women as tools of coercion (Segall, 2025). Such dynamics affect both life in the camps and the work carried out there.

Together, these two pressures imply shrinking space for gender advocacy and shrinking resources to sustain it in humanitarian settings. Given this context, the study asks not only how arts-based interventions engage with the gender norms that underpin gender-based violence, but also whether their effects can take root and endure in an environment of austerity and resistance.

The study was guided by the following primary and secondary research questions.

Primary research question:

How and to what extent have arts-based approaches contributed to addressing GBV among the Rohingya FDMNs, and what indications of durability and continuation have they shown in the current context of global aid cuts and reduced support for women's rights?

Secondary research questions:

a. To what extent and how have arts-based approaches helped transform the gender norms that underpin GBV?

b. To what extent have arts-based approaches helped Rohingya FDMNs to challenge the shrinking space for gender advocacy, promote community dialogue, and resist backlash against gender equality?

c. What factors and conditions allow arts-based GBV prevention approaches to remain feasible, culturally relevant, safe, and potentially sustainable and scalable despite backlash and diminishing global aid?

6 The Joint Response Plan (JRP) is the inter-agency humanitarian appeal for Rohingya refugees and affected host communities in Cox's Bazar, led by the Government of Bangladesh and coordinated through the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The 2025-26 JRP, launched on 24 March 2025, is a two-year strategic framework covering January 2025 to December 2026.

7 'Backlash' refers to resistance provoked when work on gender equality unsettles existing power arrangements.

2 Literature review

This section locates the study within the literature on GBV, gender norms, and Rohingya displacement; on arts-based approaches to gender equality and GBV prevention; and on the cultural relevance, safeguarding, and sustainability of such work in humanitarian programmes.

2.1 Gender-based violence, gender norms, and Rohingya displacement

Gender-based violence is a continuum (Krause, 2015). It can take place before, during, and after displacement and is also connected throughout these different phases. For Rohingya women and girls, displacement and arrival in camps in Bangladesh shape how GBV occurs, while increasing girls' and women's risk due to statelessness and precarious living conditions (Priddy et al., 2022).

UNHCR et al. (2020), Coyle et al. (2020) and Cheong (2022) show how protection problems arise from imbalances of power, expectations in relation to honour, inadequate support for women's leadership, and conflicts regarding changes in gender roles. Guglielmi et al. (2020) show that Rohingya and Bangladeshi adolescent girls carry additional age-specific burdens, with early marriage, harassment, and curtailed schooling narrowing their options, as gender norms also tighten around them. Material conditions (insecure routes, poor infrastructure, scarce livelihood options, and uneven access to services) compound these risks, both as a general feature of humanitarian settings (IASC, 2015) and in Cox's Bazar's context (UNHCR et al., 2020). Moreover, where displacement pushes women into the breadwinner role because men's mobility is constrained and formal employment is barred, women's status within the family and community does not improve, and they may face greater violence from relatives, their community, and outsiders. Akhter and Kusakabe (2014) document this among registered Rohingya refugees in Kutupalong before the 2017 influx, and the mechanism remains pertinent to the far larger population that arrived afterwards. Similarly, Akter (2022) shows that the greater public presence Rohingya women acquire in the camps (through collecting aid, using communal facilities, and attending women-targeted programmes) does not necessarily result in empowerment, since they still lack the authority, resources, and institutional backing to resist abuse.

Social norms help explain why such practices continue even when individuals privately disapprove of them. According to Bicchieri (2005, 2017), there is a difference between an individual's beliefs, what they expect others to do, and what they expect others to approve or disapprove of. Social norms therefore operate through reference groups, that is, groups of people who approve or disapprove and who, thus, reward or sanction actions (Cislaghi and Heise, 2019, 2020). Reference groups among the Rohingya FDMNs could be composed of (for example) husbands, fathers, mothers-in-law, neighbours, imams, *majhis*[8] and others. However, social norms are also deeply embedded in social structures and relations (Marcus and Harper, 2014).

Norms relating to GBV in the context of the Rohingya camps concern male dominance, female mobility, purdah[9] and respectability, early marriage, household decision-making, resource control, masculine identity, and stigma. Women's mobility outside the domestic environment is conditional on male approval. Girls' movement and sexual behaviour are tied to the family's honour. Early marriage may be regarded as protection against danger or reputational harm. Although women may know what support exists, they fear gossip, stigmatisation, or family punishment if they report violence. Men who take on caregiving duties or treat their wife with visible respect may face mockery and laughter from others in their community (Coyle et al., 2020; UNHCR et al., 2020; Guglielmi et al., 2020). Gender norms

8 A Rohingya community leader who acts as a block-level representative in the camps. Alongside imams and elders, *majhis* function as interpreters and enforcers of community norms.

9 Local norms of women's modesty and separation from unrelated men, governing dress, mobility, and mixed-gender interaction.

in the camps also bear on Rohingya third gender[10] people. Uddin (2025) describes transphobia at the socio-religious intersections of camp life, and UNHCR et al. (2020) recommend that third gender people be actively included in consultation and planning; their exclusion from social acceptance, marriage and livelihoods is a further dimension of norm-driven harm in the camps.

Norms around GBV also shape what forms of violence are recognised, excused, silenced or challenged in particular spaces. Work on GBV in the public sphere is useful because it shows how patriarchal norms organise women's safety, mobility, bodily autonomy and participation across public, institutional and online spaces (Harper et al., 2022; Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2022). Therefore, norms that sustain GBV include not only acceptance of violence, but also victim-blaming, shame, expectations of female respectability, male entitlement, and the normalisation of fear. This is highly relevant to the Rohingya camps, where women's movement to water points, toilets, learning spaces, markets, or Women Friendly Spaces (Shantikhana) is often judged through honour, purdah, family reputation, and male permission.

2.2 Arts-based approaches to gender-based violence prevention and norm negotiation

Arts-based approaches show promise in addressing sensitive issues such as GBV. Art can make violence, stigma, shame, mobility restrictions, and domestic power relations more visible, memorable, and discussable through culturally recognisable forms. Therefore, art can contest discriminatory gender norms by making GBV visible, challenging victim-blaming, communicating alternative narratives, and creating emotionally engaging forms of public expression (Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2024). Bangladesh has a long tradition of popular theatre and performance communication. BRAC's popular theatre and Theatre for Development approaches, including forum theatre and Interactive Theatre for Justice, have been used to address GBV and other harmful practices such as child marriage, and to promote women's economic empowerment (Rafi and Rahman, 2009; Aleem, 2017; Haque and Choudhury, 2023; Saleh et al., 2026).

However, the evidence base on the potential of arts-based approaches remains limited. The ALIGN mapping by Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez (2025) identified 115 institutional arts-based initiatives for gender equality across more than 55 countries, addressing issues from GBV and patriarchy to masculinities, child marriage, and women's empowerment; 52 of the 115 addressed GBV, yet only 32 of the 115 had been evaluated in any form, and 20 of those evaluated had used theatre. Theatre's prominence reflects where evaluation has been concentrated; it is not proof that theatre is necessarily more effective. Broader evidence on GBV prevention in displacement settings is already limited (Tappis et al., 2016), and the gap is greater still for non-theatre art-based modalities.

Existing literature identifies several pathways through which arts may contribute to GBV prevention and norm negotiation. Arts can support awareness-building, communicate gender-equitable alternatives, amplify marginalised voices, and enable dialogue on difficult issues (Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2025). Studies on arts-based activism, photovoice, refugee storytelling, and expressive arts therapy similarly show that creative methods can help people give form to the experiences of violence, build agency, support healing, and discuss possible solutions (Christensen, 2019; Lenette, 2019; Sayde, 2020; Bandarchian Rashti, 2023; Campana, 2024).[11] Hoff et al. (2021) surveyed over 3,000 married couples across 92 villages in West Bengal, India, and found that village exposure to participatory theatre reduced physical spousal abuse by about a quarter and more than halved the share of husbands who saw wife-beating as legitimate. Practitioner and applied-theatre accounts point in the same direction. Vemireddy (2019) describes how interactive theatre draws audiences into rethinking violence against women.

10 A recognised gender identity in Bangladesh (often known as '*Hijra*') for people who do not identify as either male or female.

11 Much of this evidence relates to research methods, therapy or advocacy rather than evaluated GBV prevention programmes.

What is missing above all is comparative evidence on how these different art forms, particularly non-theatre, work in refugee settings. Nakshi Kantha, mural art, and folk song each work differently; Nakshi Kantha may work through collective making, visual storytelling, slow reflection, tactile memory, and possible livelihood value, whereas folk song may work through rhythm, repetition, metaphor, oral tradition, public performance, and retelling, and mural art may work through visibility, spatial presence, symbolism, and repeated viewing. Each modality also carries different possibilities and constraints. Nakshi Kantha may be acceptable because of its association with women's household craft but may also accommodate restrictions on women's public presence. Folk songs may reach wider audiences, including men, but can be judged according to performer, place, and message. Murals may remain visible over time but depend on location, maintenance, and audience access.

Considered altogether, this literature suggests that arts-based approaches may help make GBV-related norms easier to see, remember, and talk about, but it also cautions against assuming that visibility or participation automatically produces durable norm change. Section 2.3 examines the cultural relevance, risks and sustainability conditions of such work in more detail, and the analytical framework in Section 3 draws them together.

2.3 Arts-based approaches and their cultural relevance, backlash, survivor-centred safeguards, and sustainability

Cultural relevance plays a key role in arts-based GBV prevention approaches, because a message carried in locally familiar artistic forms is easier for the community to accept. But cultural relevance takes more than a recognisably 'cultural' art form. A piece of Nakshi Kantha, a folk song, or a mural may look culturally familiar, yet the activity itself can still be contested, depending on its content, who takes part, where it happens, whether women are present, and whether community authorities welcome or resist it. In the Rohingya camps, the difficulty is that women's new roles and activities can collide with expectations of honour, respectability and social acceptability (Coyle et al., 2020; UNHCR et al., 2020; Cheong, 2022).

Merry's (2006) concept of vernacularisation[12] clarifies this. Messages about gender equality and GBV prevention become acceptable when expressed through locally resonant idioms, including when those messages are carried through artistic forms that already resonate with the community. This fit, however, carries a cost. Levitt and Merry (2009) identify a resonance dilemma. The more closely an idea is aligned with prevailing cultural understandings, the more readily it is adopted, but the less it unsettles the arrangements that sustain the harm it addresses. Applied to arts-based approaches, this implies a trade-off between acceptability and transformative reach.

Cultural relevance is limited in a second way. Even where arts-based approaches are culturally familiar, relevance does not necessarily protect them from backlash. Whether backlash occurs depends on whether the activity is seen as threatening the status quo. Backlash is therefore best understood as part of a negotiation process. According to Flood et al. (2021), gender equality campaigns often face backlash as people see such campaigns as threatening established social, moral, or institutional norms. In the Rohingya camps, backlash might take the form of gossip, mockery, withdrawing permission, religious condemnation, immoral accusations, hindrance of participants, stigma against projects, threats, or violence.

Arts-based GBV prevention approaches must also remain anchored within established humanitarian practice. GBV programming comprises response, risk reduction and prevention components. The response component is concerned with the needs of GBV survivors regarding confidentiality, safety, case management and referrals; the risk reduction component refers to minimising the exposure to GBV through provision of safe services and facilities; and prevention involves addressing cultural

12 Translating ideas into local religious, familial, and community idioms so that they become socially acceptable and communicable.

expectations and power dynamics that normalise violence or create obstacles to seeking help. The key principles of GBV programming described in the Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for GBV in Emergencies Programming are confidentiality, safety, non-discrimination, and respect for the survivor's choice, rights, and dignity (GBV Area of Responsibility, 2019), and according to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) GBV guidelines, action to reduce GBV risk is the responsibility of all humanitarian sectors, not of GBV specialists alone (IASC, 2015). Research among refugee populations, likewise, must attend to consent, autonomy, and reciprocity (Mackenzie et al., 2007). This matters because arts-based GBV prevention approaches can make violence easier to talk about; yet without connection to support services, referral pathways, and safeguarding, they risk producing talkability without protection. Hence, creative activities should be understood as potential components of prevention, discussion, and norm negotiation, not as replacements for the survivor-centred response. In the Rohingya camps, engaging *majhis*, imams, elders, and other gatekeepers may be necessary to organise activities safely, but social acceptance must not come at the price of handing those gatekeepers control over women's engagement and access to services.

The Do No Harm approach (Anderson, 1999) is also relevant here. Anderson's argument is that aid intended to reduce harm can inadvertently deepen it where conflict, power, or protection dynamics are overlooked. For arts-based GBV prevention approaches, such harm includes exposing those involved to stigmatisation, threats, or even violence, and safeguarding against it is a condition of an activity being able to continue at all. Flood's (2019) work on engaging men and boys bears on this too. Masculinities, male peer networks, and gender inequities help hold violence in place. Prevention therefore needs to engage men and boys, but that engagement should build male accountability for gender equality instead of recentring male authority over women's participation.

Lastly, in a protracted humanitarian crisis, sustainability must mean more than the expectation that the refugee community will simply continue an activity as external aid decreases. Arts-based GBV prevention approaches depend on community involvement, safety, facilitation, safeguards, referrals, and resources. Depending on the art form, continuation may also require space, permission, childcare, and livelihood prospects. An activity that keeps going only by drawing on women's unpaid labour, unsafe travel, or unprotected volunteers is not sustainable, however familiar the art form may be. As hooks (2015) argues of reform more broadly, continuation within existing gender arrangements can ease harm without altering the system that produces it.

3 Analytical framework

The analytical framework of this study is built around four questions:

- why GBV persists in humanitarian settings and what meaningful change would involve
- how arts-based approaches can act on the factors that sustain it
- what kinds of change to look for and how to measure them
- what allows change to occur and endure as funding shrinks and resistance to gender equality grows.

In answering these questions, the framework draws together the concepts introduced in Section 2 and specifies how they are used in the analysis.[13]

Intersectional feminist theory shows that the roots of vulnerability to violence can be traced to a set of disadvantages that overlap and reinforce one another; therefore, the people who experience violence and sit at the intersection of those disadvantages cannot be understood by examining any one disadvantage alone (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Carastathis, 2014). In the context of the displaced Rohingya population, gender intersects with statelessness, displacement, mobility restrictions and poverty among other disadvantages, which implies that a Rohingya woman's experience of patriarchy and exposure to harm is shaped by all these disadvantages at once. The framework treats these intersecting disadvantages as the structural backdrop against which knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) are interpreted.

The framework's second component operationalises the social norms concepts laid out in Section 2.1. Three elements are carried into the analysis:

- The distinction between descriptive norms (beliefs about what other people do) and injunctive norms (beliefs about what other people approve or disapprove of), corresponding to Bicchieri's (2005) empirical and normative expectations (Cislaghi and Heise, 2020).
- Reference groups as the locus where norms are held and enforced (ibid.).
- Anticipated sanctions as the mechanism through which individuals may comply with a norm even when it conflicts with their personal attitudes.

In the Rohingya camps, this has two implications for the analysis. The first is the role of religious and community authority. Figures such as *majhis* and imams play a dual role. As interpreters, they decide what gender norms mean in a given situation (for instance, whether purdah and respectability permit women to attend a community space or safe space, or join a mural or folk song activity). As enforcers, they uphold that interpretation through approval and disapproval. Interpretations are discretionary, allowing religious and community authorities to interpret a norm permissively or restrictively. As a result, they act as a reference group and shape what change is possible, encouraging some changes while discouraging others. The second implication is the logic of protection, in which to ensure security for Rohingya women, tighter restrictions on their mobility are put in place instead of making public spaces safer for them (Harper et al., 2022; Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2022). The framework treats both as barriers to change. Since challenges to power predictably provoke pushback, backlash (Section 2.3) is treated as an expected feature of this landscape, to be understood both as disapproval and as a risk to those who carry out gender equality work.

Arts-based approaches can challenge these barriers because they entail experiential and communicative learning. For Dewey (1916), education is not an insertion of beliefs into passive learners; instead, it occurs when experience, communication, action, and reflection are shared. In participatory arts-based approaches, thus, learning occurs when participants use art to formulate their lived experience, communicate it to others, and collectively reflect on what it means. For Freire (1970), learning for social change is a process of praxis. Through reflection and action, people come to perceive their situation and act to transform it. Boal (2019 [1974]) carried this Freirean insight into creative practice. He argues that participatory art is a rehearsal for action in which those who would watch become the authors of what is shown. Therefore, in interventions adopting participatory arts-based approaches, participants use their own memories, stories, fears, hopes, and observations as materials for creative work, and the process of creating art becomes a form of reflection and action. Praxis, in this sense, explains why participatory arts-based approaches can be transformative.

13 See Annex A for a summary table.

Moreover, art relates to different forms of expression, which in turn open forms of understanding that words alone cannot reach. Eisner (2002) treats music, visual arts and dance as distinct forms of representation that develop meaning and mind; Leavy (2015) argues that arts-based methods build empathy, challenge stereotypes and promote dialogue; Dolan (2005) shows that performance can create moments in which performers and audiences briefly sense what a better social world would feel like; Ingold (2013) describes making as a form of thinking that unfolds through working with materials; and Sennett (2008) shows how skilled craft ties the work of the hand to the growth of judgement.

Arts-based activities can also constitute safe space (The Roestone Collective, 2014). This does not describe a guaranteed absence of risk, but a relational achievement in which people can critically confront power, privilege and difference without fear of harm, threat or humiliation. Arts-based interventions can create such space through stories, symbols and verses instead of direct disclosure. In the context of the displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh, this is important because shame, fear, stigma and violence are often difficult to verbalise, and crafts, drawings and songs can offer an alternative path for communication.

What each art form makes possible differs (Eisner, 2002). Section 2.2 sets out what these differences imply for how each form may work and the risks each carries; the framework uses them to interpret differences in reach, engagement and risk across the three interventions.

In terms of what kinds of change to look for and how to measure them across the domains of KAP (see Table 2), the study is based on the understanding of social norms as shared expectations within a reference group, which also makes them difficult to change (Mackie et al., 2015). Kabeer's (1999) resources–agency–achievements triad is also carried into the analysis. 'Resources' are the preconditions of choice (such as income, mobility, security and institutional support), 'agency' is the capacity to reflect, voice and negotiate, and 'achievements' are observable changes in practice; Section 6.2 uses this triad to locate where the changes captured by the KAP domains sit. Change can be localised or transformative. In this study's terms, it is localised when some people express or adopt a new view while the wider reference group continues to expect the old practice, and transformative when the expectations of the wider reference group itself begin to shift (Marcus and Harper, 2014; Mackie et al., 2015), a threshold that experiments with online groups suggest can be crossed once a sufficiently committed minority forms (Centola et al., 2018). Therefore, the analysis asks whether change stayed only with the research participants or began to alter what the wider group expects. Moreover, in conservative and religiously observant settings such as the Rohingya camps, change may coexist with deeper structures of power and authority. Vernacularisation (Merry, 2006) might also help gender norm transformation, although, as Section 2.3 notes, the resonance dilemma follows (Levitt and Merry, 2009).

Finally, in terms of what allows change to occur and endure in a context of humanitarian aid budget cuts, local ownership is a necessary starting point. When an intervention is co-designed and carried out with a community, the skills and the will it generates reside within that community (Freire, 1970; Chambers, 1997). However, continuation requires more than ownership alone. As Section 2.3 argues, continuation cannot be assumed as external aid declines, so it is important to examine both whether the interventions became locally owned and whether the material and institutional conditions for continuation were in place.

A second condition is safeguarding. Given the Do No Harm argument and the forms that backlash can take (Section 2.3), whether interventions can continue depends on how such risks are assessed and managed.

A third condition is male engagement. Drawing on Connell's (1987) account of gender orders organised around male authority and power, and Flood's (2019) argument that violence prevention must engage

men and boys, the framework treats male engagement as a condition for change to spread beyond women participants, provided it builds accountability without recentring male authority.

Lastly, the framework factors in the political economy of the intervention context. When funding shrinks and backlash rises, the scope of any given intervention and the workforce that maintains it also shrink, even though need persists. Arts-based interventions differ in what they cost, the risks they carry, and the audiences they can reach. Therefore, questions of sustainability and scale are considered for each art form on its own terms, not for arts-based approaches as a single category.

4 Methodology

4.1 Research design

The study used a mixed-methods design that combined two complementary streams of evidence, with each stream contributing differently across the secondary research questions (see Introduction; also see Annex B for more details).

The first stream was a longitudinal evaluation of the Nakshi Kantha intervention, a new handicraft intervention created for this study and co-designed by the participating Rohingya community members together with the research team. The same cohort was followed across three survey waves: a baseline and two endlines (the first after the initial completion of the quilts and the second two months later, while quilt-making, experience-sharing, and refinement activities continued), with qualitative rounds alongside. This stream provides depth over a brief period of time.

The second stream was a cross-sectional comparison built around the two established interventions implemented by Mukti Cox's Bazar: the mural arts intervention under the Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies (GBViE) programme and the folk song intervention under the Centrality of Protection in Protracted Crises (CPPC) project. At a single point in time, respondents who had been involved in these interventions were compared with respondents who had not. This stream provides breadth across art forms.

Two further methods sit within the cross-sectional stream. Key informant interviews with Rohingya community leaders and with humanitarian professionals situate the two established interventions within community reactions, institutional support, and the contracting aid environment, while structured observations record the mural sites and folk song sessions as they exist in the camps.

4.2 Study sites

Four of the camps in Cox's Bazar were selected as research sites: Camp 8 West (8W) and Camp 12 in Ukhia *upazila*,[14] and Camp 22 and Camp 24 in Teknaf *upazila*. Site selection was guided primarily by the operational presence of the GBViE programme and the CPPC project, and therefore by the mural arts

14 A sub-district administrative unit of Bangladesh.

and folk song interventions, alongside practical considerations around travel distance and cost, as well as local safety and security conditions.

The three interventions were distributed across the four camps according to where each had been implemented. The Nakshi Kantha intervention, being newly created, was introduced in all four camps; the mural arts intervention was studied in Camps 8W and 24, and the folk song intervention was studied in Camp 12 (Block A) and Camp 22 (also Block A).

4.3 The arts-based interventions studied

Table 1 summarises the three interventions, and the sub-sections below describe each in more detail.

Table 1 The three arts-based interventions at a glance

Intervention	Stream and status	Study sites and timing	Participants and reach (the intervention as a whole under Mukti Cox's Bazar)	Format
Nakshi Kantha	Longitudinal evaluation; new intervention co-designed for this study	Camps 8W, 12, 22, 24; co-design workshops on 4–7 January 2026; quilt production and refinement to April 2026.	24 participants (6 per camp); 16 quilts produced	Facilitated mixed-gender co-design sessions in community spaces, followed by self-organised group quilt-making hosted in rotation at participants' homes
Mural arts	Cross-sectional comparison; established intervention of the GBViE programme's Community Arts Initiative (CAI)	Sites in Camp 24 (painted January 2022) and Camp 8W (painted April 2022); observed roughly four years later	More than 30 workshops and 4,451 people reached by the CAI between 2019 and 2022 across 19 Rohingya camps of Cox's Bazar and 2 host community areas	Collaborative visual art in Women Friendly Spaces; training for and facilitated discussion with the Rohingya community artists and members, participatory drawing, collective design, public painting
Folk song	Cross-sectional comparison; established intervention of the CPPC project	Camp 12 (Block A) and Camp 22 (also Block A); two sessions performed in January 2026 (respectively 60 and 30 minutes approximately)	Engaged 390 participants directly and more than 2,000 indirectly across all sessions in Camps 4, 5, 12, 19 and 22 since 2022[15]	Performance by Rohingya folk singers in community spaces, accompanied by harmonium, tabla, and other musical instruments

15 Mukti Cox's Bazar has been implementing the CPPC project since 2022 as part of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) consortium.

The Nakshi Kantha (quilts) intervention (longitudinal stream)

This intervention followed a participatory co-design process. In January 2026, a co-design workshop was held in a community space operated by Mukti Cox's Bazar in each of the four camps, guided by a Handcraft Co-Design Workshop Manual (developed by the research team). They were attended by all six participants in each camp. The six participants were organised into two subgroups of three (each generally comprising two women and one man). Each subgroup co-designed and produced 2 quilts, giving 16 quilts across the four camps. The co-design workshop sessions opened with facilitated group dialogue on trust, safety, respect, vulnerability and gratitude, after which participants selected symbols, planned the layout, chose colours, drew their designs on art paper, transferred them onto the cloth, and went on to produce the quilts by hand using traditional techniques.

Female participants led motif design, colour blending and the transfer of designs; male participants supported outlining and reflections on equality and respect; and all participants contributed to decisions, story development and design. Such division of labour emerged from the group itself. Female participants, who were generally experienced in this craft, took the lead and organised the distribution of tasks. At the close of the co-design workshops, materials were distributed to each subgroup, and production then continued as a self-organised group process. Subgroup members coordinated among themselves, agreed on times, and met in rotation at one another's homes to work on their quilts together, which in some cases meant travelling outside their own block. The quilts were first completed within approximately a month; experience-sharing and discussion visits with all the subgroups followed in February and March; and the groups continued to refine their pieces through to April 2026. Each quilt carries the symbols and stories its makers chose.

Figure 2 A Nakshi Kantha designed by one of the Camp 12 subgroups



A Nakshi Kantha showing a traditional Rohingya wedding gate, surrounded by pottery, flowers, a palm tree, the sun, and stars. The gate was contributed by a third gender participant, who described it as expressing a wish to be accepted and celebrated by the community. The pottery reflects a continued connection to cultural heritage and daily life. The flowers and patterns represent beauty and inner strength, and the sun and stars stand for hope, new beginnings, and friendship.

The mural arts intervention (cross-sectional stream)

The mural arts intervention formed part of Mukti Cox's Bazar's GBViE programme, which has incorporated visual art through its Community Arts Initiative since 2019. That initiative has been implemented across 19 Rohingya camps and two host community areas in Cox's Bazar, using visual art to create opportunities to share cultural values and beliefs, promote resilience, strengthen identity, and open dialogue on critical camp-level issues. The intervention combined training for selected Rohingya artists and programme staff on how to use murals as a medium for communicating behavioural messages and for dialogue through collective design, participatory drawing, collective execution, and facilitated discussion. Throughout the intervention, Rohingya community members (women, girls, men, boys, and children) were supported to translate their memories, concerns, aspirations, and messages into images. More than 30 mural workshops were held, reaching 4,451 people in total. The two mural sites examined in this study are located inside Women Friendly Spaces and were painted in January 2022 (Camp 24) and April 2022 (Camp 8W), roughly four years before observation. As such, the murals were studied as existing visual material whose images and messages could continue to be seen, interpreted, remembered and discussed over time.

The folk song intervention (cross-sectional stream)

The folk song intervention forms part of Mukti Cox's Bazar's CPPC project, which has used folk song sessions since 2022[16] to raise gender and protection issues in Rohingya community spaces, directly engaging 390 participants and indirectly reaching more than 2,000 Rohingya community members. For this study, two sessions were organised with the support of CPPC project staff and were performed in January 2026 in Block A of Camp 12 and Block A of Camp 22. The songs were chosen by the performers themselves, who were all Rohingya men, and were performed at block level in open community spaces, accompanied by traditional instruments. The sessions engaged nearby community members as listeners, and the songs discussed gender relations, harmful practices, protection concerns, and possible ways of resolving such issues within the community.

4.4 Data collection methods and instruments

Knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) survey: The survey was the primary quantitative tool in the study. The same instrument was used in both streams. In the longitudinal stream, it was administered to the cohort at three points, and in the cross-sectional stream, it was administered once to involved and non-involved respondents. Questions were grouped into 11 scored domains and an overall composite. Table 2 sets out each domain, its questions, and what a higher score means. A small number of questions sat outside the domain scores and were treated as descriptive, such as household decision-making on women's healthcare (Q46). The limits of these domain scores are noted in Section 4.8.

16 See the footnote to Table 1.

Table 2 KAP survey domain scores, related questions and interpretation

Domain score	Questions	What a higher score means
GBV knowledge	*Response options were 'yes', 'no', or 'not sure'* **Q15** Which of these do you think are forms of GBV? **Q15a** Physical hurting (hitting, slapping) **Q15b** Threats or controlling money **Q15c** Stopping someone from moving freely **Q15d** Repeated insults or humiliation **Q15e** Isolation from friends or family **Q15f** Unwanted sexual touching or pressure **Q15g** Psychological abuse (fear, intimidation, manipulation) **Q15h** Neglect of basic needs (food, medicine, care)	Stronger recognition of the forms of gender-based violence
Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statements, using a scale of 1-5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=not sure; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree). For questions 17-38, respondents were asked if...		
Support for confidentiality and survivor-centred services	**Q17** Accessing GBV-related support services must always be confidential and private, and based entirely on the individual's informed and voluntary choice.	Stronger support for confidential, voluntary support
Support for shared decision-making power	**Q19** Men and women should decide together about daily family matters. **Q20** Men should have control over women in their families, and women should obey them.	Stronger support for joint decision-making and rejection of male control
Rejection of gendered violence and coercion	**Q21** It is acceptable for a husband or wife to be physically hurt by the spouse during family conflicts or disagreements. **Q22** It is acceptable for a husband to pressure his wife in marital relations even if she does not wish. **Q23** Women and girls should be safe when walking alone in public spaces. **Q24** It is acceptable to use threats or strong words to control women or girls. **Q25** If a woman or girl faces gender-based violence, it is usually her own fault.	Stronger rejection of violence, coercion, and victim-blaming
Rejection of harmful masculinity norms	**Q26** A man loses respect if he helps with cooking, cleaning, or caring for children. **Q27** Men should not cry or show their feelings, because that is seen as something only women and girls do. **Q28** A man loses respect if he does not have authority and control over women in his family and other circles.	Stronger rejection of rigid masculine norms

Table 2 KAP survey domain scores, related questions and interpretation continued

Domain	Questions	What a higher domain score means
Support for women's mobility and economic equity	**Q29** A woman should be able to go to the market, hospital, learning centre, or Women Friendly Space when needed. **Q30** Women need to be financially independent. **Q31** Men should control the household's economic resources.	Stronger support for women's movement and economic agency
Support for protection, services, and leadership	**Q32** Marriage should take place only after a girl reaches 18 years of age. **Q33** If someone experiences GBV or faces harm, it is better to look for confidential help than to keep it inside the family. **Q35** Leaders in our camp should speak publicly for gender equality and against GBV. **Q36** Men and boys should intervene or speak up when they see gender-based violence against women and girls. **Q37** In the camp, people accept it or are comfortable when women and girls go to learning centres to learn. **Q38** In the camp, people accept it or are comfortable when women visit a Women Friendly Space to seek GBV support.	Stronger support for protective community norms and services
Perceptions of stigma against GBV survivors	**Q34** In the camp, social stigma and fear of shame stop many people from seeking help when they face harm and abuse.	A stronger sense that stigma and shame block help-seeking
Overall support for gender-equitable norms	**—** Composite score of the attitude and norm items Q19–Q33 and Q35–Q38 (excluding the perceived-stigma item Q34).	Stronger overall gender-equitable attitudes
Dialogue on GBV	**Q39** In the past year, how often did you talk with family members about gender equality, safety, or preventing violence against women and girls? *Response options were 'never', 'once', 'a few times (2–3)', or 'many (4+)'* **Q40** Have you shared messages about gender equality, safety, or GBV learned from the arts-based interventions with friends or neighbours? *Response options were 'yes' or 'no'* **Q41** In the past year, have you seen any community group begin arts-based work on gender equality, safety, or GBV, inspired by NGO-organised interventions? *Response options were 'yes' or 'no'* **Q42** In the past year, have you seen community or religious leaders encouraging people to join arts-based interventions or discussions on gender equality, safety, or GBV? *Response options were 'yes' or 'no'* Note: At endlines 1 and 2, enumerators asked Q39–Q42 about the period since the previous survey round, and for Q41, excluded the Nakshi Kantha subgroups in the respondent's respective camp. At baseline, Q39, Q41 and Q42 covered the past year.	More discussion of gender and GBV and more sharing of messages

Table 2 KAP survey domain scores, related questions and interpretation continued

Domain	Questions	What a higher domain score means
Agency regarding seeking help in cases of GBV (for others or oneself)	**Q43** How confident are you in guiding someone who has experienced GBV or faced harm to places where they can get confidential help? *Response options were 'not at all confident', 'a little confident', 'somewhat confident', 'confident' or 'very confident'* **Q44** If you see someone experiencing GBV or facing harm in a public place, how likely are you to seek help or intervene? *Response options were 'very unlikely', 'unlikely', 'not sure', 'likely' or 'very likely'* **Q45** If you personally face harm or violence, how comfortable would you feel reporting the aggressor, speaking up, or seeking help? *Response options were 'very uncomfortable', 'uncomfortable', 'not sure', 'comfortable' or 'very comfortable'*	Stronger confidence and willingness to act
Potential and cultural fit of arts-based approaches	*Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with these statements, using a scale of 1–5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=not sure; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree)* **Q47** Art (drawing, theatre, literature, and so on) can change people's minds about gender equality or GBV. **Q48** The arts-based interventions respect our culture and values.	Stronger belief that arts-based approaches fit local culture and can shift views

The survey instrument was developed in English, translated into Bangla, and administered digitally through KoboToolbox. Data were collected orally in the Rohingya language because of the participants' varied levels of literacy. Several attitude items were worded negatively so that agreement signalled a less equitable position. Section 4.7 explains how these were handled in scoring.

Structured observation: This was carried out through two checklists. The mural arts checklist (with 12 sections and 58 items) covered: mural identification; site context and access; visibility and reach; community interaction; visual content; text and message features; social norm signals; production and ownership; condition and durability; cost and resource proxies; rapid rating scales; and a narrative summary. The folk song checklist (9 sections and 48 items) covered: location and access; performance identification; message content and themes; gender representation and power dynamics; community interaction; signs of diffusion and contestation; safety and logistics; rapid rating scales; and a narrative summary. The checklists recorded the setting of each mural site and folk song session, the artistic content, and the nature of community engagement. Their categorical and rating-scale records were analysed descriptively (Section 4.7) and treated as observational evidence in their own right. The co-design workshops that launched the Nakshi Kantha intervention, and the subsequent experience-sharing and discussion visits, were also documented and treated as a source of data. The finished Nakshi Kantha quilts were analysed as visual data.

Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews: Both were held at baseline and endline. Focus group discussions were held with all the Nakshi Kantha cohort members in each camp to explore collective narratives and shifts. In-depth interviews were held with two Nakshi Kantha cohort members in each camp (one in Camp 24 at endline; see Section 4.5) to explore personal narratives and shifts.

Key informant interviews: These were conducted with community leaders (discussing the cultural relevance of arts-based interventions, community reactions and backlash, and the conditions for sustaining such work) and with humanitarian professionals (discussing implementation, reach, and the prospects for sustaining and scaling the interventions as resources contract).

All of the study's instruments were field-tested and finalised before use. Summaries are provided in Annexes B and C.

4.5 Sampling

The study used non-probability sampling throughout, and all participants were adults aged 18 or above who gave informed consent.

The longitudinal evaluation cohort comprised all 24 participants of the Nakshi Kantha intervention (6 in each of the four camps). Recruitment for the intervention was purposive. It sought a deliberate balance of women and men, a range of ages and community roles, and a willingness to take part in every phase of the longitudinal evaluation. Each camp's group included four women and two men, except for Camp 12, whose group comprised four women, one man, and one third gender participant. All 24 participants completed the baseline round. One participant in Camp 24 could not be re-contacted after baseline, so 23 participants (16 women, 6 men, and 1 third gender) took part in the endline 1 and endline 2 survey rounds and in the endline focus group discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview (IDI) round. To keep the group-level comparison consistent across the three survey waves, the longitudinal analysis is based on these 23 participants.

The qualitative rounds drew on the same cohort. A focus group discussion was held in each camp at baseline and at endline with all cohort members present, giving eight discussions in total; the Camp 24 endline group had five members. The participant who could not be re-contacted was one of the two Camp 24 interviewees. The endline round in that camp comprised a single interview, giving 15 in-depth interviews in total (8 at baseline and 7 at endline).

In the cross-sectional comparison, 80 respondents took part in the KAP survey, divided equally into 40 who had been involved in the mural arts or folk song intervention and 40 who had not; the latter forming the comparison group. Among the involved respondents, 20 had taken part in the mural arts intervention and 20 in the folk song intervention, where involvement covered both direct roles (as an artist or performer) and indirect roles (as a viewer or member of the audience). The 20 folk song respondents were performers in, or audience members at, the two sessions organised for this study in January 2026 (Section 4.3). Staff from the GBViE programme and the CPPC project assisted in identifying involved and non-involved respondents. The comparison group was formed differently for the two interventions because of how each was delivered. For mural arts, where the murals sit inside women-only Women Friendly Spaces, the non-involved group comprised men, who could not enter those spaces, and women who had not visited them. For the folk songs (performed in Block A of each of the two camps), the non-involved group was drawn from blocks where sessions had not been held. The involved and non-involved groups differ in composition, most notably in education and in the share of women. Women make up 60.0% of the involved group against 42.5% of the non-involved group; the involved group is older on average (34.0 against 28.1 years); and 10.0% of the involved group has any schooling against 45.0% of the non-involved group. Camp is numerically balanced by design, with 10 involved and 10 non-involved respondents in each of the four camps. The implications of these compositional differences for interpretation are set out in Section 4.8.

Key informants were selected purposively for their knowledge and position. In each camp, the study spoke with one recognised community leader and one humanitarian professional, giving eight key informant interviews in total (four with community leaders such as *majhis*, imams, and recognised

women leaders in community roles, and four with staff whose work on protection and gender in the camps intersected with arts-based approaches). All key informants were familiar with the interventions under evaluation. The community leaders had been involved in the mural arts and folk song processes directly or indirectly (for example, as spectators or as leaders of camp blocks where sessions took place). Among the humanitarian professionals, two had been directly involved in the interventions studied (one with mural arts and one with folk song), while the other two were involved more broadly in arts-based interventions led by Mukti Cox's Bazar or other humanitarian organisations. Structured observation covered four events: the two mural sites (in Camps 8W and 24), and one folk song session (in each of Camps 12 and 22).

4.6 Data collection procedures

Data collection procedures are described in Annex C. Ethical approval, permissions and ethical considerations are set out in Annex F.

4.7 Data analysis

Data management procedures, the software used, and the availability of the study's instruments are described in Annex E.

Quantitative analysis

KAP survey responses were converted to numeric scores on a 0–100 scale, with higher scores representing more favourable (more gender-equitable or more violence-preventive) positions. Graded scoring was used for attitude and norm questions such that strong agreement with a favourable statement scored higher than mild agreement, and the negatively worded questions noted in Section 4.4 were reverse-coded so that all domain scores, with the one exception noted below, move in the same direction. The full scoring rules are set out in Annex D.

Two scoring choices are worth stating separately because they shape how the numbers should be interpreted. The two questions on the likelihood of acting and on comfort in speaking up against GBV (Q44 and Q45) were scored on a graded scale so that being 'very likely' or 'very comfortable' scored higher than being 'likely' or 'comfortable'. The question on stigma (Q34) was treated as a measure of how strongly stigma is felt to be a barrier to help-seeking by people who face harm and abuse. So, unlike the other domain scores, a higher value indicates a stronger sense of stigma rather than a more favourable position (Annex D). Responses of 'not sure' were retained as meaningful, since on sensitive topics they may signal hesitation or discomfort.

For the longitudinal stream, the same cohort contributed data at each KAP survey wave, but survey records were analysed without individual-level linkage across waves. Given the small cohort and the design limits described in Section 4.8, p-values for the longitudinal results are treated as exploratory. Whether a change is judged meaningful rests instead on its size and on whether it appears consistently across survey waves, related questions, and the qualitative data. The main analysis was descriptive. Average domain scores and question-level shares of favourable responses were compared across the three waves, and each question was then classified by how its share moved, using a threshold of 10 percentage points to avoid reading too much into small movements. The threshold is a pre-specified classification rule. With 23 respondents, 1 person is about 4.3 percentage points, so 10 points corresponds to roughly 2 to 3 respondents changing. It applies in both directions and to every category below:

- A question whose share of favourable responses rose and held its gain was labelled 'improved and sustained'.
- One that rose at the first endline but fell back by the second was labelled 'improved then faded'.
- One that improved only at the second endline was labelled 'delayed improvement'.
- One that shifted by less than the 10-point threshold either way was labelled 'no meaningful change'.
- One whose share of favourable responses fell was labelled 'worsened'.
- Any remaining question, whose above-threshold movements fit none of the categories above, was labelled 'mixed/unclear'.

As supporting material, a regression relating domain scores to survey wave and background characteristics was produced. A correlation matrix was also generated as an internal check on which domain scores move together and is not reported.

For the cross-sectional stream, the analysis compared groups at a single point in time, through two comparisons. The first comparison set the 40 arts-involved respondents against the 40 non-involved respondents and looked at the gap between the two groups' average domain scores. A positive gap means the involved group scored higher. The second comparison set the 20 mural arts respondents against the 20 folk song respondents, and a positive gap here means the mural arts group scored higher. Question-level shares of favourable responses were also compared (between groups rather than across waves). Camp was used only as a background and balance variable. Between the involved and non-involved groups, it was balanced by design (Section 4.5), so it could not act as a confounder. In the mural arts and folk song comparison, it coincided exactly with art form, so it could not be estimated as a control. As with the longitudinal stream, the same supporting material was produced for this stream.

In both streams, the supporting regressions were exploratory, and each was run in two forms for every domain score.

The first form (the unadjusted exploratory model) makes the comparison directly. In the longitudinal stream, survey wave is the only predictor, and the model compares the cohort's average score at each endline with its average at baseline, reporting a p-value for each change. In the cross-sectional stream, group membership is the only predictor, and the model compares the two groups' average scores as they stand in each of the comparisons described above, reporting a p-value for the gap between them.

The second form (the adjusted exploratory model) repeats the same comparison while holding sex, age, and education level constant, with camp added in the longitudinal stream. What this can show differs between the streams. In the cross-sectional stream, the compared groups differ in composition (Section 4.5); therefore, the adjusted models act as a robustness check, and Section 5 notes the results that change when the comparison is made this way. In the longitudinal stream, the cohort does not change, so these characteristics are identical across waves by construction. Hence, the adjusted model leaves every wave estimate unchanged and affects only the standard errors, which generally grow larger in these data; as a result, the same changes are estimated with less precision.

Unless stated otherwise, the significance results reported in Section 5, including the asterisks shown in its figures, come from the unadjusted models. A difference is described as statistically significant when $p < 0.05$. The interpretive limits of these p-values are set out in Section 4.8.

Qualitative analysis

The qualitative data from the focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and key informant interviews were analysed thematically in NVivo, guided by a theory-informed codebook developed from the analytical framework set out in Section 3. The codebook organised the analysis around eight overarching themes: gender norms and power; GBV; gender and GBV norm negotiation; gender and GBV norm change; dialogue and social interaction; backlash and resistance; the aid context; and the sustainability of arts-based interventions. Each theme was broken down into codes and sub-codes, and for every code, the codebook specified a definition, rules on when to apply it, the data sources to which it pertained, and its analytical relevance, which supported consistent application of the codes and tied the coding directly to the framework's constructs. Baseline and endline qualitative data of the longitudinal stream were coded in such a way that shifts in expressed norms, negotiation, and behaviour could be traced over the intervention period. Quotations are reported in English translation.

Visual and observational material

The quilts produced through the co-design process were treated as a further source of evidence. The 16 quilts and their imagery were interpreted alongside the explanations participants gave of their own designs, drawing on approaches that interpret visual material within its social and cultural context. The observational checklist data were analysed through descriptive interpretation of the categorical and rating-scale items, combined with a comparative qualitative reading across the two art forms structured around codes aligned with the qualitative codebook.

Integration of the two streams

The two streams were integrated at the interpretive stage in two ways. Findings were triangulated so that a pattern seen in the KAP survey was examined against the accounts given during in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews, and against the data collected through the structured observations. They were also juxtaposed in order for the depth of the longitudinal account of the Nakshi Kantha intervention to be set beside the comparative breadth of the mural arts and folk song findings.

4.8 Limitations

There are several study limitations to note. The samples were small and selected through non-probability sampling, which limits the statistical weight the numbers can carry and means that the quantitative results are best interpreted as descriptive patterns instead of as proof of cause or as precise, generalisable estimates. The p-values reported in Section 5 should be interpreted the same way. They describe the groups surveyed (the 23 Nakshi Kantha participants in the longitudinal cohort, and the 80 respondents in the cross-sectional comparison). They are not evidence about a wider population. The $p < 0.05$ threshold is a conventional one, applied here in exploratory models, and several domains and questions were tested with no adjustment for multiple testing. A single respondent can shift a result noticeably; for example, in the longitudinal stream, one person in the cohort moves any question-level percentage by about 4.3 points (Section 4.7). In the cross-sectional stream, a single response can likewise move a marginal domain difference from one side of the 0.05 threshold to the other. The KAP survey, moreover, captures self-reported knowledge, attitudes, and practices, and its results should be interpreted with that in mind (Launiala, 2009). It records what respondents said they knew, believed, and did, not their observed behaviour.

Some limitations sit in the measures themselves. The domain scores are study-specific descriptive indices constructed for this evaluation. No reliability statistics are computed for them. Domains rest on between one and eight questions each, and two of them, the perceived stigma score (Q34) and the support for confidentiality and survivor-centred services score (Q17), rest on a single question each. The dialogue on GBV domain combines questions about respondents' own conversations and message-sharing (Q39–Q40) with questions about seeing community arts activities and leader encouragement in the camps (Q41–Q42), and Q40 asks specifically about messages learned from arts-based interventions. Therefore, the domain score is not a pure measure of participants' own dialogue. In the cross-sectional comparison, part of the gap between involved and non-involved respondents is built into the questions, and in the longitudinal stream, the change in the score at endline 2 largely reflects reported exposure to community arts activities (Q41), which lay outside the interventions' control (Section 5.2). The recall period for Q39–Q42 also changed after baseline (Table 2); baseline values for these questions are not directly comparable with endline values. Several knowledge questions started at or near the top of the scale, which left little room for improvement to register. Given the translation chain described in Section 4.4 and the quotation of qualitative material in English translation, some meaning may have shifted in translation.

The longitudinal KAP analysis carries three further limitations. First, one of the 24 baseline participants could not be re-contacted (Section 4.5). Second, the same people answered at every wave, so their responses are not statistically independent. Because records were not linked by respondent across waves, the regressions could not account for this, and it is not possible to say how much the standard errors are affected or in which direction. The p-values in this stream are therefore treated as exploratory. Third, adjusting for sex, age, education, and camp cannot test whether change over time reflects the composition of the group, since the group does not change (Section 4.7). Where a result loses significance in the adjusted model, it has lost precision and has not been shown to be confounded.

The window for judging lasting change of the Nakshi Kantha intervention was short. Due to the short timeframe of the study, the endline 2 survey was conducted only two months after endline 1 and around three months after the intervention began. So, the study may only provide evidence on early signs of durability. The baseline round also followed the co-design workshop sessions; therefore, baseline values may carry any immediate effects of that first engagement. In addition, the longitudinal analysis of the KAP survey data was conducted at group level. It describes how the cohort as a whole moved instead of individual trajectories, a limitation that was partly offset by the repeated in-depth interviews. The Nakshi Kantha cohort in the longitudinal stream also included only 6 men and one third gender participant alongside 16 women. Accordingly, change could not be reliably disaggregated by sex.

In the cross-sectional stream, involvement in the mural arts and folk song interventions was not assigned by the research team. Thus, differences between the groups may reflect who chose, or was able, to take part in these interventions, not the influence of the interventions themselves. As noted earlier (Section 4.5), the involved and non-involved groups differed in composition. Adjusting for sex, age and education narrows, but cannot eliminate, the scope for these selection effects. Therefore, the adjusted differences remain associations. The non-involved group was also not free from arts exposure altogether (3 of the 40 had encountered arts-based interventions run by other organisations).

Within the same stream, the comparison of the 20 mural arts respondents with the 20 folk song respondents carries an additional limitation. Each art form was studied in different camps (murals in Camps 8 West and 24, folk songs in Camps 12 and 22) and with different exposure histories. The murals date from 2022 and were studied as standing visual material, while the observed folk song sessions were live performances during the study period. Art form, camp, and the timing and recency of exposure cannot be separated. With 20 respondents in each group, the comparison also has little statistical weight, and its contrasts, in either direction, are descriptive.

The observational evidence rests on two sites and two sessions seen by a single observer within short periods of time. The murals in particular were observed roughly four years after they were painted. Therefore, what was seen reflects their condition and reception long after their production.

Mukti Cox's Bazar both implemented the interventions and conducted this study, so the possibility of social desirability and courtesy bias cannot be removed. The study's positionality, and how the study design responded to it, are set out in Annex G. The evidence on relative resource requirements was drawn from key informant accounts and from the feasibility and resource proxies recorded in the observational checklists and should be interpreted as indicative. Finally, the study surveyed only intervention participants and comparison respondents. Whether norms changed at the community level and how far messages travelled lie outside the study's scope.

5 Findings

The study's findings are organised around the three secondary research questions set out in Section 1.

5.1 To what extent and how have arts-based approaches helped transform the gender norms that underpin gender-based violence?

Box 1 The answer in brief

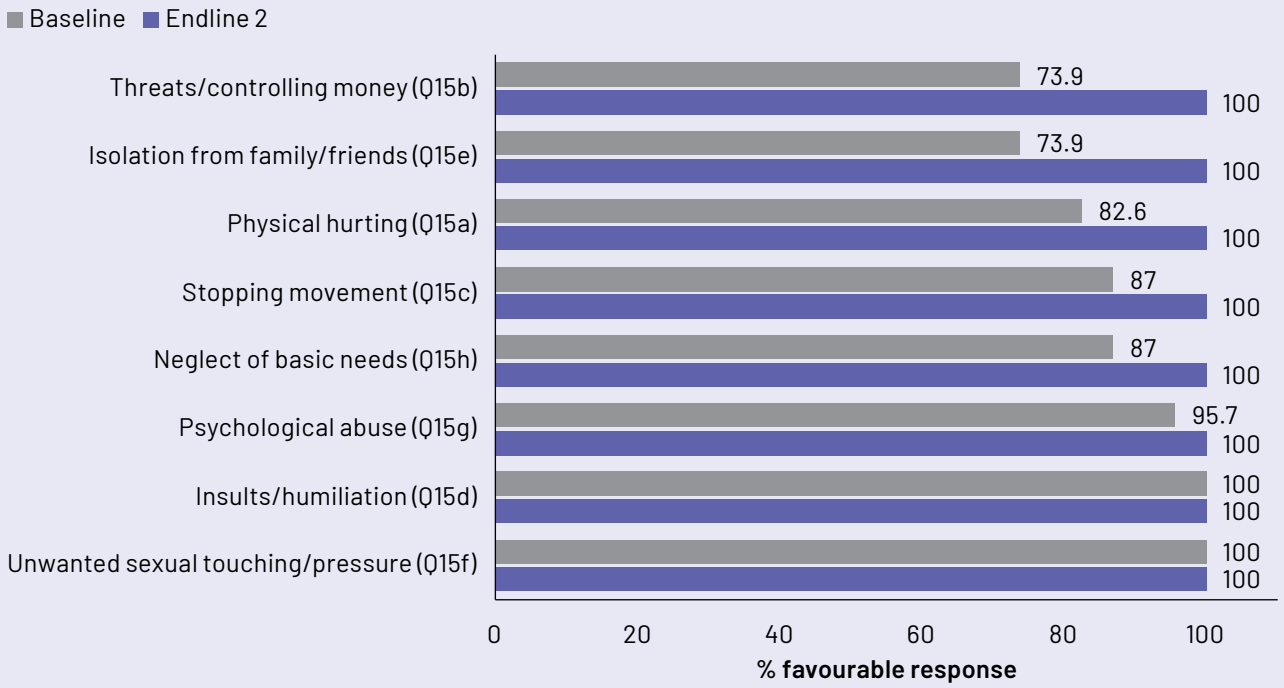
The data suggest partial and negotiated change in knowledge and attitudes among the research participants, with the clearest evidence coming from the longitudinal Nakshi Kantha cohort. In that cohort, three kinds of change stand out. Knowledge of GBV deepened. Attitudes moved on the norms closest to male authority. Participants gained the confidence to reflect on, restate, and reimagine these norms; to recall GBV messages; and to share those messages with others. The cross-sectional comparison of the mural and folk song interventions gives a more mixed picture. Arts-involved respondents scored higher than non-involved respondents on support for women's mobility and economic equity, but lower on rejection of harmful masculinity norms and on support for confidentiality and survivor-centred services. In both streams, the changes and differences observed remained individual-level and negotiated. All three interventions opened spaces for reflection and discussion while working within the same power relations that define camp life.

Changes in GBV knowledge in the Nakshi Kantha cohort

At baseline, the Nakshi Kantha cohort already knew about GBV. The GBV knowledge score stood at 87.5 on the 0–100 scale. The baseline survey was administered immediately after the Nakshi Kantha co-design workshops (Section 4.8); the changes reported in this section are therefore changes over the quilt production period. Knowledge nonetheless improved. By endline 2, the domain score had risen from 87.5 to 100, and every one of the eight forms of GBV the survey asked about (Q15a–h) was recognised by all respondents (Figure 3). The largest question-level gains (the percentage of participants recognising each form) concerned the forms that fewest participants recognised at baseline (threats or control over money, isolation from family and friends, and physical hurting).

Recognition of threats or control over money (Q15b) and of isolation from family and friends (Q15e) each rose by 26.1 percentage points (both from 73.9% to 100%), recognition of physical hurting (Q15a) rose by 17.4 percentage points (from 82.6% to 100%), and recognition of restrictions on movement (Q15c) and of neglect of basic needs (Q15h) rose by 13 percentage points each (from 87.0% to 100%). Insults and humiliation (Q15d) and unwanted sexual touching or pressure (Q15f) were recognised by all participants from the outset, and psychological abuse (Q15g) by 95.7%. Physical hurting is worth noting, as 4 of the 23 participants did not name hitting or slapping as a form of GBV at baseline, even though wife-beating was among the forms of violence participants described in the baseline focus group discussions and interviews.

Figure 3 Recognition of the forms of GBV (Q15a–h), baseline and endline 2 (Nakshi Kantha)



Across all four camps, Nakshi Kantha intervention participants in the baseline focus group discussions and interviews were familiar with specific forms of GBV (wife-beating, sexual violence, harassment, child marriage, restrictions on women's movement), and they also raised closely related protection risks such as trafficking and abduction, grounded in the insecurity of camp life.

> I have no mother, no father, no brother in my parents' home. Where will I go if I leave my husband? So, even when he beats me, I stay quiet and accept it. If the marriage breaks, I have no one to give me food, shelter, or help me live.
> (FGD participant, baseline, Camp 12)

> As a woman in the camp, I face many problems. When I go out to fetch water and a man appears in front of me, I move away. At night, I am afraid to go to the toilet in case someone takes me away. We remain constantly afraid in the camp.
> (IDI, baseline, Camp 24)

> As dowry practices have increased in the block, many girls dream of marrying outside and travel illegally by boat to Malaysia. Some die on the way, while others become pregnant after being sexually exploited by brokers. In the camp, the rule is always that those with power prevail.
> (FGD participant, baseline, Camp 22)

Attitudinal change on male authority, mobility and masculinity in the Nakshi Kantha cohort

In the baseline qualitative data from the Nakshi Kantha cohort, gender roles were highly structured. Women were expected to cook, care for children, rear fowl, and stitch clothes, while men earned, moved, and acted outside the home.

> **If any girl or woman goes outside for any work, she must take permission from her husband or father… Even to fetch water from outside, a woman needs her husband's permission.**
> (FGD participant, baseline, Camp 22)

Breaking such norms can itself provoke gender-based violence, and the wider community takes part in policing them. In Camp 12, another woman said she feared going outside without her husband's permission because neighbours might see and tell her husband, who could beat her (IDI, baseline, Camp 12).

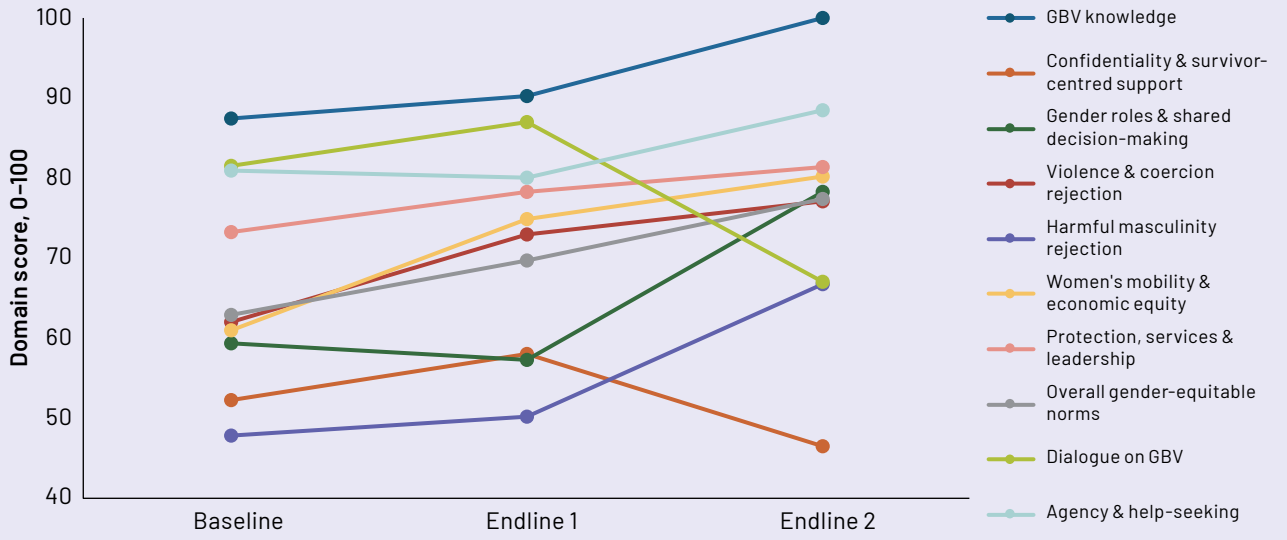
Exclusion reached beyond the women. The participant who identified as third gender described ridicule, discrimination in employment, inability to marry, and lack of social acceptance (IDI, baseline, Camp 12).

Masculinity norms were also enforced. In Camp 8W, a woman said that if a husband helped with domestic work, people called him '*bou paula*' (a taunt implying a man ruled by his wife) and mocked him for doing women's work (IDI, baseline, Camp 8W). In Camp 12, the third-gender participant said that men who consult women or treat them equally could be called '*meyaille*' (womanly or effeminate) and warned not to give women too much indulgence (IDI, baseline, Camp 12). Such peer enforcement meant that even men inclined toward equitable household arrangements faced a visible social cost for acting on that inclination.

The baseline also showed some more equitable norms emerging. In all four camps, some participants said that men and women should share work, consult each other, and treat sons and daughters equally, and in Camp 24, Nakshi Kantha group members said that men and women could both earn and decide together, though men kept the main protection role (FGD participants, baseline, Camp 24). These openings are fragile because they depend on permission, respectability, safety, and acceptance by others.

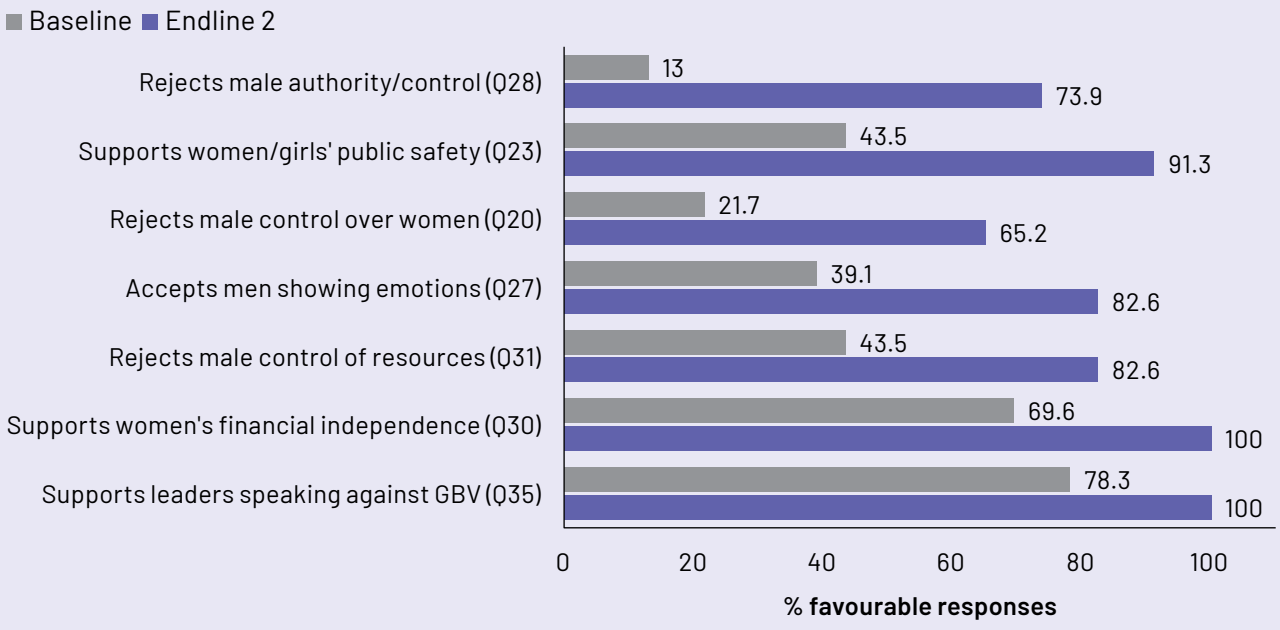
Across the three survey waves of the longitudinal evaluation, several KAP domains had improved by endline 2. Support for women's mobility and economic equity rose from 60.9 to 80.2, support for shared decision-making power increased from 59.4 to 78.3, rejection of harmful masculinity norms increased from 47.8 to 66.7, rejection of gendered violence and coercion increased from 62.0 to 77.1, and overall support for gender-equitable norms rose from 62.9 to 77.4 (see Figure 4). In the exploratory group-level regressions, the models returned $p < 0.01$ for the endline 2 gains in four of these domains (women's mobility and economic equity, shared decision-making power, rejection of harmful masculinity norms, and overall support for gender-equitable norms). The gain in rejection of gendered violence and coercion had $p = 0.013$. For most endline 1 changes, the models did not return $p < 0.01$, a pattern examined under 'Timing of change across the survey waves' below.

Figure 4 Domain score trends (Nakshi Kantha)[17]



The largest positive changes in the Nakshi Kantha cohort concerned norms on male control and masculinity (Figure 5). Rejection of male authority and control rose from 13.0% to 73.9%, support for women's and girls' safety in public spaces from 43.5% to 91.3%, rejection of male control over women from 21.7% to 65.2%, acceptance that men can show emotions from 39.1% to 82.6%, and rejection of male control over household resources from 43.5% to 82.6%. Support for women's financial independence reached 100% by endline 2.

Figure 5 Top improved questions, endline 2 compared with baseline (Nakshi Kantha)



Note: The GBV knowledge questions (Q15a–h) are shown in Figure 3.

The endline interviews with Nakshi Kantha participants show how they linked the intervention to changes in their own beliefs about gender norms relating to work, mobility, and restrictions on contact between men and women.

17 The dialogue on GBV line falls at endline 2 partly because two of the domain's questions measure contextual conditions in the camps. In particular, reported exposure to community arts activities (Q41) fell sharply to 8.7%, while reported leader encouragement (Q42) remained high (See Figure 15 in Section 5.2).

> After joining the Nakshi Kantha work, I understood that work women can do can also be done by men. Men and women can do any work together if they want... If boys can do jobs, girls can also do jobs; if boys can go to the market, girls can also go to the market.
> (IDI, endline, Camp 24)

> Previously, I thought that sitting and working with men was sinful. Now I know that men and women can sit and work together while maintaining purdah, and that this is not sinful.
> (IDI, endline, Camp 12)

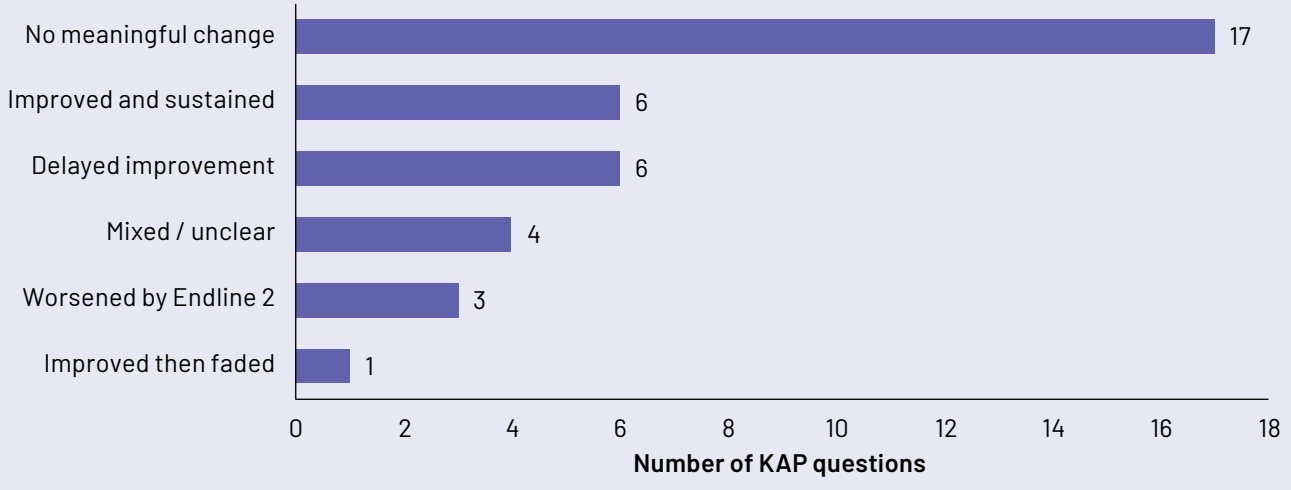
Observation of the Nakshi Kantha co-design workshops and the follow-up discussions with participants showed that the mixed-gender format itself involved visibly crossing an established gendered boundary. Nakshi Kantha is a feminine-coded handicraft, and the men who joined were crossing that boundary before any message was stitched into the cloth. One male participant who had initially felt shy later described explaining the designs to neighbours without hesitation.

> I used to feel very shy to be seen doing it. But all my neighbours used to ask me about the Kantha designs... Now I do not hesitate.
> (Male participant, Camp 12, follow-up discussion)

Timing of change across the survey waves

Several domains improved most clearly by endline 2 rather than immediately at endline 1. This is visible in Figure 4 and in the exploratory regressions. Of the domains in Figure 4, only two had $p < 0.05$ by endline 1 (February 2026) in the exploratory model: support for women's mobility and economic equity, and rejection of gendered violence and coercion, the latter only just inside the threshold ($p = 0.049$). The gains in shared decision-making power, rejection of harmful masculinity norms and GBV knowledge reached that threshold only by endline 2 (April 2026). Classifying every survey question by how its favourable share moved across the survey waves (Section 4.7) shows the same pattern. Six questions improved and sustained their gains, 6 improved only at endline 2, 1 improved and then faded, 3 worsened by endline 2, and 4 moved in mixed or unclear ways, while 17 showed no meaningful change (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Direction and persistence of change across the KAP questions (Nakshi Kantha)[18]



18 Classified with the 10-percentage-point threshold mentioned in Section 4.7. The 37 questions shown are the survey's 38 scored questions (except the perceived-stigma item (Q34), whose direction is interpreted separately) the descriptive Q46 sat outside the scored set.

Such a pattern reflects changes that emerged later while the intervention was still running, which distinguishes it from a delayed effect after a completed intervention. Over the two months between the endline surveys, participants had time to revisit the quilts, explain them to relatives, observe neighbours' reactions, and gradually attach new meanings to the symbols they had created. Change linked to arts-based engagement may, as a result, follow non-linear or gradual paths.

> **Because we drew these ideas on the quilt with our own hands, they remain embedded in our mind.**
> (IDI, endline, Camp 12)

> **It feels good to talk about gender equality, safety, and GBV through art. We had forgotten the discussions about GBV, but now when we see the Nakshi Kantha, the GBV stories come back to mind… Women should not be beaten, and girls should not be married at an early age.**
> (IDI, endline, Camp 24)

Change occurred through memory, reflection, and reinterpretation. Testimonies of care, dislocation, rescue, loss, and hope came into discussion in the co-design workshops. Participants expressed them symbolically in many ways, including through trees, houses, joined hands, butterflies, schools, walls, burning dolls, and raised hands, which allowed sensitive topics to be discussed without each participant revealing their own story. The raised hand stood for seeking help, the burning doll for a childhood lost to child marriage, the wall for obstacles, and the joined hands for harmony between women and men. In this way the quilts became stories, and the process involved far more than information-sharing. Two of the 16 quilts illustrate this visual vocabulary (see Figures 7 and 8).

Figure 7 Example of a Nakshi Kantha artwork created by the participants



This Nakshi Kantha functions as a visual protest, drawing on experiences familiar to the Rohingya community. The hill at the centre of the composition references frequent abduction and concealment of the community members within the surrounding hills; the raised hands of the figures within the landscape signal help-seeking, conveying both vulnerability and a call for recognition; and the wall in the foreground operates as a layered symbol of the structural barriers and gender-based constraints that participants identified as recurring features of their social environment.

Figure 8 Example of a Nakshi Kantha artwork created by the participants



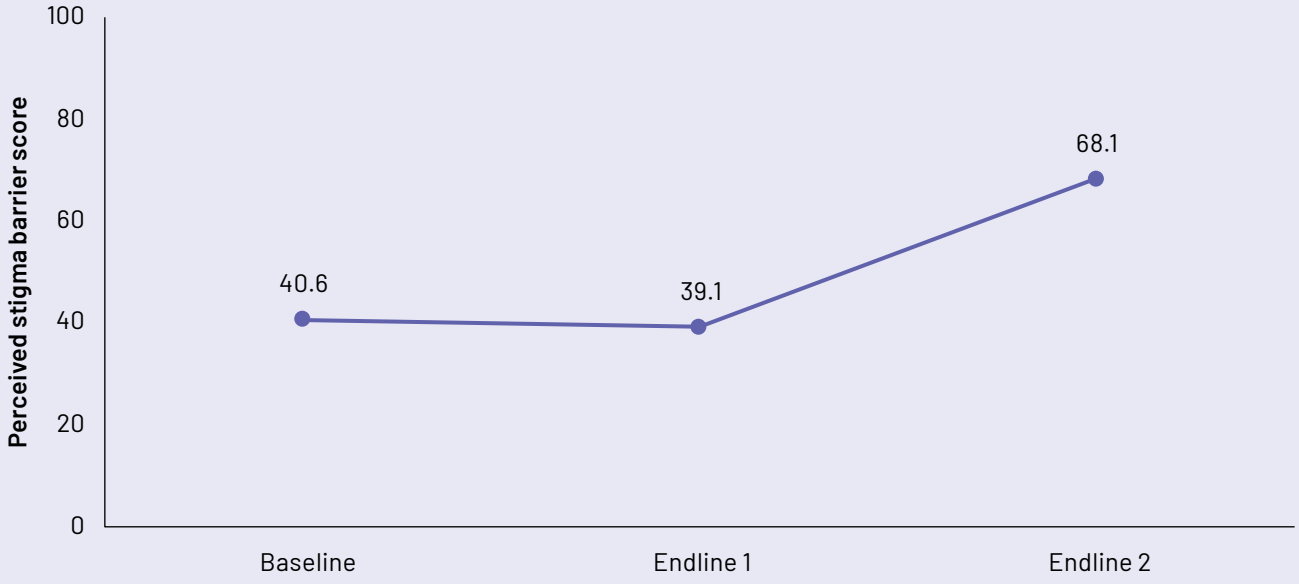
This Nakshi Kantha depicts the reality of child marriage and its impact on a young Rohingya girl's life. The child bride represents a girl compelled to grow up prematurely, leaving behind her childhood, while the burning doll serves as a symbol of lost freedom, innocence, play, and dreams, encapsulating the irretrievable nature of what early marriage takes from girls.

Another participant in Camp 8W described Nakshi Kantha as a place where 'all our life stories' were drawn, saying that seeing the illustrations brought her childhood memories back (IDI, endline, Camp 8W). The Nakshi Kanthas accordingly worked both as awareness material and as memory objects through which participants remembered, explained, and reinterpreted GBV messages in the light of their own lives.

Norms resistant to change in the Nakshi Kantha cohort

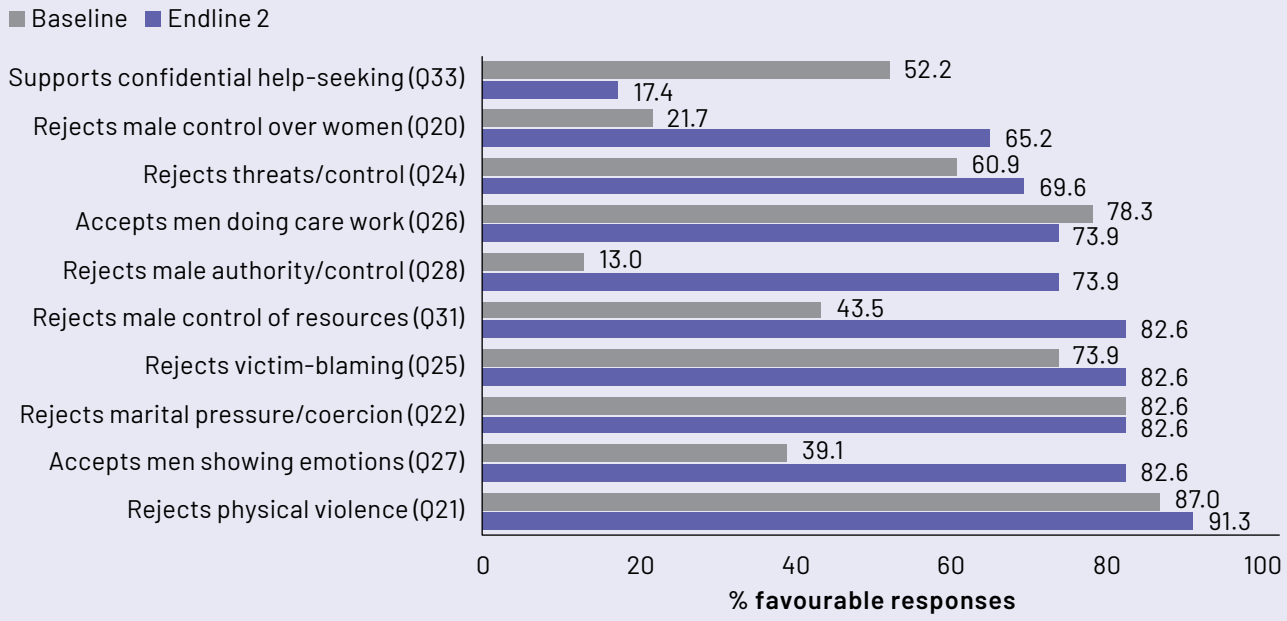
Not every indicator in the Nakshi Kantha cohort moved in a favourable direction. Support for confidential help-seeking (a question within the protection, services, and leadership domain) fell sharply, from 52.2% of favourable responses at baseline to 17.4% at endline 2. Separately, the support for confidentiality and survivor-centred services domain score declined over the same period, from 52.2 to 46.4 on the 0–100 scale, making it one of the weakest domains at endline 2. Meanwhile, the perceptions of stigma against GBV survivors score, which records agreement with the statement that 'in the camp, social stigma and fear of shame stop many people from seeking help when they face harm and abuse' (Q34), held steady between baseline and endline 1 (40.6 and 39.1) and then rose sharply to 68.1 by endline 2, a shift of +27.5 points for which the exploratory regression returned $p < 0.01$ (Figure 9). One interpretation is that, as participants discussed GBV more openly, they also became more aware of the social risks of disclosure. Whether this reflects heightened realism (a more accurate perception of the stigma and retaliation that help-seeking can invite) or lost confidence in confidential support is taken up in Section 6.4.

Figure 9 Perceptions of stigma against GBV survivors across survey waves (Nakshi Kantha)[19]



The largest changes occurred on the same questions where restrictive norms remained most entrenched. By endline 2, support for confidential help-seeking (Q33) was the lowest favourable score among the attitude and norm questions (in absolute terms). Rejection of male control over women (Q20), rejection of threats and control (Q24), acceptance of men doing care work (Q26), and rejection of male authority and control (Q28) remained among the questions with the lowest scores. Rejection of marital pressure and coercion (Q22) stayed essentially flat across the three survey waves (82.6%, 87.0% and 82.6%). This is consistent with the gains described above. The male control questions started from the lowest baselines (13.0% to 43.5%) and consequently recorded the largest percentage-point gains while still finishing among the lowest absolute levels at endline 2 (Figure 10).

Figure 10 Questions with the lowest favourable responses at endline 2, shown against baseline (Nakshi Kantha)



19 A higher score indicates a stronger perception that stigma and shame block help-seeking.

Qualitative findings from the Nakshi Kantha cohort explain why these areas were resistant to change. Concerns about confidentiality were shaped by shame, gossip, family reputation, and fear of retribution. They were also shaped by the presence of armed groups, whose use of threats, abduction, and violence against women (see Section 1) makes any disclosure that could reach them dangerous and invites retaliation, and by the density of the camps, where shelters sit wall-to-wall, and a visit to a service point is quickly seen and talked about.

Qualitative findings also suggest that participants will have to navigate changes in their own beliefs within unchanged social structures, which may block or reverse the changes recorded during the intervention. For example, participants spoke of how survivors of sexual violence are blamed for breaking gender mobility norms; how girls receive less food because boys are seen as future earners; and how respectful men could be ridiculed as effeminate, limiting the social adoption of non-violent masculine behaviour.

> **They say that the girl is bad because she left the house. Because such an incident happened to her, they look down on her family.**
> (FGD participant, endline, Camp 12)

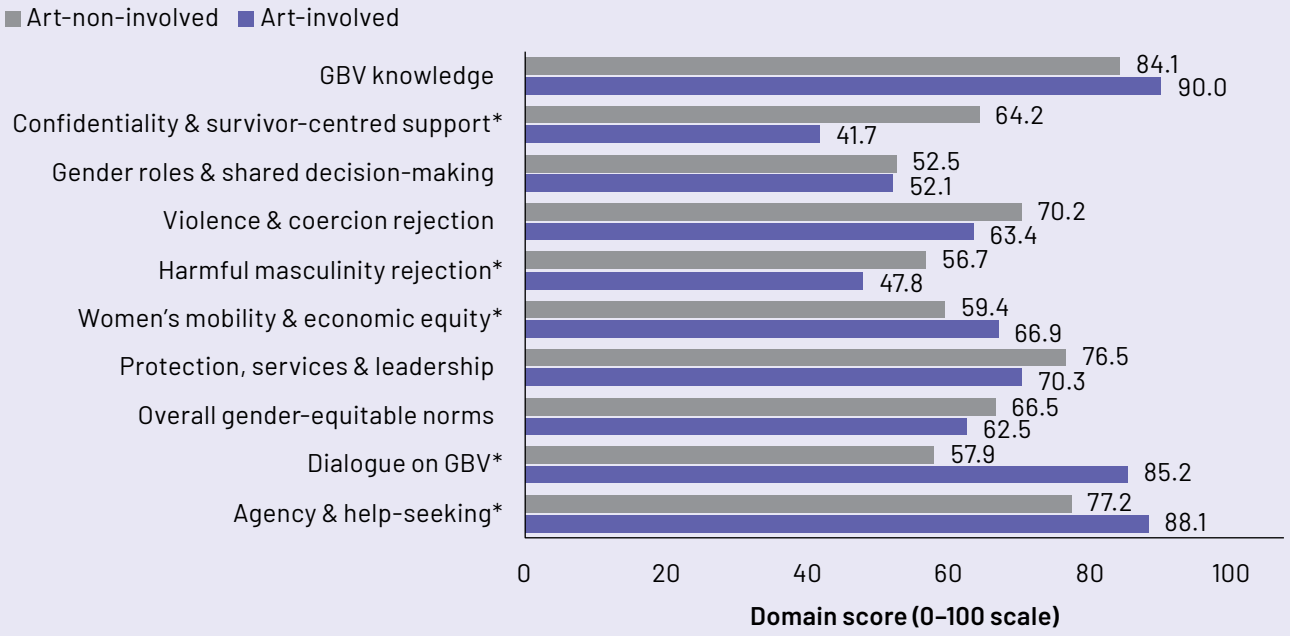
> **They believe that women are stubborn and should be controlled through beating rather than indulgence. In the camp, if a man respects his wife, they consider that man effeminate.**
> (FGD participant, endline, Camp 12)

Although the Nakshi Kantha intervention encouraged participants to think and speak in ways that departed from prevailing gender norms, it left the social cost of behaving that way intact, because the group involved was small. Changes of this kind therefore remain subject to negotiation, and regression cannot be ruled out.

Cross-sectional comparison of arts-involved and non-involved respondents

Involvement in the mural and folk song interventions was associated with more communication and confidence, not with uniformly more gender-equitable attitudes. Arts-involved respondents scored higher than non-involved respondents on the two domains most directly about speaking and acting (dialogue on GBV, and agency regarding seeking help in cases of GBV, examined in Section 5.2), and on support for women's mobility and economic equity. The unadjusted exploratory model returned $p < 0.05$ for each of these three differences. They also scored higher on GBV knowledge (90.0 against 84.1), but that 5.9-point difference did not reach the same threshold ($p = 0.059$). They scored lower on support for confidentiality and survivor-centred services and on rejection of harmful masculinity norms, with $p < 0.05$ for each. The remaining differences did not reach that threshold (Figure 11). The non-involved group scored somewhat higher on rejection of gendered violence and coercion, on support for protection, services, and leadership, and on overall support for gender-equitable norms. The two groups were level on support for shared decision-making power. Because the two groups differ in composition, the analysis also adjusted for sex, age, and education. The five differences with $p < 0.05$ persist in that comparison. The GBV knowledge gap stays at the margin of the threshold under every specification ($p = 0.059$ unadjusted, $p = 0.039$ adjusted with education as collected, and $p = 0.061$ with education coded as any schooling versus none); therefore, the gap should be interpreted as an indication. One further difference reached $p < 0.05$ in the unadjusted model but did not persist under adjustment. That difference was on the perceptions of stigma against GBV survivors. Arts-involved respondents scored higher than non-involved respondents (45.8 against 29.2), with $p = 0.012$ in the unadjusted exploratory model. This gap is interpreted as descriptive. A higher score on this domain means a stronger sense that stigma and shame block help-seeking. Therefore, the gap suggests that the involved group felt stigma more strongly. The longitudinal stream points in the same direction. In the Nakshi Kantha cohort, perceptions of stigma against GBV survivors increased over the study period.

Figure 11 Domain scores of arts-involved and non-involved respondents (cross-sectional comparison)



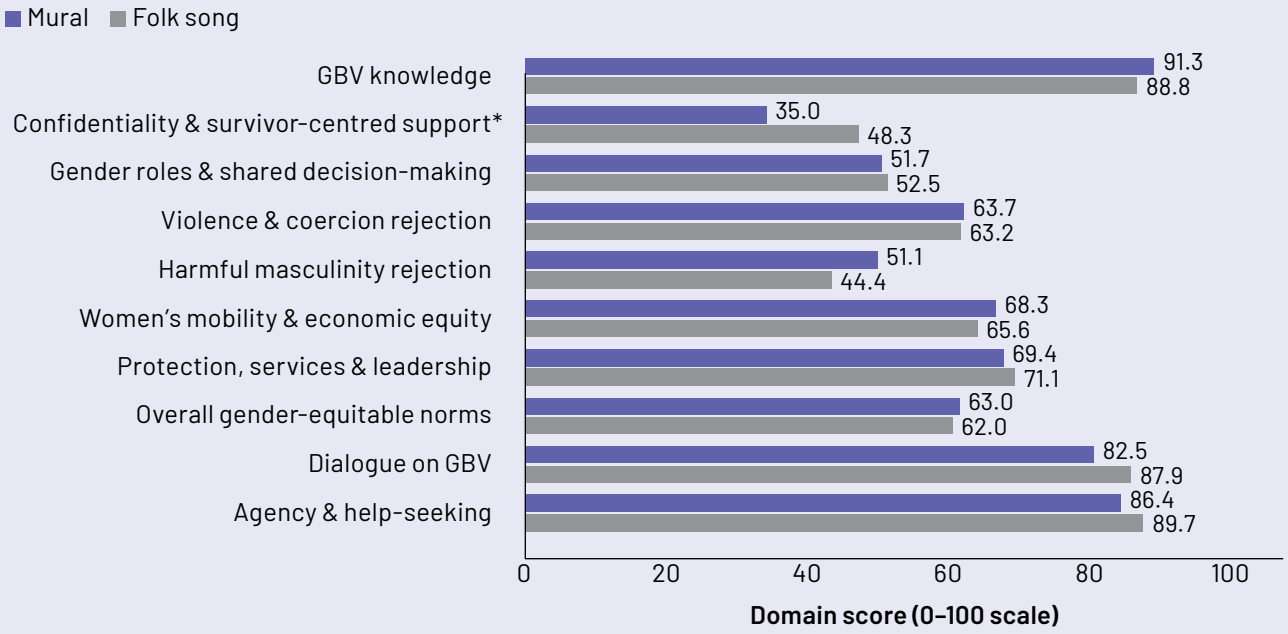
Note: An asterisk marks a domain where the difference between the two groups has p < 0.05 in the unadjusted exploratory model. The p-value reflects a direct comparison of the two groups' average scores, before other characteristics are taken into account.

Several key factors can explain this mixed picture. The most important is that participation in the mural and folk song interventions was voluntary and was influenced by where the activities took place. The folk song sessions were public performances in open community spaces in the camp, which drew mainly male audiences. The murals were located inside women-only spaces (Shantikhana), and engagement with them came almost entirely from women. Since taking part depended on reaching these particular settings, the people who took part did not mirror the camp population. Therefore, a respondent's score may reflect the sort of person who was able and inclined to take part in such activities, as much as any effect of the arts (see Section 4.8).

Cross-sectional comparison of mural arts and folk song respondents

The comparison of the 20 mural arts respondents with the 20 folk song respondents mostly showed similarity. On most norm domains, the differences between the two groups were small, and neither art form scored consistently higher (Figure 12). Only two differences had $p < 0.05$ in the unadjusted exploratory model, and only one of them concerned the norm domains shown in Figure 12. Folk song respondents scored higher on support for confidentiality and survivor-centred services (48.3 against 35.0), a difference that does not persist in the adjusted comparison. (The other difference with $p < 0.05$, on the potential and cultural fit of arts-based approaches, is not a norm measure and is explored in Section 5.3.) Any contrast in this comparison, in either direction, is descriptive, because art form, camp, and the timing and recency of exposure cannot be separated (Section 4.8). The remaining contrasts (the mural arts group somewhat higher on rejection of harmful masculinity norms and on support for women's mobility and economic equity; the folk song group marginally higher on dialogue and on agency) were small and indicative at most. The two interventions differed more clearly in whom they reached, and where, than in the attitudes their participants reported. This contrast is examined in Section 5.2 through the structured observation.

Figure 12 Domain scores of mural arts and folk song respondents (cross-sectional comparison)



Note: The asterisk marks the only difference among the domains shown with $p < 0.05$ in the unadjusted exploratory models; it does not persist in the adjusted models (Section 4.7).

5.2 To what extent have arts-based approaches helped Rohingya FDMNs challenge the shrinking space for gender advocacy, promote community dialogue, and resist backlash against gender equality?

Box 2 The answer in brief

Making GBV easier to talk about was the clearest contribution of the arts-based approaches in both the longitudinal evaluation and the cross-sectional comparison, though the opportunities they opened for dialogue, message exchange, and negotiation remained bounded. The data show how the arts helped participants address GBV and gender equality within family, peer, and close community relationships while meeting opposition. As aid contracted, the staffed platforms that sustain advocacy shrank; in the Nakshi Kantha cohort, participant-led message-sharing persisted despite that contraction. The evidence on this question consequently concerns maintaining or opening spaces for dialogue and navigating backlash.

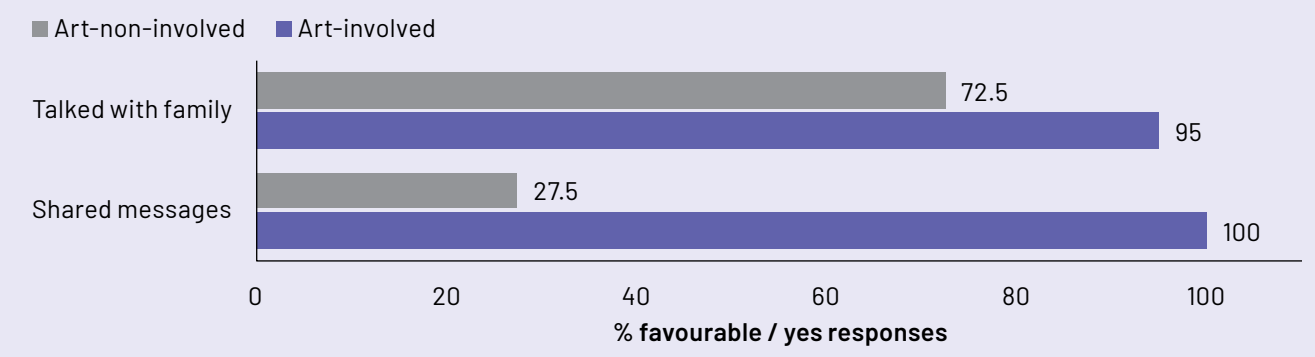
Dialogue on GBV

The clearest finding emerging from the mural and folk song interventions concerns the dialogue on GBV domain. Arts-involved respondents scored 85.2 against 57.9 among the non-involved, the largest gap in the comparison. As noted in Section 4.8, the domain mixes ordinary family discussion and message-sharing (Q39–Q40) with questions about what respondents had seen happening in the camps (Q41–Q42), and the gap partly reflects exposure itself (Figure 13).[20] At the question level under this domain, every arts-involved respondent reported sharing messages about GBV with others,

20 Two questions in this domain (seeing community arts activities and seeing leaders encourage people to join them) are outside the three interventions' control. They are excluded from Figure 13 and are not interpreted as evidence of intervention-facilitated dialogue. They, however, remain part of the dialogue on GBV domain score as computed; for the Nakshi Kantha cohort, the domain score is, as a result, not interpreted as a trend across survey waves (see the footnote to Figure 4), because changes in these contextual questions, especially the collapse in Q41 (Figure 15), lower the endline 2 domain average irrespective of participants' own dialogue.

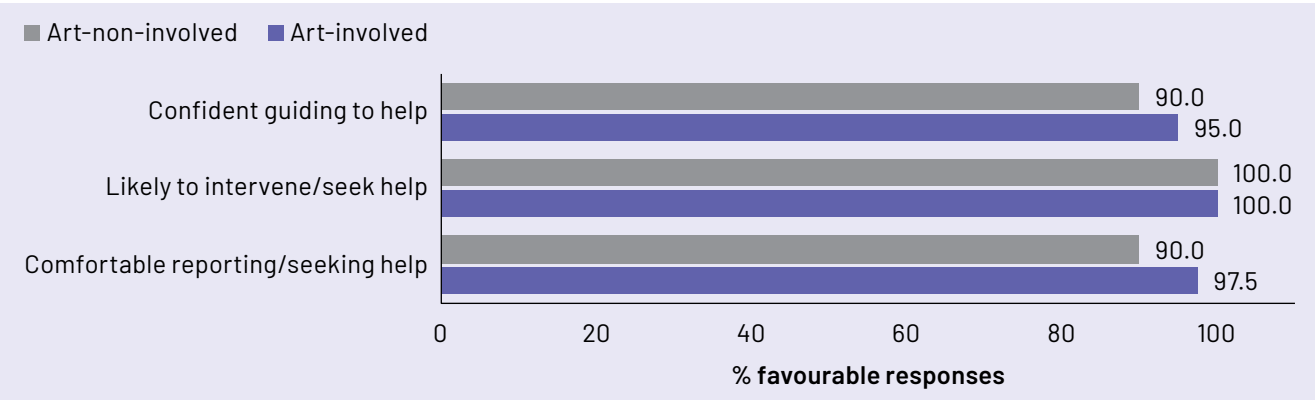
compared with 27.5% of non-involved respondents (Q40). Q40 asks about messages learned from arts-based interventions, implying that the question is inherently exposure-dependent. Therefore, the gap between the two groups is built into the question. Within the involved group, however, it does show how many passed messages on. Arts-involved respondents were more likely to report talking with family members about gender equality, safety, and violence prevention (95.0% against 72.5%). The Nakshi Kantha intervention shows the same pattern over time. The share of participants who had shared messages with others stood at 91.3% at baseline and reached 100% by endline 1, remaining at that level through endline 2, while the share who talked with family members about these topics remained high across all three survey waves at 91.3%, 100% and 91.3% (the baseline recall period was longer; see Table 2) .

Figure 13 Questions under the dialogue on GBV domain (cross-sectional comparison)



Dialogue is closely tied to a second measure introduced in Section 5.1 (people's confidence to seek and offer help). The link between the two matters because talking about GBV is often the first step toward acting on it. A conversation is typically where someone learns that help exists, and where a listener can be directed toward it. Scores for agency regarding seeking help in cases of GBV were also higher among arts-involved respondents (88.1 against 77.2). Although both groups reported high willingness to act or seek help, arts-involved respondents were slightly more likely to say they felt confident guiding someone to help, and comfortable speaking up or seeking support (Figure 14). These are differences in reported confidence to offer and seek help, not in public advocacy for gender equality.

Figure 14 Questions under the agency regarding seeking help in cases of GBV domain (cross-sectional comparison)



The endline qualitative data from the Nakshi Kantha intervention show how the spaces for message-sharing worked in practice. Research participants described explaining their designs tofamily members and neighbours who came to watch them work. In Camp 12, one participant said neighbours and girls came to her house after seeing the work, expressed interest in joining if there were any future rounds, and helped her with household tasks while she stitched (IDI, endline, Camp 12). Visitors did not

come only to watch the stitching. They asked about the designs and the stories behind them, which turned the visits into conversations about the GBV-related messages the quilts carried. In Camp 8W and Camp 24, focus group discussion participants similarly described people coming to see the Nakshi Kanthas, asking about the stories in the design, and wanting to join if new participants were selected. In Camp 24, one participant shared the messages with her husband, daughter, elderly women, boys and neighbours, including messages about not marrying girls before they are 18, seeking help if someone is abducted, and recognising trafficking as a risk (IDI, endline, Camp 24). This suggests that discussion and learning from the Nakshi Kantha co-design workshops travelled beyond the workshops and through participants' everyday relationships.

> **A neighbour of mine asked me why I was drawing a human image, as it is considered haram [forbidden]. I told her that I am not drawing a human. I am telling a story.**
> (Female participant, Camp 24**,** follow-up discussion)

Informal diffusion of messages

The KAP survey shows that participants themselves kept sharing messages. However, as noted in Section 4.8, it cannot show how far those messages travelled or whether they changed minds beyond the participants. Within the Nakshi Kantha cohort, message-sharing remained at 100% even as exposure to community arts activities fell sharply between the two endlines (Figure 15). Participants imagined further diffusion through peer learning and the teaching of Nakshi Kantha skills.

> **First, one person can learn the work and then teach four others. They will teach several others. In this way, step by step, as we learn from one another, the circle… will become much wider.**
> (FGD participant, endline, Camp 22)

Diffusion is unlikely to have reached a tipping point, largely because of the design and scale of the interventions. As the analytical framework notes (Section 3), the expectations of a reference group are theorised to begin shifting when a critical mass of its members changes together; the study did not map reference-group networks or estimate any threshold. A cohort of 24 people spread across four camps, engaged for roughly three months, could not provide that critical mass. The murals and folk songs, for their part, engaged a small core of artists and performers, while most of those they reached encountered a finished wall or a single performance. The interventions also worked chiefly with participants, and left unengaged the imams, *majhis*, elders and husbands who make up the reference groups whose expectations hold these norms in place, while the sanctions those groups apply continued to operate. On balance, the evidence points to informal message-sharing and early peer diffusion rather than to change beyond the participants themselves.

Negotiated safety of participation

Participants described the Nakshi Kantha co-design workshop sessions as 'safe' because working on Nakshi Kantha is seen as respectable, the location was considered safe, and its purpose could be explained in terms of GBV prevention and community wellbeing.

> **When coming to this art session, no man or person nearby said bad things, so we could come happily. Women ask husbands for permission to come outside the home. Because husbands give permission, we can come easily. As this centre is close to the police post, it feels very safe to us.**
> (FGD participant, endline, Camp 22)

The Nakshi Kantha intervention expanded women's room for participation by working within existing norms of purdah, protection, and male approval. It offered a socially acceptable route to participate, speak and share GBV messages without confronting all gendered restrictions at once. Increased dialogue on GBV consequently occurred within existing social limits.

Acceptance also depended on the community's own hierarchies. In Camp 12, people initially asked why men were joining the Nakshi Kantha intervention. Research participants explained that boys could also do such work without losing dignity (an appeal to the male breadwinner norm), and when elders and imams (the male authorities whose approval carries weight) were shown the work and its purpose, some became more accepting (FGD participant, endline, Camp 12). In other words, acceptance depended on male authority, and this pattern of negotiated approval can be understood as an early example of norm change taking place within the existing order (Section 3). In Camp 22, women reported that husbands did not object because they understood it as important for reducing GBV (FGD participant, endline, Camp 22). Such negotiated space was both a pragmatic strength and a limit on transformative change.

Forms of backlash

Despite new opportunities for dialogue, participants continued to live in an environment where women's mobility, interaction with men, and help-seeking are monitored by family, religious figures, and the community (Sections 2.1 and 5.1). Some elders and imams opposed mixed-gender groups in the Nakshi Kantha intervention, particularly when women moved outside their block in the camp (Section 4.3), justifying the objection through Sharia, purdah, women's respectability, and the presence of men.

> **When participants go outside the block for Nakshi Kantha sewing, elderly people and imams consider it against Sharia because men are present in the group.**
> (FGD participant, endline, Camp 22)

Resistance to arts-based interventions on GBV also included victim-blaming (see the accounts in Section 5.1 of survivors being blamed for breaking mobility norms), suspicion and mockery. The interviews with humanitarian professionals make clear that backlash extended beyond verbal disagreement, taking several of the forms anticipated in Section 2.3. It included suspicion of Women Friendly Spaces (Shantikhana), obstruction of volunteers, and even physical assault. One humanitarian professional working for Mukti Cox's Bazar and directly involved in the mural intervention described Rohingya community members, particularly men, addressing the Shantikhana in disparaging language and accusing it of 'spoiling' Rohingya women and girls. He added that some men created mobility challenges for Shantikhana volunteers and, in some cases, were aggressive toward and physically assaulted them, before Mukti Cox's Bazar sought support from the Camp-in-Charge (CiC) and resumed community engagement.[21]

> ***Majhis* or community leaders created many challenges around the messages shown through mural art… Our volunteers were physically assaulted, and we took them to hospital. They called the Shantikhana a [derogatory term] … [saying] it was bringing their women and girls out of the home and would spoil them, and that the work should be stopped.**
> (Key informant interview, Camp 8W)

Resistance of this intensity is consistent with the expectation, set out in Sections 2.3 and 3, that challenges to the arrangements holding GBV in place provoke pushback, and it indicates that the work was reaching questions of who is allowed to move, to be seen in public, to speak, and to hold power

21 See Footnote 1.

over whom. This should not, however, be mistaken for a sign of success. When resistance hardens from disagreement into harm, it becomes a safeguarding concern, a point discussed in Section 6.5.

Responses to backlash by participants and staff

The qualitative evidence from the Nakshi Kantha cohort shows how participants navigated resistance through numerous means, including calm explanation, demonstration, avoiding quarrels, giving examples from camp life, asking a *majhi* to intervene, framing the work as a way to earn (the appeal to the breadwinner norm noted above), and working through trusted intermediaries. These strategies are consistent with the process of vernacularisation described in Section 2.3.

> **We explained that men can do the same work as women and that this does not reduce their dignity. Men can learn this work [referring to the Nakshi Kantha intervention] and earn money at home instead of remaining unemployed in the camp. Later, when people were properly informed and brought close to see the work, they agreed.**
> (FGD participant, endline, Camp 12)

> **If they do not agree with me, I explain calmly once, twice or three times. I then approach someone whose words they are likely to accept. If that also does not work, I advise them to go to Shantikhana.**
> (IDI, endline, Camp 12)

Participants did more than repeat the messages they had learned; they described adapting how they explained the work when they encountered resistance. The Nakshi Kantha intervention left the authority of husbands, elders, imams and *majhis* standing, but it gave participants a safer language, and an object, through which to speak. The Mukti Cox's Bazar team, which implemented the mural and folk song interventions, took a similar negotiated approach. They sought CiC and *majhi* approval, consulted Rohingya community leaders, adapted approaches, used the Rohingya language, involved local singers and artists, and avoided trigger words. One humanitarian professional (key informant interview, Camp 12) explained that terms such as 'GBV', 'gender equality', and 'rights' could provoke reaction, and awareness messages were accordingly reframed through respect, peace, justice, family suffering, and community wellbeing, a further instance of the vernacularisation noted above.

Reach of the murals and folk songs

In the structured observations, the murals created visual and symbolic presence inside Women Friendly Spaces, offering repeated exposure to images of women's work, education, inclusion, and community life. The Camp 8W mural carried a more explicit inclusion message, depicting men and women playing volleyball together, while the Camp 24 mural centred on women's livelihoods through the image of a woman with a sewing machine. However, as Section 5.1 noted, the murals' location inside women-only spaces limited their reach and their direct viewers were mainly women and children. This protected the space, but it also limited men's exposure to messages about shared responsibility and masculinity norms. Both murals had also faded over the four years or so since they were painted.

The folk song sessions observed worked through a different pathway. Performed in public community spaces by all-male groups of Rohingya folk singers (see Section 4.3), they reached predominantly male audiences. Audience members clapped, filmed, sang along, and said they would share recordings at home. In one camp, a teacher from a nearby madrasa (an Islamic religious school) came out briefly with students to listen. The songs were direct and educational, carrying messages against child marriage, domestic violence, and household conflict in a directive, easily repeated style. Reaching men is a strength of this art form. Men are an audience that gender-equality and GBV prevention

messages need to reach, and public performance gathered them in ways that would otherwise be difficult. However, as folk song is a predominantly male art, women were not performers, and few joined the audience because of mobility restrictions (though some listened from beside their shelters rather than entering the public space).

> **I wish I could bring my wife here. She enjoys music a lot. I will show this to her later.**
> (Folk song session observation, Camp 22)

The three interventions thus differed in the form of their reach (summarised in Table 3, Section 5.3). Where the murals and folk songs each reached one sex far more than the other, Nakshi Kantha created deeper small-group reflection through making, storytelling and discussion, and its wider reach depended on participants' own family and neighbourhood networks and on whether the work could continue.

As Sections 2.2 and 3 anticipated, art form and placement together shaped each intervention's reach, engagement potential, visibility and risk; in other words, they shaped its 'access geometry' (who can see, hear, perform, repeat and discuss a message, and at what risk of backlash). A form that communicates powerfully but reaches only women, or only men, does different work from one that reaches everyone but carries a more diluted message.

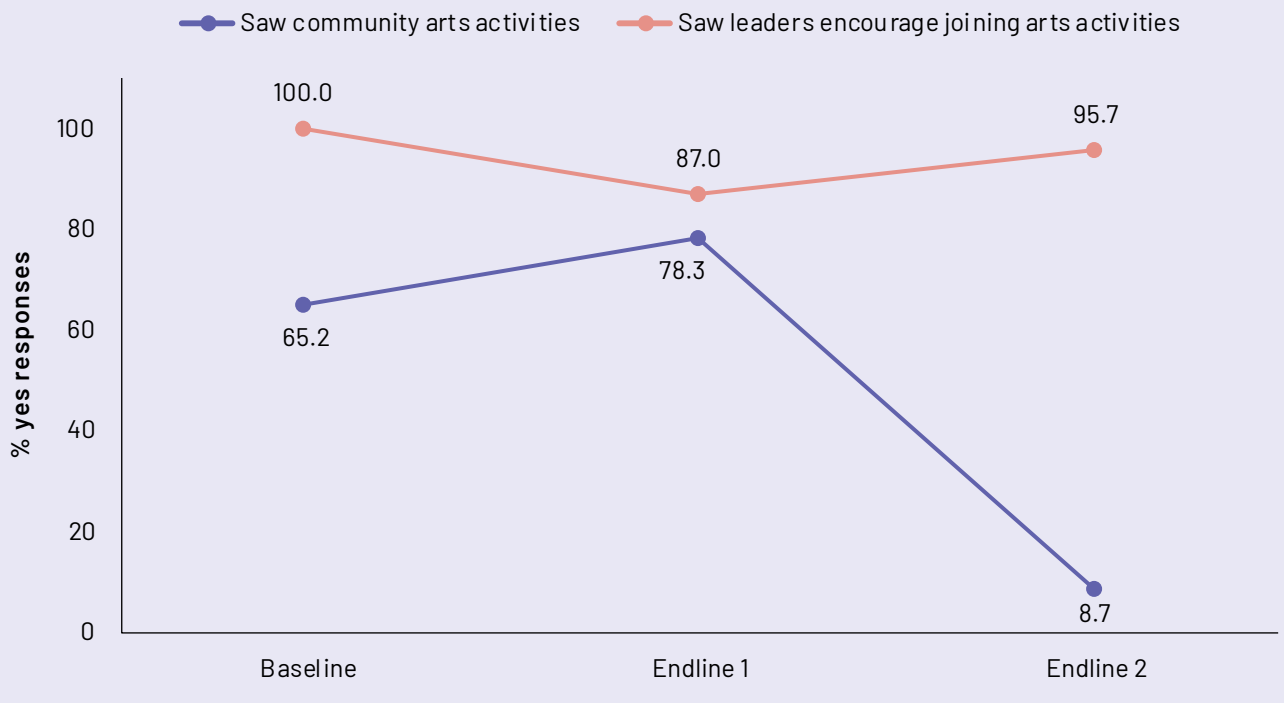
Contraction of platforms for dialogue under aid cuts

As noted above, exposure to community arts activities fell sharply. In the Nakshi Kantha cohort, the share of participants who had recently seen such activities stood at 8.7% by endline 2 (Figure 15). Its importance lies in the fact that dialogue requires sustained platforms. Humanitarian professionals in the key informant interviews reported that reduced staffing, fewer events, reduced materials, and less food or transport support made community mobilisation harder. Several Rohingya research participants said people used to attend meetings partly because they received snacks, food, or materials, and that without these, attendance and engagement declined. Where participation is partly sustained by incentives, funding cuts reach beyond the number of events and make it harder to bring people along on the longer process of social change. Humanitarian professionals also said that protection and gender work has become harder as funding priorities have shifted toward food and health.

> **Because staffing has decreased, advocacy among community members has decreased. Gender equality is a long-term process of social change, but it becomes constrained by funding shortages. With fewer events, advocacy has become difficult.**
> (Key informant interview, Camp 12)

Another humanitarian professional noted that reduced funding affected learning centres through limited resources and engagement capacity. Against this background, participants' own conversations carried on. Their continued message-sharing is the study's most direct evidence that participants maintained a modest space for dialogue as the wider space for gender advocacy shrank. Such spaces may be preserved when funded activities stop, but GBV prevention and protection services remain necessary in their own right (Section 2.3).

Figure 15 Exposure to arts events in the community across survey waves (Nakshi Kantha)



Note: Both questions record conditions in the camps that lie outside the three interventions' control. At baseline both questions covered the past year; at endlines 1 and 2, the period since the previous round. Q41 excludes the Nakshi Kantha subgroups in the respondent's respective camp.

5.3 What factors and conditions allow arts-based GBV prevention to remain feasible, culturally relevant, safe, and potentially sustainable and scalable despite backlash and diminishing aid?

Box 3 The answer in brief

Arts-based GBV prevention interventions are more likely to remain relevant and potentially scalable when they are culturally familiar, socially acceptable, inexpensive to continue (an indicative judgement; Section 4.8), and supported in practice by materials, childcare, safe access, fair payment, market links, and the permission of community and camp authorities. Cultural relevance, scalability, and sustainability shape an intervention's potential to contribute to norm change. Scalability differs by art form. Sustainability must not mean unfunded continuation of the interventions by the Rohingya community.

Cultural relevance

The potential and cultural fit of arts-based approaches domain score was high in the Nakshi Kantha intervention, rising from 76.8 at baseline to 89.1 at endline 2 on the 0–100 scale. It was also high for the mural and folk song interventions, with mural arts respondents scoring higher than folk song respondents (76.7 against 70.0 on the same scale; the unadjusted exploratory model returned $p = 0.028$), a difference that persists and strengthens in the adjusted model but, like every other mural–folk song contrast (Sections 4.8 and 5.1), remains descriptive.

Three recurring features help explain the interventions' cultural relevance (their 'cultural fit'). The first is fit with tradition. Nakshi Kantha drew on a handicraft practised in the region for generations

and coded as respectable women's work; the folk songs used the Rohingya language and a familiar oral performance tradition; and the murals used imagery of everyday life (sewing machines, homes, shelters, animals, and peaceful landscapes). The second is fit with how the community communicates and remembers. Respondents repeatedly contrasted the arts with meetings. Mural, song, drama, video and handicraft were described as easier to remember because messages could be seen, heard, repeated and retold. A community respondent from Camp 22 said folk songs were remembered because people could sing them again in shops, homes and informal gatherings; if the same message had only been given in a meeting, people might not remember it in the same way. In Camp 24, a female respondent said people remember messages better when shown through images, drama or video, and can then explain them to children or neighbours. In an oral culture with varied levels of literacy, forms that travel by voice, image and practice fit the ways ideas already move, and this is what allowed the messages to pass beyond formal sessions into everyday conversation. The third fit is with what the community values. A productive skill that can bring an income carries social worth, and the link to earning (see below) in itself made participation culturally easier to accept.

> **Compared with what is said in meetings, showing something through practice remains in memory more. If we do the work ourselves, we remember even more. Then we understand ourselves and can explain to others… I prefer explaining through sewing on Nakshi Kantha.**
> (IDI, endline, Camp 24)

At the same time, cultural acceptability depended on negotiation. Mixed-gender participation became acceptable for some only when reconciled with purdah, and neighbours who questioned whether drawing human images was haram were answered by reframing the act as storytelling (Section 5.2). This also marks the boundary of cultural relevance, which is that the same cultural and religious frames that made the activities acceptable also constrained some of the messages and forms of participation and limited how far the message travelled, the resonance dilemma anticipated in Section 2.3.

Conditions for continuation

The gains on women's mobility and economic equity reported in Section 5.1 sit alongside qualitative evidence that participants were interested in Nakshi Kantha partly because it offered a skill and possible income. Some imagined selling GBV-themed quilts so that buyers would both acquire the cloth and become aware of its messages.

> **People now show more interest in these discussions than before because they receive money, receive snacks, and can learn Nakshi Kantha sewing… They think they can sell Nakshi Kanthas and earn money.**
> (IDI, endline, Camp 24)

As the quote illustrates, payment for taking part mattered alongside the earning potential of the skill itself (see also the accounts of incentive-dependent attendance in Section 5.2). Remuneration emerged as one of the central conditions for the continuation of arts-based interventions. Others included access to materials such as needles, thread, cloth and sewing machines; safe centres near participants' blocks where they could gather and work; availability of childcare; buyers for the finished quilts; continued NGO support; and the *majhi's* permission. Some said they could buy small materials themselves if donors or buyers remained connected to them. Others warned that without NGO support, snacks, payment, and help in obtaining permission, interest would decline.

> **I want to take 8 to 10 girls on my own initiative, sew Nakshi Kanthas and sell them in different blocks or through fairs at the CiC office… We want sewing machines so that even without the NGO we can work from home and earn money.**

(FGD participant, endline, Camp 22)

> If NGOs do not give anything, we can buy scissors, thread and cloth ourselves. Suppose donors stay with us. If they buy our finished quilts, we can use our own money to buy supplies and deliver quilts.
> (FGD participant, endline, Camp 8W)

> Without the *majhi's* permission, without NGO help, we cannot do anything. Seeing that NGOs give money and snacks, everyone becomes interested in sewing kanthas. Without NGO support, interest gradually decreases.
> (FGD participant, endline, Camp 8W)

Participants also stressed that sustainability depends on trust. One research participant reported completing an earlier sewing order for a different organisation (not one of the three interventions studied here) on the understanding that she would be paid, but said payment was not provided. A single account cannot be generalised, but in a setting of poverty and declining assistance, broken payment expectations may undermine both individual participation and wider confidence in work linked to earning. Participants elaborated on two of the conditions listed above, childcare and safe access. Mothers brought children and found it hard to concentrate without a caregiver, and distance to camp-level centres or community spaces from their shelters created fear of harassment, attack or abduction.

> Without a separate place for children to play or a caregiver at the centre, it becomes difficult to concentrate on the work.
> (FGD participant, endline, Camp 22)

> If many people gather for Nakshi Kantha work, the centre [referring to the space where they will gather, sit down and work] must be located near the block. If it is far away, there is fear of dacoits [armed bandits]; dacoits could catch us and beat us.
> (FGD participant, endline, Camp 24)

Participants suggested that using female volunteers or guards could support women's movement between blocks and centres.

These accounts bear out the point made in Sections 2.3 and 3 that local ownership is necessary but not sufficient. Materials, staffing, safety, childcare and facilitation matter equally. Participation also depends in practice on permission from husbands, *majhis*, and camp authorities.

Scalability by art form

Nakshi Kantha may be the easiest art form to continue. It can be carried out at the household level because it needs few inputs and can be done from home. However, that same home-based feasibility may leave mobility restrictions unchallenged. Folk songs are comparatively inexpensive (Section 4.8), memorable and publicly engaging, but require performers and access to suitable public spaces. The available evidence does not show whether GBV-themed folk songs would continue independently without NGO support, or whether performers would shift away from social themes if NGO-organised sessions and payment declined. Mural art can remain in place and shape visual memory, but requires appropriate placement, permission, maintenance and siting that puts the message in front of the audience it is meant to reach. A mural about men's responsibilities, for example, does little in a space that men cannot enter (Section 5.2). Table 3 draws these contrasts together.

Table 3 Modality comparison (relevance, reach and scalability conditions)

Art form	Potential strength	Main scalability condition	Key risk or limitation
Nakshi Kantha	Familiar, participatory, memorable, and can bring an income	Materials, fair payment, market links, safe access, childcare, and permission	Home-based acceptability may leave mobility restrictions intact
Folk song	Lower-resource, public, repeatable, and reaches men	Performers and access to suitable public spaces	Women under-represented as performers and visible audience members
Mural art	Visual presence, repeated exposure and symbolic messaging	Good placement, maintenance, permission and siting that reaches the intended audience	WFS placement limits men's exposure to messaging about male responsibilities

It is important here to notice that the forms easiest to sustain as external aid shrinks may also be those least likely to challenge existing gender arrangements, as the home-based feasibility of Nakshi Kantha illustrates. Without some form of facilitation, the reflection and guided dialogue that gave the craft its GBV prevention content may not be reproduced. Diffusion, meanwhile, depends on who has the legitimacy to speak. The humanitarian professional in Camp 12, who was directly involved in Mukti Cox's Bazar's folk song intervention, said during a key informant interview that Rohingya folk singers created lyrics and melodies themselves and later used similar messages at weddings and other community events. Messages can travel when carried by local performers and community figures, but this diffusion remained uneven. A respected man, *majhi*, imam or local singer in the Rohingya camps could speak more easily than a woman, adolescent girl, or volunteer facing suspicion. Scalability should accordingly be judged form by form, by audience, protection risk, cost, and resource requirement, as the analytical framework proposed (Section 3).

Sustainability and the need for continued support

Research participants described women as potential trainers who could teach Nakshi Kantha to boys and men (a finding that positions women as carriers of continuation) while stressing that courage would be needed, alongside the conditions already described above.

> **If NGO funding decreases in the future, women will be able to help more. Women can teach Nakshi Kantha work to boys, youth, and men... Women are more skilled at this work, so they can take it forward. And one must have courage for this work.**
> (FGD participant, endline, Camp 8W)

Key informants listed what it would take to keep the mural arts and folk song interventions running. Some of these needs are financial (instruments, sound systems, microphones, food, transport, canvas, paint, training, and venues). Others involve no money at all but are equally important, such as permission from the CiC and the *majhis*, safe timing, and protection from harassment or abduction. Some informants also pointed to cheaper alternatives, such as calligraphy, everyday materials like bamboo, mud, and cloth for crafts, mobile or audio recordings, short videos, and simple home-based handicrafts. Even so, none of this means that communities can carry on arts-based approaches unaided. Lower-resource arts-based work can keep modest spaces for dialogue open only if a minimum of resources, safeguarding and institutional support stays in place. Sustainability should consequently be judged, as Section 2.3 argued, by whether an intervention can continue safely, without an unpaid burden on participants, exposure to backlash, or reproduction of the inequalities it sets out to address.

6 Discussion

This section answers the study's primary research question by interpreting the findings of Section 5 through the analytical framework (Section 3) and against the literature (Section 2).

6.1 Extent and limits of the contribution

By the accounts of the people they reached, all three interventions helped them to remember GBV-related messages, to reflect on the norms beneath them, and to raise both in conversation. The same evidence also shows the limits of that contribution. The study was not designed to determine whether collective-level norm change occurred (Section 4.8), and the structural conditions that keep GBV in place (male authority in the household, restricted female mobility, the policing of reputation, and the stigma attached to help-seeking) remained largely intact (Section 5.1). Given the modest scale and duration of what was studied (Section 4.3), dismantling the arrangements described in Section 2 was not a realistic standard. The appropriate test, set by the analytical framework, is whether the interventions made restrictive norms visible, discussable and negotiable, for whom, and at what risk. On that test, the findings are largely affirmative. The study adds intervention-relevant evidence to a sparse evidence base (Section 2.2) and generates propositions that can be examined in other settings.

6.2 Mechanisms of change

The mechanisms below are drawn mainly from the longitudinal cohort, the only stream that observed change as it happened (Section 4.1). The Nakshi Kantha cohort began with a high level of GBV knowledge (87.5 on the 0–100 scale) while the domains closest to male authority scored far lower (Section 5.1). This is the pattern the social norms literature predicts where practices rest on shared expectations, not ignorance (Bicchieri, 2017; Cislaghi and Heise, 2019). The changes observed over the study period raise a further question of where the movement occurred and where it stopped. Kabeer's (1999) triad (Section 3) locates that movement. Agency moved most, as participants reflected critically, reinterpreted norms, and voiced and negotiated them. Achievements moved least, with little reported change in household authority or safe help-seeking. The resources that underpin choice, such as income, mobility, security and institutional support, remained constrained throughout. In Kabeer's framework, resources are the preconditions through which agency is exercised; therefore, achievements are unlikely to follow while those resources remain out of reach. The Nakshi Kantha cohort's accounts fit that interpretation.

How change came about is visible in where the gains fell. Within the cohort, they were concentrated in the areas that the co-design process, the mixed-gender format, and the imagery addressed most directly (male authority, women's mobility, masculinity), and several appeared only at endline 2, after two further months of living with and explaining the quilts (Section 5.1). Such delayed development is what experiential learning and praxis (Section 3) predict, where learning happens through making, communicating, and reflecting (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Boal, 2019 [1974]). Making the quilts was itself a form of thinking through materials (Sennett, 2008; Ingold, 2013), and the finished pieces then worked as memory objects that prompted explanation and discussion (Section 5.1), a dialogic role that participatory visual methods have likewise shown, including in GBV work (Christensen, 2019) and in research with displaced people (Lenette, 2019; Bandarchian Rashti, 2023).

Change was communicated through idioms the community already valued. Participants and implementing staff reconciled mixed-gender work with purdah, reframed image-making as storytelling, justified men's involvement through income, and replaced charged vocabulary with

respect, peace, justice and community wellbeing (Sections 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3). This is Merry's (2006) vernacularisation in practice. As Section 2.3 warned, however, it brings the resonance dilemma (Levitt and Merry, 2009). The framings that made the messages acceptable also limited what could be said. Messages against child marriage, abduction or wife-beating were more readily accepted, whereas challenges to male authority over women's movement, labour, and decisions met resistance.

6.3 Barriers to community-level norm change

The male authority and control questions showed both the largest gains and some of the lowest final levels (Section 5.1). The analytical framework explains this pattern. Private rejection of male control does not by itself alter the injunctive expectations of the reference group or the sanctions attached to deviance (Mackie et al., 2015; Cislaghi and Heise, 2020). Participants could articulate equality while daily practice remained governed by permission, reputation, and ridicule. This is localised change rather than a shift in the group's own expectations (Mackie et al., 2015). This pattern of partial reform predates the interventions. At baseline, specific harms were already condemned while the permission system remained unchanged (Section 5.1). The cross-sectional stream reinforces this finding. Arts-involved respondents scored lower than the non-involved on rejection of harmful masculinity norms (47.8 against 56.7), a difference that persists in the adjusted model. Whatever mix of selection and exposure lies behind it, involvement was not accompanied by more equitable masculinity attitudes, which suggests that masculine norms shift only where an intervention is designed to target them.

However, there are two limits to this conclusion. None of the interventions was designed to work directly and sustainedly on authority structures, and roughly three months of engagement cannot lower the social cost of acting differently, which is what keeps harmful practice in place even as attitudes change. Norms are held by reference groups. Work focused on participants alone, as all three interventions largely were (Section 5.2), will therefore keep meeting this barrier; change spreads through those who hold normative authority. Engaging men on terms of accountability rather than a recentring of male authority (Flood, 2019), and involving religious and community leaders early, are consequently conditions for diffusion.

6.4 Interpretation of the stigma findings

By endline 2, perceived stigma had risen sharply, and support for confidential help-seeking had fallen in the longitudinal cohort. Arts-involved respondents also reported feeling stigma more strongly than the non-involved, a descriptive gap that does not persist in the adjusted model (Section 5.1). One interpretation is conscientisation (a sharpened critical awareness of one's own situation). As participants came to perceive the arrangements around them more critically (Freire, 1970), they also saw more clearly what speaking up would cost, and they described the gossip, blame and retaliation that disclosure invites. The interventions did not weaken their sense of rights but sharpened their view of what exercising those rights currently costs. The longitudinal rise cannot be an artefact of changing group composition, because the cohort comprises the same people at every wave, and the cross-sectional pattern, though descriptive, points in the same direction. An alternative, that confidence in the confidentiality of available support itself declined, is equally consistent with the evidence, as are changes in actual camp conditions during aid contraction. These interpretations differ in where they locate the problem (in participants' awareness, in their trust in services, or in conditions in the camps), but all three point to the same implication that arts-based GBV prevention work must stay connected to trusted, confidential, survivor-centred services and referral pathways; otherwise, greater awareness is produced with no protected route through which to act.

6.5 Reach and risk across the three art forms

The three interventions did different work, with different people, in different spaces. What each art form makes possible differs (Section 3; Eisner, 2002), and where each was placed did the rest, together producing what Section 5.2 described as each intervention's 'access geometry'. The arrangements that made participation possible (respectability, husbands' consent, proximity to a police post) produced safe space as a relational achievement in the Roestone Collective's (2014) sense, although the same conditions that produced the safety also limited the reach.

The limits of this access became clearest where participants encountered backlash. Resistance was concentrated where the interventions challenged the existing organisation of space and movement (Section 5.2). This resistance made the sanction mechanism visible. It defended who may move, assemble, speak, and control shared space, as the literature on resistance to gender equality work predicts (Flood et al., 2021; Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2024). It signals that the work touched norms which matter. Because disapproval can harden into harm, however, resistance must be treated as a safeguarding matter, assessed, planned and resourced from inception in line with Do No Harm and the GBV minimum standards (Anderson, 1999; GBV Area of Responsibility, 2019). The risk can be managed. Calm explanation, demonstration, livelihood framing, trusted intermediaries and the early involvement of CiCs and *majhis* repeatedly converted opposition into tolerance (Section 5.2).

6.6 Sustainability under aid contraction

The study period provided a limited indication of whether some changes continued over the short term. Reported exposure to community arts activities fell sharply between the two endlines, and key informants linked shrinking staffing, materials and incentives directly to weakened mobilisation (Section 5.2), consistent with the funding contraction described in Section 1. Participants' continued conversations show what such interventions can realistically preserve under austerity, regardless of the constraints.

The tension identified in Section 5.3, that home-based Nakshi Kantha is both the most feasible form to continue and the most easily absorbed into existing gendered space, illustrates hooks' (2015) argument that reform within a patriarchal system can ease harm without altering how the system works, which is localised change falling short of transformation. Local ownership alone does not ensure sustainability (Section 3). The Nakshi Kantha intervention showed early signs of local ownership, and co-design left the skills and the will inside the community (Sections 4.3 and 5.3). Continuation, however, depends on the material, safety, and permission conditions participants described (Section 5.3). Ownership identifies who carries the work without supplying what carrying it requires. Within the short window observed (Section 4.8), 'lasting impact' is therefore conditional. The interventions created assets (message-bearing objects, marketable skills, practised habits of explaining and negotiating, and precedents such as men visibly taking up a feminine-coded handicraft) that can accumulate if minimal support, safeguarding and connection to services continue, and that will otherwise fade or, worse, leave participants to bear the risks on their own.

7 Conclusion and implications for policy and programming

The conclusion of this study is that the three arts-based interventions it examined contributed to addressing GBV less by transforming gender norms than by making them open to discussion and negotiation. In the Rohingya camps, art provided a culturally familiar means of raising issues that are difficult to address directly, and participants used it to examine, and in some cases revise, their own views. The authority structures and sanctions through which these norms are maintained, however, showed little sign of change. This mainly reflects the design and scale of the interventions. It also reflects a constraint common to work carried out within the social and religious order it seeks to change, namely that the accommodations that make participation possible also limit how far that order can be challenged. Therefore, whether the contribution of arts-based approaches reaches beyond participants depends largely on factors other than the art form itself.

Six implications follow for future programming and policy in the context of the Rohingya crisis:

- Arts-based GBV prevention work can be framed and supported as a way to increase conversation on GBV and to support norm negotiation, and should always be connected to confidential, survivor-centred services.

- Such work should be multi-pronged from the outset, pairing work with women with deliberate, accountability-oriented engagement of men and of the reference groups (imams, *majhis*, elders, husbands, etc.) whose expectations hold norms in place, because change that does not reach the reference group stops with the participants.

- Each art form needs its own design, with message, audience, siting, visibility, and safety planned form by form so that messages reach the people they are meant for.

- Safeguarding belongs at inception and should include strategies to anticipate and respond to resistance and backlash.

- Continuation must be costed realistically, covering the materials, childcare, safe access, fair payment, market links, and permissions on which participants said it depends.

- Interventions should be designed for cultural fit from the start, working through art forms, idioms, and messengers the community already values, while recognising that the frames that make participation acceptable can also limit what can be said and how far messages travel.

These implications carry the most weight in the present funding climate. Lower-resource, locally rooted interventions can help sustain gender dialogue as formal advocacy platforms shrink. But sustainability must never come to mean that the Rohingya community is left to carry sensitive and sometimes dangerous work alone.

The study's most encouraging finding is perhaps the persistence of small spaces for dialogue. Across the three interventions, participants found different ways to raise, remember and discuss GBV-related issues. In a protracted crisis in which such spaces are closing, keeping them open, safe, and connected to protection services remains necessary.

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Annexes

Annex A. Summary of the analytical framework

Table A1 Summary of the analytical framework

Component	What it examines	Key sources
Intersectional structural backdrop	How gender intersects with statelessness, displacement, mobility restrictions and poverty to shape exposure to harm; treated as the backdrop against which knowledge, attitudes and practices are interpreted.	Crenshaw (1989, 1991); Carastathis (2014)
Social norm dynamics	Descriptive and injunctive expectations, reference groups and anticipated sanctions that hold GBV-related norms in place.	Bicchieri (2005); Cislaghi and Heise (2020)
Authority and protection logics	Religious and community authority (imams, *majhis*) as interpreters and enforcers of norms; protection through restriction; backlash understood as both disapproval and risk.	Harper et al. (2022); Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez (2022); see authority roles' conceptualisation in Sections 2.1 and 2.3
Arts-based change pathways	Experiential learning and praxis; distinct expressive affordances of each art form; safe space for confronting power without direct disclosure.	Dewey (1916); Freire (1970); Boal (2019 [1974]); Eisner (2002); Dolan (2005); Sennett (2008); Ingold (2013); The Roestone Collective (2014); Leavy (2015)
Measuring change	Knowledge–attitude–practice domains; resources–agency–achievements; localised versus transformative change and the threshold at which wider expectations begin to shift; vernacularisation of gender equality ideas and the resonance dilemma that follows.	Kabeer (1999); Merry (2006); Levitt and Merry (2009); Marcus and Harper (2014); Mackie et al. (2015); Centola et al. (2018)
Masculinities and male engagement	Gender orders organised around male authority and power; male engagement as a condition for change to spread beyond women participants, provided it builds accountability without recentring male authority.	Connell (1987); Flood (2019)
Sustainability and political economy	Local ownership as necessary but not sufficient; safeguarding against the risks backlash carries; funding contraction; cost, risk and reach considered per art form instead of for arts-based approaches as a single category.	Freire (1970); Chambers (1997); Anderson (1999)

Annex B. Research questions and principal sources of evidence

Table A2 Research questions and principal sources of evidence

Research question	Principal sources of evidence
Secondary question (a): transformation of the gender norms that underpin GBV	Longitudinal stream: three-wave KAP survey; baseline and endline FGDs and IDIs; co-design workshop documentation and analysis of the quilts; cross-sectional stream: KAP survey comparing involved and non-involved respondents, and mural arts with folk song respondents, on the norm domains.
Secondary question (b): dialogue, advocacy space, and resistance to backlash	Longitudinal stream: FGDs and IDIs, and the dialogue on GBV, and agency regarding seeking help in cases of GBV domains of the KAP survey; cross-sectional stream: the same two KAP domains compared between involved and non-involved respondents; KIIs with community leaders and humanitarian professionals, and observed signals of endorsement and contestation at the intervention sites.
Secondary question (c): feasibility, cultural relevance, safety, and sustainability and scalability under aid constraints	Longitudinal stream: endline FGDs and IDIs, and the potential and cultural fit of arts-based approaches domain of the KAP survey; cross-sectional stream: the same KAP domain compared between mural arts and folk song respondents; KIIs; structured observation.
Primary question: contribution and early indications of durability and continuation in the current context of aid cuts and reduced support for gender equality	Synthesis and triangulation of both streams at the interpretive stage.

Annex C. Data collection procedures

Data collection was carried out by a team of eight enumerators, all of them women, which particularly supported the comfort and safety of female participants discussing sensitive matters. The enumerators were fluent in the Rohingya language and were trained on the research instruments and on the study's ethical and safeguarding procedures before fieldwork began.

Fieldwork followed the sequence of the design. The Nakshi Kantha co-design workshop sessions were held between 4 and 7 January 2026. The baseline round of the longitudinal stream (the KAP survey, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews) took place in January 2026 immediately after the workshop sessions, following which materials were supplied, and participants began producing their quilts. The KAP survey and structured observations of the cross-sectional stream were also carried out in January 2026. The first endline round of the longitudinal stream (again covering the KAP survey, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews) took place in February 2026, after the initial completion of the quilts, and the key informant interviews of the cross-sectional stream were conducted in the same month. The second endline round (covering the KAP survey of the longitudinal stream only) took place in April 2026, two months after the first endline, to examine whether earlier changes had held.

Table A3 Data collection procedures

Stream	Method or instrument	Camps	Rounds and instances	Participants or units	Timing (2026)
Longitudinal	Nakshi Kantha co-design workshop	8W, 12, 22, 24	1 round; 4 instances (1 per camp)	24 participants; 16 quilts produced	4–7 Jan
Longitudinal	KAP survey	8W, 12, 22, 24	3 rounds (baseline, endline 1, endline 2)	24 participants at baseline; 23 participants at each endline	Jan, Feb, Apr
Longitudinal	FGD	8W, 12, 22, 24	8 instances (2 rounds; 4 instances in each round; 1 per camp)	6 participants per camp (5 in Camp 24 at endline)	Jan (baseline); Feb (endline)
Longitudinal	IDI	8W, 12, 22, 24	15 instances (2 rounds; 8 at baseline, 7 at endline)	2 per camp per round (1 in Camp 24 at endline)	Jan (baseline); Feb (endline)
Cross-sectional	KAP survey	8W, 24 (mural arts); 12, 22 (folk song)	1 round	80 (40 involved; 40 non-involved)	Jan
Cross-sectional	Structured observation	8W, 24 (mural arts); 12, 22 (folk song)	1 round; 4 instances	2 mural sites; 2 folk song sessions	Jan
Cross-sectional	KII (community leaders)	8W, 12, 22, 24	1 round; 4 instances; 1 per camp	4 community leaders	Feb
Cross-sectional	KII (humanitarian professionals)	8W, 12, 22, 24	1 round; 4 instances; 1 per camp	4 humanitarian professionals	Feb

Annex D. Scoring rules in the quantitative analysis

Table A4 Scoring rules in the quantitative analysis

Response Type	Response	Score
Knowledge	Yes	100
Knowledge	No	0
Knowledge	Not Sure	0
Positive attitude	Strongly disagree	0
Positive attitude	Disagree	33.3
Positive attitude	Not Sure	50
Positive attitude	Agree	66.7
Positive attitude	Strongly agree	100

Response Type	Response	Score
Negative attitude	Strongly agree	0
Negative attitude	Agree	33.3
Negative attitude	Not Sure	50
Negative attitude	Disagree	66.7
Negative attitude	Strongly disagree	100
Dialogue frequency	Never	0
Dialogue frequency	Once	33.3
Dialogue frequency	A few times	66.7
Dialogue frequency	Many times	100
Yes/No dialogue	Yes	100
Yes/No dialogue	No	0
Confidence	Not at all confident	0
Confidence	A little confident	25
Confidence	Somewhat confident	50
Confidence	Confident	75
Confidence	Very confident	100
Likelihood	Very unlikely	0
Likelihood	Unlikely	33.3
Likelihood	Not Sure	50
Likelihood	Likely	66.7
Likelihood	Very likely	100
Comfort	Very uncomfortable	0
Comfort	Uncomfortable	33.3
Comfort	Not Sure	50
Comfort	Comfortable	66.7
Comfort	Very comfortable	100

Notes:

Reverse coding was applied to negatively worded questions so that all main domain scores, except the Perceptions of stigma against GBV survivors score, move in the same interpretive direction. This means that higher scores consistently represent more favourable knowledge, attitudes, norms, agency, or acceptability. For example, agreement with 'Women need to be financially independent' was treated as favourable, while agreement with 'Men should control the household's economic resources' was treated as unfavourable. After reverse coding, both questions could be included in the Support for women's mobility and economic equity score because higher values on both questions represented stronger support for women's economic agency.

'Not Sure' responses were retained as analytically meaningful, for the reasons given in Section 4.7.
For knowledge questions, 'Not Sure' was coded as 0 because the respondent did not confidently recognise the item as a form of GBV.
For attitude questions, 'Not Sure' was coded as 50, representing a midpoint between unfavourable and favourable responses.

Annex E. Data management, software and instruments

Survey and observation records were identified through pre-assigned data collection IDs rather than respondent names, and were stored on the KoboToolbox server, with access restricted to the research team. Qualitative transcripts were held under the same access restrictions, and quotations used in reporting carry coded, non-identifying source references.

The quantitative analysis was carried out in Python, using the pandas and numpy libraries for data cleaning and numerical work, matplotlib and seaborn for charts, and scipy and statsmodels for the correlation and regression outputs. The qualitative analysis was conducted in NVivo.

The full KAP survey instrument, the two observational checklists, and the guides for the focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and key informant interviews are available on request from the authors.

Annex F. Ethical approval, permissions and ethical considerations

The study received full ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the Institute of Health Economics, University of Dhaka. The approval was granted on 9 December 2025 under Ref. No. IHE/IRB/DU/70/2025/Final. The study also followed the permissions required for work in the Rohingya camps, including the permission processes linked to the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB), the Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), and the offices of the respective Camp-in-Charge (CiC).

All participants were adults who gave informed consent (Section 4.5); data collection on sensitive topics was carried out by an all-female enumeration team trained on the study's ethical and safeguarding procedures (Annex C); and records were identified through pre-assigned data collection IDs with quotations reported under non-identifying source references (Annex E).

Annex G. Positionality

Mukti Cox's Bazar occupied a dual position in this study. It implemented the two established interventions assessed here (mural arts and folk song), and facilitated the new Nakshi Kantha intervention, while also conducting the research. This position brought advantages, including established access to the camps, trust with research participants, and deep contextual knowledge, without which a study of this kind would have been difficult to carry out. It also carried risks, above all the possibility that research participants may have wished to please the organisation, contributing to the social desirability and courtesy bias acknowledged in Section 4.8. The study design was informed by this positionality.

ALiGN **Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms**

About ALIGN

ALIGN is a digital platform and programme of work that supports a global community of researchers, practitioners and activists, all committed to gender justice and equality. It provides new research, insights from practice, and grants for initiatives that increase our understanding of — and work to change — patriarchal gender norms.

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Cover photo

Participants develop design concepts during the Nakshi Kantha co-design workshop session in Rohingya Camp 24. ©Khwaja Nuzhat Zerin Fatmi.

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