

Project Sanyōga

BRIDGING GENDERED DIGITAL DIVIDE IN
KUTUPALONG REFUGEE COMMUNITY

GENEVA CHALLENGE 2025:
THE CHALLENGES OF MIGRATION

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ABSTRACT

The Kutupalong Refugee Camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, now comprising 33 sub-camps, is home to over 1.1 million Rohingya refugees, making it one of the largest and most densely populated refugee settlements in the world (UNHCR, 2025). The Rohingya, a stateless ethnic minority from Myanmar, have endured decades of systemic persecution, culminating in a violent military crackdown in 2017 that triggered the mass displacement of over 700,000 individuals into Bangladesh (Duggal, 2023). Within this context of forced migration, Rohingya women and girls face heightened vulnerabilities shaped by both their displacement status and deeply entrenched gender norms including restricted mobility, exposure to gender-based violence, and exclusion from education, healthcare, and information access. One of the most critical yet under-recognized challenges in the camp is the systemic digital exclusion of women and girls, perpetuated by a complex web of factors, including limited device ownership, low digital literacy, patriarchal control over technology, and government-imposed restrictions on mobile and internet access in refugee settlements (Hussain and Lee, 2021; Win, 2023). The result is a digital divide that leaves Rohingya women dependent on second-hand, male-mediated information. This compromises their ability to make informed decisions, access vital services, and participate meaningfully in community life. In this sense, digital exclusion is a key manifestation of the structural barriers faced by women and girls in the Kutupalong Refugee Camp and must be addressed as a core challenge of migration and humanitarian response. In response to this urgent need, we propose Sanyōga (which means 'connection' in Bengali), a small-scale, grassroots pilot initiative aimed at bridging the digital divide for Rohingya women in Kutupalong. Sanyōga offers an affordable, offline, solar-powered solution tailored to the restrictive conditions of the camp, comprising three components: offline digital access, community phone sharing and peer-led digital literacy and advocacy programmes. We aim to implement this in partnership with civil society and international organizations active in Kutupalong, focusing initially on five safe spaces. The project anticipates engaging over 400 women and training up to 30 peer facilitators in its first year, with the long-term goal of replication across similarly affected refugee contexts. By providing safe, structured, and community-owned digital access, Sanyōga seeks not only to close the gender digital divide but also to enhance autonomy, dignity, and resilience among displaced women. It represents a scalable model of digital inclusion that responds directly to the compounded challenges of gender, displacement, and statelessness.

INDEX

Chapter	Page Number
Abstract	1
Meet the Team	3
Introduction and Problem Statement	5
Literature Review	8
Methodology	12
Project Solution	14
Project Implementation	17
Conclusion	22
Bibliography	23
Annex	25

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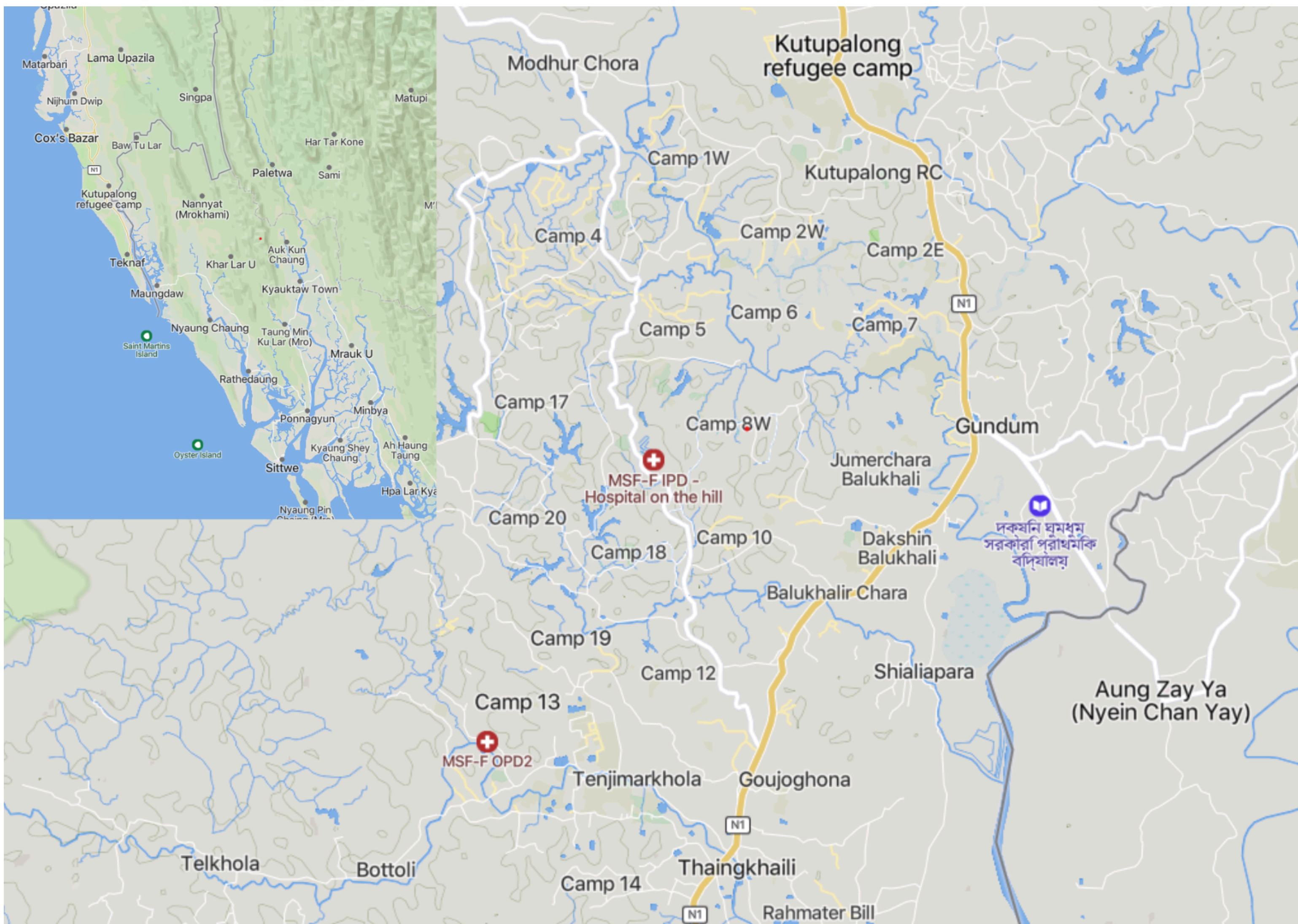


Figure 1: Kutupalong Refugee Camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Source: Mapcarta

1.INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Kutupalong Refugee Camp is now composed of 33 refugee camps in the Cox's Bazaar area in Bangladesh and is home to nearly 600,000 Rohingya refugees living in one of the world's largest and most densely populated camps. Kutupalong was an original camp itself until many extensions were added with the sharp increase in Rohingya forced migration. The current total population of the camp as of June 2025 is 1,106,008 according to UNHCR ([UNHCR, 2025](#)). The Rohingya have faced persecution since the 1940s in Myanmar, which culminated in a citizenship law passed in 1982 that rendered them stateless when they were barred from obtaining citizenship. As a result, Rohingya women were denied their basic rights and protections, making them vulnerable to exploitation and gender-based violence. Following this, in 2017, Myanmar's military launched an aggressive offensive, targeting the Rohingya and forcing them to flee, leading to over 700,000 people forcibly displaced in Bangladesh ([Duggal, 2023](#)). The crisis has significantly worsened since then, as exemplified by the quickly increasing number of refugees in the camp.

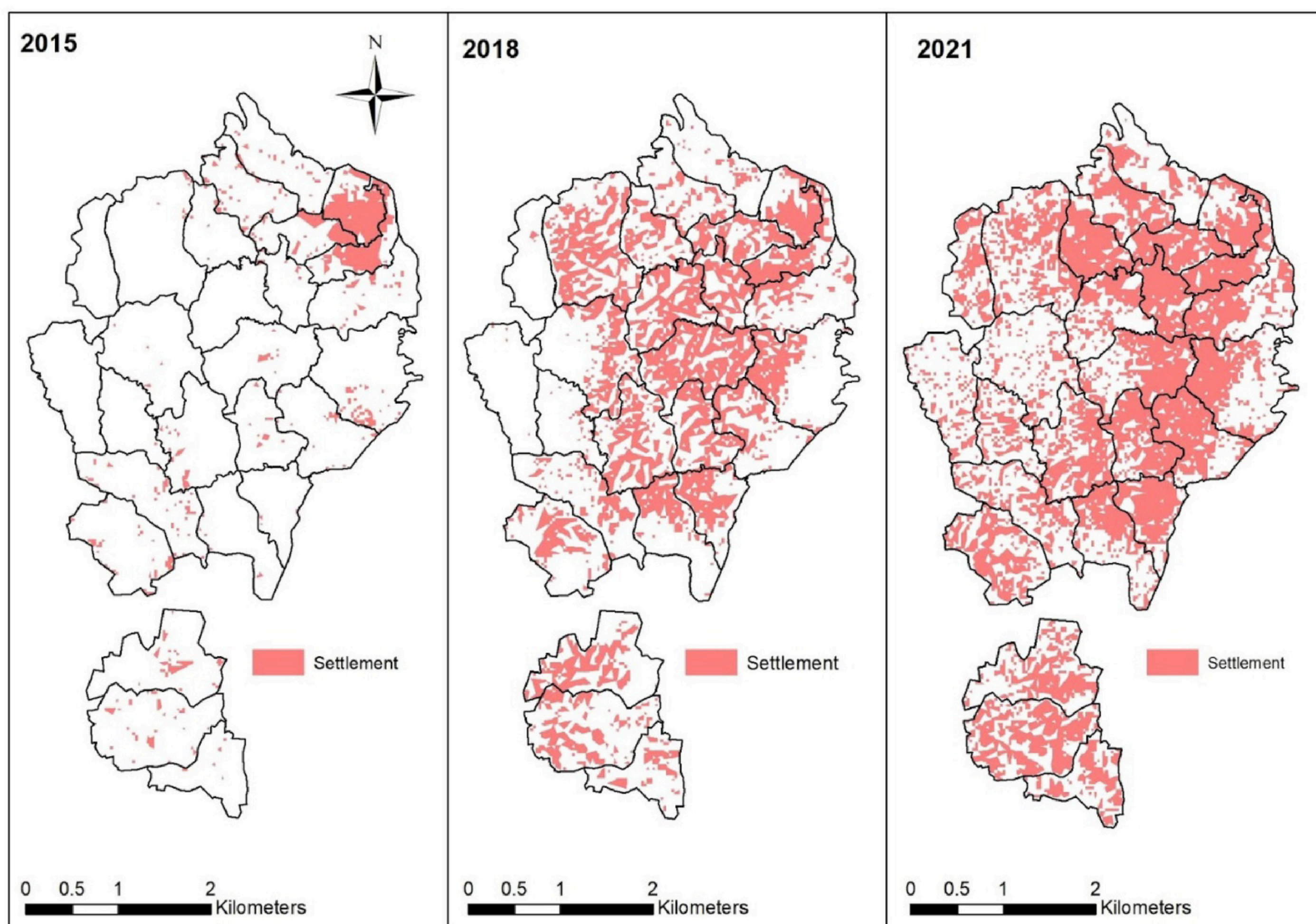


Figure 2: Settlement increase in the Kutupalong Refugee Camp, demonstrating increase in bare land and decrease of forest cover; Source: (Bappa, et al., 2022)

Women and girls in Kutupalong face disproportionate barriers to accessing mobile phones and digital information due to restrictive social norms, limited device ownership, low digital literacy, and government-imposed limitations on mobile and internet access ([Karin et al., 2020](#)). Furthermore, within this humanitarian setting, Rohingya women and girls face acute, gender-specific vulnerabilities. They are often confined to the domestic sphere due to prohibitive cultural norms and safety concerns, which severely limit their access to public spaces, education, health services, and livelihood opportunities. Digital access, which is now recognized as a critical enabler of health, education, safety, and empowerment, is almost entirely out of reach for most women in the camp ([Win, 2023a](#)). This exclusion is shaped by several intersecting barriers:

pervasive gender norms that restrict women's mobility and autonomy; low ownership of mobile phones and digital devices; minimal digital literacy; and government-imposed on-and-off bans on internet access, mobile phone services, and SIM card sales within refugee camps ([Hussain & Lee, 2021](#)).

Despite the increasing digitization of services and information delivery in humanitarian contexts, Rohingya women remain disproportionately cut off from these opportunities. Mobile phone ownership among women is exceptionally low, often controlled by male family members. Cultural restrictions further discourage or forbid women's use of digital tools. In addition, Bangladesh's policy of restricting 3G/4G connectivity in refugee camps has created a digital black hole that compounds the marginalization of already vulnerable populations ([Amnesty International, 2020](#)). As a result, Rohingya women are left dependent on second-hand information, typically filtered through male relatives, which increases the risk of misinformation and limits their capacity to make informed decisions about their lives. This digital gender divide is not just a matter of inequality: it is a critical barrier to achieving basic rights and improving outcomes in health, safety, and education for refugee women ([Amnesty International, 2020](#)).

This context creates an urgent need for innovative, localized, and gender-sensitive interventions that can provide women with safe, meaningful access to digital resources, without violating government regulations or endangering users. The solution must be affordable, community-driven, and capable of operating without reliance on internet connectivity.

Core Problem Statement: Rohingya women and girls in the Kutupalong Refugee Camp face systemic digital exclusion due to restrictive social norms, government limitations on internet access, and lack of digital literacy. This exclusion prevents them from accessing vital information related to healthcare, education, legal rights, and protection. These are resources that are essential to their safety, dignity, and long-term resilience.



This is a serious challenge of migration because the forced displacement of the Rohingya population has placed them in a highly controlled, resource-scarce refugee camp where access to basic rights, including digital access, is severely limited. As a result of their forced displacement, Rohingya women face compounded vulnerabilities due to intersecting factors such as statelessness, gender-based restrictions, and host-country policies that restrict internet use in settlements. The digital exclusion they experience is not merely a technological issue but a direct consequence of their migratory status, isolation, and lack of legal protections, thus making it a critical challenge within the broader context of displacement and migration ([Win, 2023](#)).

Accordingly, the project proposal will be laid out as such:

1.1. Project Summary

Sanyōga is a low-cost, scalable initiative designed to address the digital exclusion of refugee women in Kutupalong. The project provides a decentralized, community-based solution delivering safe, offline, solar-powered digital access and capacity building. By combining hardware innovation, structured access governance, and peer-led training, Sanyōga aims to create a replicable model of gender-equitable digital inclusion suitable for restrictive and volatile humanitarian contexts.

1.2 Core Components

Offline Digital Access Hubs

Solar-powered offline Wi-Fi hubs will be installed within women-only safe spaces across Kutupalong. These hubs host preloaded, culturally appropriate content, including health guides, maternal care, women's rights information, language learning modules, and audio storytelling in Rohingya and Bengali. Women access this content via Wi-Fi on their personal or shared mobile devices, without requiring internet connectivity.

Community-based Phone Sharing Circles

Women will be organized into small peer groups managing shared smartphones donated by partner organizations. These devices will be stored securely in NGO-supported spaces and used on scheduled rotations to ensure equitable and safe access, reducing male gatekeeping of digital resources.

Peer-Led Digital Literacy and Advocacy

Selected refugee women will be trained as digital literacy facilitators and community advocates. They will deliver tailored digital skills training and support advocacy for women's safe access to technology within the camp, promoting shifts in social norms and enhancing community acceptance.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The digital divide based on gender in the Kutupalong refugee camp is a complex problem with its roots entrenched in cultural norms, safety concerns, and socio-economic inequalities that disproportionately restrict women's and girls' access to technology, education, and public spaces. In our literature review, we look at past literature that demonstrates the complexity of this specific challenge of migration. We conducted a desk review for four different aspects: gendered digital divide, information precarity, international law and respective frameworks, and lastly, local context of the Kutupalong expansion site and the larger Cox's Bazar camp area.

2.1 Gendered Digital Divide and Information Precarity

Digital divides have emanated from the deeply entrenched preexisting social divides in our society (Dixon et al., 2014). While new technologies are celebrated for their innovation and impact on human civilization, the structural inequalities that exist for women in accessing and building on these new technologies is a rather underresearched and neglected area (Dijk, 2005; de Haan, 2004). Since women have traditionally been restricted from accessing most technologies and resources, they are unable to fully utilize the potential of said new technologies whenever they receive it. This digital divide runs deep beyond its gendered aspect; it can be observed between rich and poor, urban and rural populations, majority and minority communities, urbanized and ethnic communities, among other similar dichotomies (Dixon et al., 2014).

There is immense research on how gendered digital divide manifests itself, prominently through social structures influencing user behaviour and the different ways in which women think about technology, even when they receive access to it (Terry & Gomez, 2010). There are studies that show that male users outnumber female users even when all of them have access to public internet resources such as state-run libraries; male users have been studied to associate libraries with technology while women associate them with books and nostalgia (Dixon et al., 2014). Thus, a woman thinks differently about technology, often unlike what is conventionally perceived and accepted (Dixon et al., 2014; de Haan, 2004; Terry & Gomez, 2010). Researchers have indicated towards women lacking "ownership" of technology and respective technological skills. Men invest in and own computing technologies much more than women and utilize these technologies for taking more technology classes and improving their digital literacy and skills (Cooper, 2006; Correa, 2010; Dixon et al., 2014; Fallows, 2005).

This gets pronounced at the intersection of the gendered digital divide and life in refugee camps, where information precarity emerges as a critical and foundational issue. Refugees share a deep emotional connection with their mobile phones specifically amidst the chaotic and fear-inducing environment of displacement settings (Wall et al., 2017). Cited as the "most crucial item that migrants and refugees carry", smartphones with their internet facilities have become a vital tool, sometimes marking the difference between life and death for refugees worldwide (Kozłowska, 2022). However, the extremely securitized life inside a refugee camp also invites information precarity. Within academic research on migration, information precarity relates to a "condition of information instability and insecurity that may result in heightened exposure to violence", implying limited and curtailed social access to information infrastructure, state surveillance, and high unavailability of misinformation (Wall et al., 2017).

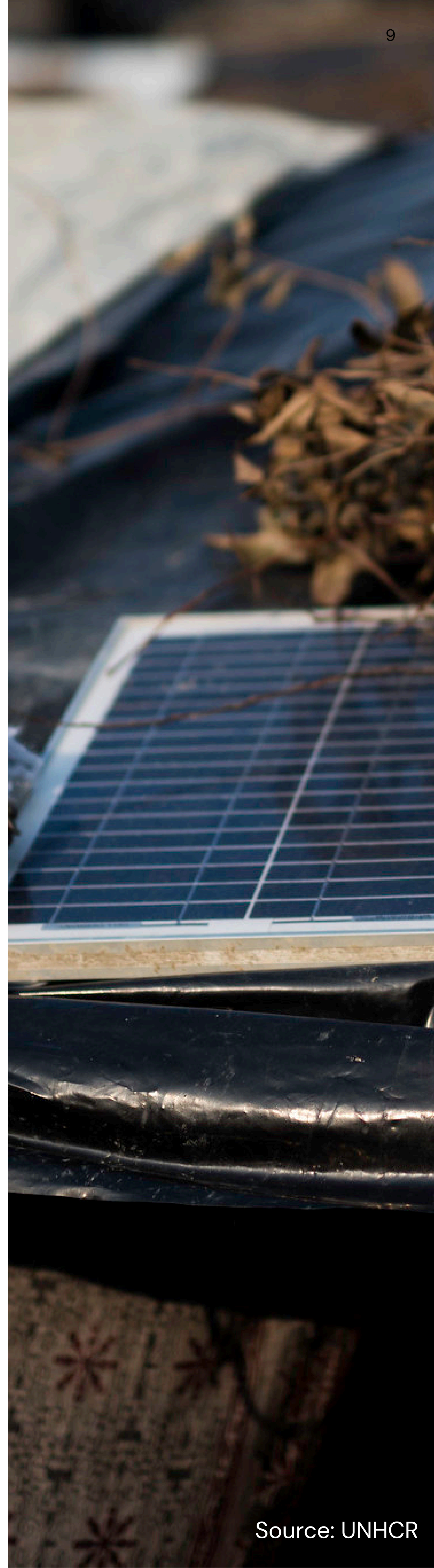
This information precarity manifests differently for men and women, with the latter bearing the brunt of the precarity burden. Moreover, there is a deep digital divide between not just men and women in one refugee camp but also among women of different socioeconomic backgrounds as well, exacerbating the structural and digital inequalities that get percolated into refugee camps. According to the International Telecommunication Union, when viewed through a socioeconomic lens, only 21% of women in low-income countries use the Internet, compared to 93% of women in high-income countries (Smith, 2025). A study by UN Women on digital divides at the Al-Azraq and Al-Za'atari refugee camps in Jordan reveals these inequalities. Despite the urge and the urgency to claim digital resources while also realizing their potential in acquiring jobs and knowledge, women in these camps lag severely behind men (UN Women, 2020).

Within refugee camps, digital infrastructures are either completely banned/unavailable or present in limited capacity. Less than 1% of participants in the UN Women study reported having a laptop, desktop, or tablet and only 14% said they did not have a smartphone themselves but used a family member's smartphone to access the internet ([UN Women, 2020](#)). Participants were observed to be unaware that digital resources even exist for them to capitalize on but the willingness to persevere and learn more remains strong.

In displacement settings, patriarchal structures frequently dictate access to and control over digital technologies, reinforcing existing gender inequalities. For example, among Syrian refugees in Jordan's Za'atari and Azraq camps, prohibitive costs around internet access often imply that the male partner or family member controls ownership of digital access and resources ([UN Women, 2020](#)). This control is reinforced by cultural beliefs that associate female mobile phone use with sexual impropriety or dishonor, particularly among conservative households ([Onyima & Egbunike, 2019](#)). Moreover, owing to lack of access to ownership, women often rely on male relatives to access information which introduces gender biases in the way information is conveyed ([UN Women, 2020](#)). Humanitarian organizations worldwide have attempted to alleviate this through digital literacy programmes, however participation remains low. In Kenya's Kakuma camp, for instance, young girls cite lack of parental support, language barriers, and early marriages as key issues related to their male counterparts becoming more digitally literate ([Mairura, 2023](#)). These examples illustrate how male gatekeeping of digital tools and resources in refugee camps is not merely incidental, but embedded in broader gendered systems of control that shape access to information and inclusion.

2.2 International Law

The gendered digital divide has emerged as a pressing human rights and development issue, particularly in humanitarian contexts such as the Kutupalong refugee camps. International legal frameworks, though not explicitly tailored to digital access, provide foundational principles relevant to gender equity and technological inclusion for displaced populations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) guarantees in Article 19 the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media, a right that is increasingly interpreted to include digital platforms ([United Nations, 1948](#)). Additionally, the principles of equality and non-discrimination articulated in Articles 1 and 2 support the interpretation that digital exclusion on the basis of gender constitutes a violation of fundamental rights (*Ibidem*). The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) similarly enshrines the right to freedom of expression in Article 19(2) stating that everyone should have the right to "include freedom to seek, receive and impart



information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice" ([OHCHR, 1966](#)).

Gender-specific protections are further reinforced through the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which, though developed before the digital age, remains a cornerstone in the fight against gender inequality ([OHCHR, 1979](#)). Articles 10 and 13 of CEDAW guarantee women's equal access to education and public life, areas that increasingly require digital literacy and internet access. Recent legal and academic commentaries have advocated for a digital interpretation of CEDAW obligations, recognizing that exclusion from online spaces reinforces structural inequalities that disproportionately affect displaced women and girls ([Arimatsu, 2019](#); [Krupiy, 2021](#); [Treuthart, 2019](#)). Within the context of migration and displacement, international refugee law also provides relevant, though indirect, legal protections. The 1951 Refugee Convention does not address digital inclusion explicitly, but its provisions on the right to education (Article 22) and access to public assistance (Article 23) create a normative space to argue that digital access is essential to fulfilling these rights in contemporary settings ([UNHCR, 1951](#)). Moreover, UNHCR and its Digital Transformation Strategy 2022–2026 identify digital exclusion particularly among women and girls as a barrier to protection and self-reliance.

Beyond formal legal instruments, soft law and global development agendas also play a crucial role. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5, which calls for gender equality (in particular target 5.b), and SDG 9, focused on infrastructure and innovation (in particular target 9.c) support efforts to close the digital divide. Similarly, frameworks such as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), affirm the importance of inclusive information and communication technologies (ICTs) and call for gender-sensitive ICT strategies. Finally, operational guidance documents like The Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) provide practical frameworks for addressing gender disparities in access to services in humanitarian settings.

2.3 Contextualizing the Gendered Digital Divide in Kutupalong Refugee Community

Located on the coastal side of Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, Kutupalong is the world's largest, most densely populated and increasingly overcrowded refugee camp in the world ([Malteser International](#)). As summarized by Al Jazeera, the Rohingya are a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority who have resided in Myanmar for centuries but have faced systematic discrimination and state-led persecution since the country's independence in 1948 ([Duggal, 2023](#)). The 1982 Citizenship Law excluded them from Myanmar's list of 135 officially recognized ethnic groups, effectively rendering them stateless ([Burma Citizenship Law, 1982](#)). Statelessness has denied the Rohingya access to basic rights, legal protections, and public services, increasing their exposure to exploitation, including sexual and gender-based violence ([Duggal, 2023](#)). On August 25, 2017, a large-scale military operation by Myanmar's armed forces triggered the forced displacement of over 700,000 Rohingya into neighbouring Bangladesh ([Ali and Duggal, 2022](#)). As of July 2023, approximately 931,960 Rohingya refugees resided in 33 camps within Cox's Bazar district, covering around 24 square kilometres. Much like many other refugee camps across the world, this camp is also run by the coordination between the state (Bangladesh, in this case) and the United Nations. All United Nations entities and agencies functional inside the camp are organized in clusters, based on their purpose. However, it's important to note that Kutupalong faces the dual challenges of hosting refugees who have faced violent persecution by the states they left behind and lack of adequate disaster risk reduction measures in the camp itself ([Malteser International](#)).

The Government of Bangladesh has explicitly prohibited Rohingyas from registering SIM cards in their own names, effectively imposing digital repression and curtailing their access to communication and technology ([Human Rights Watch, 2019](#)). Under the garb of security requirements in Cox's Bazar, such state measures have broadened the digital divide in Kutupalong. After several human rights groups signed petitions to encourage the Bangladesh government to lift digital restrictions, 2G services and limited telecommunication services are now provided within the camps ([Win, 2023](#)). These measures create severe information precarity, especially for women and girls in Kutupalong, who are unable to do what many men resort to:

paying high prices for fake SIM cards, traveling long distances, and navigating complex coordination with telecom shops (Amnesty International, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2019; Win, 2023). This has resulted in increased isolation for Rohingya women in Kutupalong. Women are expected to stay home and are cut-off from their long-distant friends and family members, being denied access to emotional belonging. Internet and leisure is severely compromised and online sexual exploitation among women and girls are rampant within the camp, thus furthering the gendered digital divide. These are some of the gaps our project solution with a well-planned monitoring and evaluation phases will address.

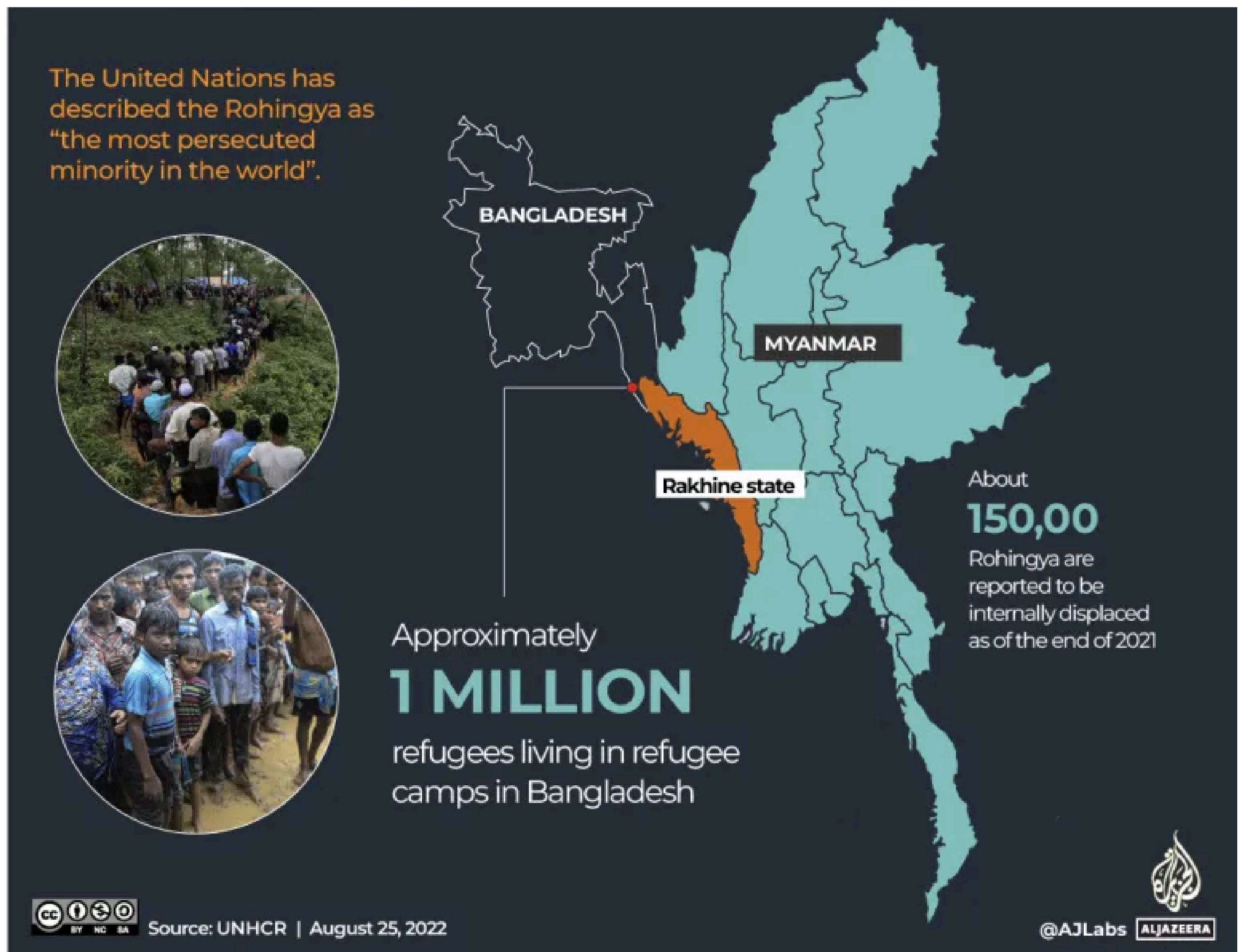


Figure 3: Contextualising the Rohingya refugee crisis; Source: Al Jazeera

2.4 Case Studies

Humanitarian organizations have been documented to deploy gender-sensitive digital literacy initiatives in refugee and displacement settings to close the digital divide and challenge patriarchal norms. For instance, the International Rescue Committee piloted a "Safe Space to Learn Digital Literacy" programme in Yemen after conducting research on gendered digital divide in Lebanon and Uganda. This programme provided digital skills training (online navigation, account security, job-oriented uses) to women and girls in dedicated safe spaces (International Rescue Committee, 2024; Kristy Crabtree & Rana Obadi, 2024). Participants reported a significant increase in digital citizenship skills, greater confidence, and even support for family members. Furthermore, UNHCR's Innovation Service reports that in Lebanon, digital literacy training for refugees reached over 650 women and girls, of whom 87% reported increased confidence using internet platforms safely (UNHCR Innovation Service, 2023).

3. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Project Solution Design

Our project solution draws on relevant data and literature from key authors and organisations working closely with Rohingya women in Cox's Bazar. This helped us in understanding and accommodating consideration for their contextual vulnerabilities. To design our project solution better, we have conducted a meticulous desk review of news articles, international law frameworks, international organizations and civil society reports, relevant academic articles, NGO case studies and refugee innovation project evaluations. We also accommodated an analysis of Bangladeshi policies on telecom regulations affecting Rohingya communities, such as SIM card restrictions or internet shutdown orders, to identify feasible alternatives such as offline Wi-Fi which is also solar powered. This desk review proved immensely useful in designing an innovative solution which is rooted in humanitarian principles, while keeping in mind the contextual issues faced by Kutupalong refugees.

All of these approaches will ensure dignified and human rights-based access to digital resources, reserved specifically for women and girls of the Kutupalong refugee community. We will rely on multi-stakeholder partnerships with international organizations and civil society members to ensure ease of implementation. These partnerships will also ensure that we amplify the utility of available resources and effective practices, thus reducing implementation frictions and ensuring that women get access to digital resources within the comfort of their safe spaces, trusted partners, and useful resources.

2.2 Ethical considerations

The project is committed to upholding the highest ethical standards in all phases of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Given the vulnerability of the Rohingya refugee women and girls, ethical safeguards are essential to the design and delivery of this initiative.

Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

All participants will be fully informed of the purpose, scope, and potential risks and benefits of their involvement in the project. Participation in training, phone-sharing circles, and access to Wi-Fi hubs will be entirely voluntary, with no consequences for refusal or withdrawal. Consent procedures will be conducted in the Rohingya and Bengali languages and designed to accommodate varying literacy levels.

Do No Harm Principle

The project will prioritize the safety and well-being of participants at every stage. Special attention will be paid to: avoiding digital or physical exposure that may put women at risk of familial or community backlash; designing discrete and culturally acceptable modes of access to digital tools; ensuring that digital literacy training and advocacy activities are implemented by people that participants can trust and be comfortable with.

Data Privacy and Confidentiality

All personal data collected during the baseline assessment or monitoring phases will be anonymized, encrypted, and stored securely, using a decentralized, open-source and blockchain-based information management system following the example of humanitarian organizations like UNICEF. No personally identifiable information will be shared without explicit consent. Given the restrictions around SIM cards and internet use, the project will avoid digital surveillance risks by relying on offline systems and non-traceable access methods wherever possible.

Community-Led and Gender-Sensitive Approach

The project will center the voices and leadership of refugee women. Selection of peer facilitators will be conducted through a transparent, inclusive process with community input. Gender sensitivity training will be provided to all staff, and male allies within the community will be engaged wherever appropriate.

Ongoing Ethical Oversight

An ethics focal point will be designated within the project team to oversee compliance with ethical standards. Feedback loops will be built into the implementation to ensure that participants can safely voice concerns, make suggestions, or report issues without fear of retaliation. Any emerging ethical challenges will be addressed in coordination with camp authorities and humanitarian partners.

Coordination with Humanitarian and Legal Standards

The project will align with key international organization frameworks and legal standards including UNHCR's data protection policies, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission policies, all relevant guiding principles from protection clusters and inter-agency coordination groups in Cox's Bazar and SDGs 5 and 9.

2.3 Limitations

It is essential to acknowledge the limitations that our project and research can encounter. The first one being that we have not conducted any primary fieldwork and we are solely relying on existing data and case studies to design our solution. Due to the current access restrictions and the sensitivity of working with forcibly displaced populations, this project design is not yet informed by direct insights from Rohingya women and girls themselves. Another limitation with the heavy reliance on secondary data is that they may not fully capture the intersectional barriers faced by women, as well as informal or undocumented digital practices. Additionally, relying on secondary evidence may require us to further evaluate the concrete issues women and girls face because their local context can evolve rapidly. As a result, primary engagement with community members and implementing partners will be critical to fill these gaps. The proposal draws inspiration from successful digital inclusion initiatives in Kenya and Ecuador; these case studies emerged in distinct regulatory, infrastructural and socio-cultural settings. Therefore, the implementation will need to adapt more specifically to the Kutupalong camp which will require flexibility, ongoing feedback, and localisation. To this end, the project foresees an initial data collection stage in the camp during the pilot phase and monitoring and evaluation through beneficiaries' feedback and reflection and learning workshops with relevant stakeholders. Finally, the restrictive telecommunications environment in Bangladesh presents a significant external risk to digital interventions. While our approach circumvents some of these challenges through offline, solar-powered solutions, national regulatory changes could still impact project feasibility. More about the main risks of the implementation can be found in the preliminary risks matrix in the Annex.



4. PROJECT SOLUTION

The proposed solution to address the identified challenge of migration by bridging the gendered digital divide in the Kutupalong refugee camp relies on a three-pronged approach revolving around delivering offline, solar-powered digital access and capacity building. As demonstrated briefly in the Introduction chapter, the three steps we plan to take, in equal measures of priority include:

- **Creation of Solar-Powered Offline Digital Access Hubs**
- **Implementing Community-Based Phone Sharing Circles**
- **Facilitating Peer-Led Digital Literacy and Advocacy**



4.1 Creation of Solar-Powered Offline Digital Access Hubs

As mentioned earlier in the literature review, digital access is often precarious in refugee camps across the world due to a combination of factors including limited infrastructure, unreliable power supply, poor mobile network coverage, high costs of connectivity, and restrictive regulatory or logistical barriers that hinder the deployment of stable internet services. To combat these issues and provide greater access to internet connectivity as well as ensuring that women and girls have access to useful resources, we aim to utilize high-end solar WiFi hotspots which will enable access to offline libraries equipped with useful resources.

We aim to partner with the Solar Powered Educational Learning Library (SolarSPELL) programme invented by the Arizona State University to implement this step.



The SolarSPELL initiative essentially works as a managed service to reduce technical barriers to educational access. While this initiative helps make available the hardware and software required for this stage, we independently aim to work on educational resources that SolarSPELL will upload to their libraries.

These resources must include health guides with a focus on natal and maternity care as well as sexual health among girls. Other resources will include language learning modules, audio storytelling in Rohingya and Bengali, legal resources on women's rights which will be useful for navigating through lived experiences of the Kutupalong refugee camp area. We also wish to encourage psychosocial support through this step, which includes access to Rohingya community cultural elements such as songs, poems and similar resources which can help keep sense of community and emotional belonging alive. This will help in alleviating the emotional burden of displacement among the female community of Kutupalong. We aim to work with dedicated translators for ensuring that language coherence is strictly maintained throughout all our uploaded resources.

4.2 Community-based Phone Sharing Circles

This approach is specifically designed to ensure that male gatekeeping of digital resources is prevented and the power to access said resources remains for the women, among the women of the Kutupalong refugee community. For this, we intend to partner with already present international organizations and local NGOs such as the the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for their safe spaces programmes across refugee camps in Bangladesh. As an example, UNFPA has established 20+ such safe spaces meant for a host of reasons: access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, gender-based violence prevention and care, access to voluntary family planning, distribution of dignity kits, access to midwives for prenatal and delivery care, skills training, among other uses.



**WOMEN
& GIRLS
SAFE
SPACES**

We intend to use these safe spaces which are run by women to store phones that can be circulated among women and girls visiting these safe spaces. This circulation will be roster-based ensuring equal access to all beneficiaries. All participating members must register their names to utilize these phones in a roster which will be maintained by either UNFPA or local civil society members or volunteers managing these safe spaces. It is imperative that these phones be utilized within the boundaries of the safe spaces because we wish to minimize external access to the best of our abilities. This intentional gatekeeping will allow us to run an equitable and fair phone sharing circle, while also preventing women from losing access to their digital devices to their male members of the family.

4.3 Peer-Led Digital Literacy and Advocacy

Training for increasing digital literacy and advocacy campaigns are a crucial part of our project solution. This serves a dual purpose: ensure access of digital resources to women who may not be visiting UNFPA's safe spaces and normalizing the use of digital technologies within the broader Kutupalong refugee community. We initially plan to enroll around 20 female members of the community, preferably volunteers, for a Training of Trainers (ToT) to become digital literacy trainers and community advocates. This process will multiply with the progress of the implementation phases. The ToT will encompass imparting training on the availability and use of solar-powered offline digital access hubs which will include getting acclimated with the technical

aspects of these tools, getting accustomed to the uploaded resources on the hub for helping women and girls navigate through it. This will also include advocating for the use of digital resources in the safe spaces and being present on-site to help women use the shared phones in an efficient manner. For this step, we will rely on non-profit organizations such as RW Welfare Society functional in Cox's Bazar specifically for the upliftment of women through an increased access to rights. Trainers volunteering for the ToT will then be able to conduct door-to-door, peer-led digital literacy training for women and girls in the Kutupalong refugee camps.

For implementation of the trainings, we will develop communications-based creative collaterals that summarizes our project solution with the right use of graphics, in both Rohingya (Hanafi script) and Bengali languages. We also aim to develop a pocket handbook consisting of training materials in Bengali and Rohingya as a take-home supplement for women and girls to whom the trainers provide training. A digital version of the handbook with a text-to-speech option will be made accessible through a QR code included in the handbook and will be made available in the offline libraries.



Source: UN Women

5. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The overarching aim of this project is to advance digital inclusion and build digital confidence among women and girls by expanding access to essential information on education, healthcare, and rights as well as through community-level advocacy that promotes equitable access to technology for women. Specifically, the project seeks to empower refugee women and girls in the Kutupalong camp and, by extension, in other refugee or displacement settings by equipping them with offline digital resources and establishing safe, gender-sensitive spaces where these tools can be accessed and used. Through these interventions, women and girls will be better positioned to make informed decisions about their wellbeing, autonomy, and future.

This goal will be achieved in two phases: the Pilot Phase and the Scaling Phase. The project will take place specifically in the Kutupalong RC Camp, the original nucleus of what is now the Kutupalong expansion site, which currently hosts around 9,000 women and girls, according to UNHCR data. The primary target group will be women and girls over the age of 12, totaling approximately 6,400 individuals. This decision was made with the goal of addressing migration challenges affecting the entire camp population and fostering greater exchange and solidarity among beneficiaries.

5.1 The Pilot Phase

The pilot phase will have a duration of 12 months, followed by a period of 3 months to complete the project evaluation, and will be limited to selected areas of the Kutupalong site. The main activities will be distributed across the implementation period as illustrated in the Pilot Workplan (included in the Annex).

Data Collection and Analysis: The first month will be dedicated to data collection and analysis to understand the specific needs, priorities and capacities on the ground. In fact, as mentioned in the Methodology Section of this report, we designed this project based on secondary sources. Hence, the implementation of the project will be characterised by the collection of primary evidence to ensure that the outputs of the project are in line with the needs on the ground. By combining data made available by UNHCR with focus groups and individual interviews with representatives of international and local NGOs, as well as refugee-led organizations (RLOs), we will map the different organizations active in the camp and their types of engagement. This will help us identify potential implementing partners beyond those already mentioned in the Project Solution section and narrow down the scope of the pilot to those areas in the camp where these organizations operate. Additionally, their inputs will provide an overview of the women's specific vulnerabilities and interests, which will inform the creation of targeted content for the guides, information sheets and toolkits. A survey will be disseminated to women who are literate and interested in becoming digital facilitators across the target area, to assess their level of digital literacy. While the accessible materials will also include oral and visual resources to promote the inclusion of women and girls who cannot read or write, it is important for the success of the project that the facilitators possess an adequate level of literacy in order to understand the digital training without difficulty. Based on the results of the survey, together with the implementing partners, we will identify around 20 women that will be trained as peer-facilitators.



Identifying Spaces and Setting Up Devices: Private sector companies for solar panels (also potential alternate options) for SolarSPELL will also be mapped through focus groups and by going around the camp to collect information. Once an overall understanding of the different expertise and affiliations has been obtained, it will be easier to identify whom to approach for the setup of the solar-powered hubs together with SolarSPELL and the provision of devices. Drawing from the positive impact of UNFPA's Safe Spaces, the project aims to create women-only hubs where beneficiaries will be able to access critical information about hygiene measures, healthcare, and rights for themselves and their children, as well as literacy and numeracy skills. Given the population and building density in Kutupalong, the initial idea is to explore whether it is possible to equip existing spaces with solar panels and store our resources there, including UNFPA's Safe Spaces and those run by other smaller organizations ([Hussain et al., 2020](#)). Alternatively, the option of renovating and repurposing disused existing spaces, such as the free phone booths called Teletalk provided by the Government of Bangladesh between 2017 and 2018 will also be explored ([Dhaka Tribune, 2017](#)). This would also benefit other stakeholders occupying those spaces, with whom our implementing partner would organize an access schedule for both the phone sharing circles and the digital literacy and advocacy trainings. This would be critical especially during the pilot phase as it would help reduce the environmental impact and costs of the project.

Alongside the set up of the infrastructure which includes ensuring adequate numbers of solar panels and set up of SolarSPELL devices, in the first months of the pilot phase, tailor-made resources that address the needs identified through the survey and focus groups will be developed in collaboration with the Inter-agency Network of Education in Emergencies (INEE). Within this network, there are various organizations that have worked or are working in Cox's Bazar and that could support the creation of culturally appropriate resources, drawing on the materials they already use, such as in the Case Study on IRC. These will be uploaded to the SolarSPELL library. There will also be close coordination with organizations that are already operating on the ground to both avoid duplication and prevent the inclusion of information that could be perceived as contradictory or confusing by the beneficiaries.

Training of Trainers: The third phase of the project will consist of a three-month Training of Trainers (ToT) to equip the selected women with the knowledge and skills necessary to become digital literacy trainers and community advocates. Through classes, workshops, and practical group activities, as well as self-paced learning modules combined with guided review and explanations of materials, women will enhance their digital skills and their ability to teach or pass these skills on to others. Additionally, they will receive culturally sensitive gender training focused on the specific needs, rights, and opportunities of women both inside and outside the camp. This knowledge will provide them with essential understanding to navigate the context in which they live, enabling them to make informed decisions and advocate for their own wellbeing.



The duration of the ToT was designed taking into account the existing commitments of these women and their role as primary caregivers within their families. In fact, because it is important that prospective trainers commit to attending at least 80% of the sessions, we planned to spread the training out in bi-weekly sessions so as not to disrupt their daily routines or those of their families. Between in-person sessions, however, they will have the opportunity to practise their knowledge and skills by accessing self-paced modules in the hubs. Having time to become familiar with the devices and resources will be essential to effectively support their peers. A test conducted at the end of the training will assess the digital skills acquired. Those who score over 70% will receive a “trainer certificate” and will be able to become peer trainers. Those who don’t meet the threshold can still become community advocates and will have the opportunity to receive a limited number of one-to-one sessions with project trainers to prepare for retaking the test.

Peer-led Training and Advocacy: The final part of the pilot phase will include peer-led training on digital literacy for the wider female community of the camp, enabling them to independently access the offline informational resources available in the hubs and use the phones in the safe spaces. Additionally, there will be a longer-term, peer-led training on healthcare and rights, so they can make informed choices and be empowered to advocate for their own rights and those of their daughters. This stage will cover the second half of the project timeline and will be structured as follows. Capacity building will be a priority during this phase. During the pilot, a selected number of interested women will participate in a full day of classes each month with a professional trainer (ideally relying on the same organization that provided the ToT, so that the materials developed with us can be reused, ensuring continuity). The sessions will alternate between general explanations on the use of digital devices, internet, and online safety, and more practical workshops, open circles, and round tables to troubleshoot issues and build familiarity with the devices. The number of women involved will depend on the number of peer facilitators, as they will be divided into groups of 10 and each volunteer trainer will oversee and support the advancement of two groups. In the following weeks, these groups will have the opportunity to develop their skills practically, alternating moments of sharing and hands-on workshops in small groups with supervised self-paced learning and individual access to the resources. Supervision is important as it ensures support and explanations when needed. The digital literacy training will entail 3 one-day sessions with professional trainers and the weeks that follow for practicing. Subsequently, the skills acquired will be applied thematically, namely to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of hygiene, gender-based healthcare and rights, including reproductive and neonatal care, among other relevant topics. The final month will be dedicated to advocacy coaching sessions, enabling the beneficiaries to become community advocates themselves and share the skills and knowledge they have acquired with more women and girls within the camp. This will help spark their interest and empower the advocates to set up new spaces for dialogue and training, thereby generating the cascading effect envisioned by the project solution.



5.2 Scaling Phase

Following the successful completion of the pilot phase, the project will enter the scaling phase, which will span 36 months and have the dual objective of providing training to the totality of women and girls (aged 12 years old and above) within the Kutupalong RC camp, while also expanding the educational package to cover online and digital safety and other essential aspects of daily life, from nutrition and household management to financial management and income opportunities through small businesses and trade.

To support the expansion of the number of digital hubs and their sustainable operation throughout Kutupalong RC, the project will first broaden partnerships with private companies willing to provide solar panels for prefabricated structures free of charge and with minimal maintenance costs. Leveraging solar power will ensure a reliable, low-impact energy source, which is critical for maintaining access to digital devices and offline resources in areas where electricity may be limited.

Moreover, a key feature of the scaling phase will be the empowerment of women already trained during the pilot phase to provide peer support and conduct training sessions. This approach aims to create a multiplier effect, enabling exponential growth in the number of beneficiaries reached. While challenges such as establishing sufficient hubs and procuring enough digital devices for the entire female population are anticipated within the three-year timeframe, the increasing independence of women participants will allow trainings to commence concurrently across several sites. Moreover, as the project advances, some women will be expected to take on leadership roles and collaborate closely with implementing partners, acquiring skills in managing training phases and overseeing the digital hubs themselves.

Inclusivity remains a top priority: while pilot activities are designed with a focus on literate beneficiaries, illiterate women will also have meaningful access to educational resources and information throughout the scaling phase. To this end, all materials will be made fully accessible through storytelling, visual and video content, and enhanced by text-to-speech functionality and additional audio narration, in order to leave no one behind. Additionally, during the scaling phase, the content available in the offline library will be expanded to cover critical daily life skills. This will include financial and resource management training—particularly digital money—as well as more structured language learning modules. By broadening the scope of training, the project will equip women with practical tools to improve their economic independence and overall quality of life.

Long-term impact and sustainability

Considering the cultural restrictions and the volatile context, the project's feasibility will be deemed effective if, by the end of the 48 months, at least 75% of women and girls over 12 years old in Kutupalong RC camp have successfully received basic digital literacy training and are able to access the resources available in the digital hubs. In fact, by developing local capacity and empowering women with transferable skills and knowledge, and fostering a positive and safe environment, the project aims to ensure long-term sustainability and leverage a new sense of community and solidarity among the female refugee population. In the future, the project could then be pitched to larger donors and shared with other organizations working in the Kutupalong and Cox's Bazar areas for implementation across the entire area.



5.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring will be ongoing throughout the implementation process. The framework will combine quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the project's impact and ensure evidence-based improvement measures. Data on digital literacy levels acquired at the very beginning of the pilot, as well as knowledge and understanding of gender-based rights and basic hygiene and self-care measures, will be used as the baseline against which progress will be monitored over time.

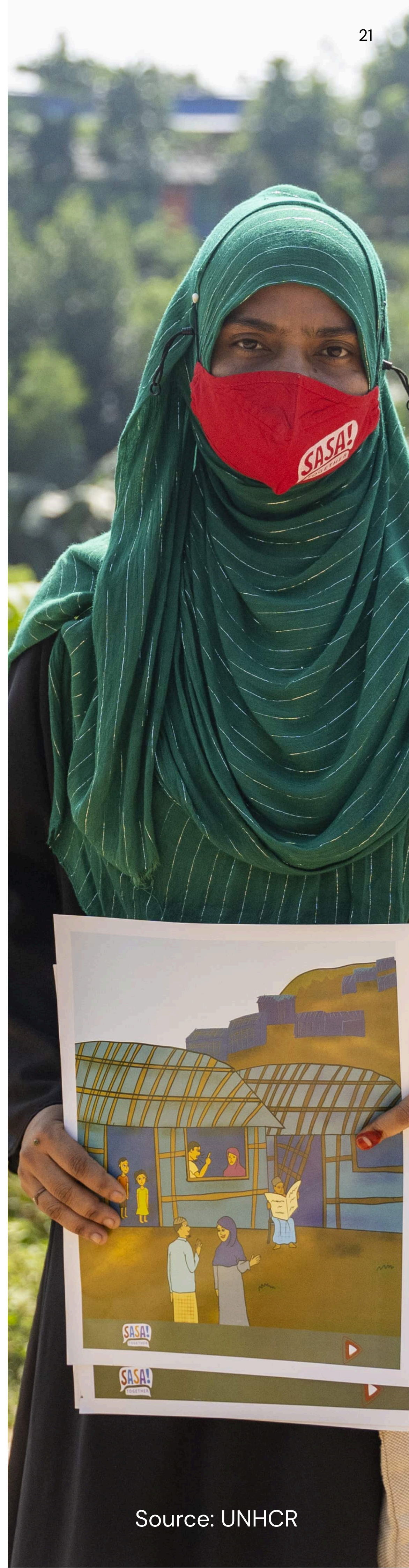
Monitoring activities will include site visits, regular reports and interviews with implementing partners, beneficiary feedback surveys, and post-Training of Trainers (ToT) assessments for facilitators. Continuous feedback from beneficiaries and stakeholders will guide ongoing improvements, maintaining the project's relevance and responsiveness to community needs. At the end of the pilot phase, a workshop with beneficiaries and partners will identify challenges and inform improvements for the scaling phase. Special attention will be given to beneficiaries' satisfaction with the tailored digital resources, ensuring necessary adjustments before expansion.

Evaluation will be conducted both internally and externally. Internally, reflection workshops with trainers and surveys among women beneficiaries will assess training quality, safety, and information relevance. Additionally, an external evaluator will carry out a quantitative assessment to measure impact and scalability potential.

5.4 Estimated Budget Overview

The budget will cover key components necessary for both the pilot and the scaling phases of the project. These include costs for setting up and equipping solar-powered digital hubs, procuring smartphones and offline Wi-Fi devices, developing culturally appropriate offline content, training materials, and stipends for digital facilitators. Additional budget lines will account for monitoring and evaluation activities, external consultancy for impact assessment, and minimal refurbishment of existing safe spaces where applicable.

Staffing costs will include professional trainers, local coordinators, and project management personnel, while operational expenses will support logistics, maintenance, and community outreach efforts. During the implementation phase, resources will be sourced locally or through in-kind contributions from particulars, civil societies, private sector, universities and public institutions.

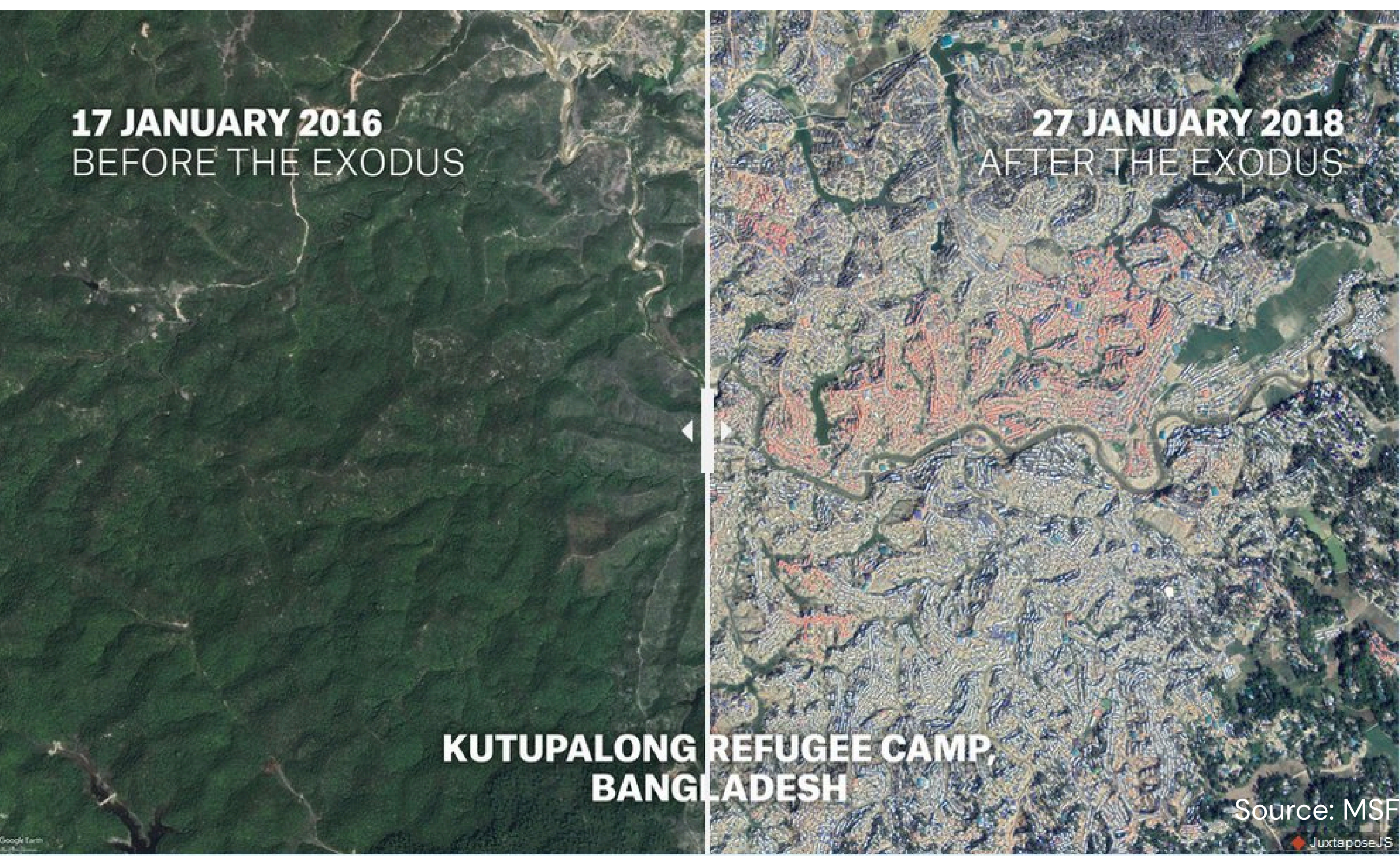


6. CONCLUSION

The gendered digital divide is an issue rooted in structural inequalities stemming from patriarchal norms, male gatekeeping, and digital repression, especially in refugee contexts. Within this context, the obstruction of women's access to digital tools is shaped by cultural beliefs, lack of autonomy, and safety concerns. As a result women face information precarity, a state of insecurity around digital access that increases vulnerability. They are isolated, lack access to health information, education, aid systems and emotional connection. Even when infrastructure exists, men dominate usage and training opportunities. From a broader perspective, international law supports equal access (UDHR, ICCPR, CEDAW) but it lacks practical enforcement at the local level in the camps. Digital tools in refugee camps are essential for rights, protection and participation. The initial exclusion of women combined with the national restrictions only exacerbate their circumstances.

Kutupalong is the largest refugee camp and has some of the most restrictive regulations. This makes women digitally invisible and current systems fail to address the gender-specific digital needs of displaced women. Such a divide requires gender-sensitive, community-led, and context-specific approaches where solutions must go beyond infrastructure to include skills, autonomy, and advocacy.

Drawing on an understanding of the structural inequalities, cultural norms, and digital oppression that disproportionately impact women and girls in this context, the project centers on equitable, dignified access to digital resources. Through bringing together offline, solar-powered digital hubs, phone sharing at the community level, peer-led digital literacy and advocacy, Sanyōga empowers displaced women to overcome information precarity-related hurdles as well as male gatekeeping of technology. The project not only increases digital inclusion but also enables autonomy, resilience, and social cohesion among refugee women. By creating partnerships with international agencies, civil society, and national opinion leaders, Sanyōga enables culturally relevant implementation and leverages existing support networks. Lastly, the project advances human rights and gender equality in the information era through offering displaced women in Kutupalong meaningful avenues to access information, education, and self-reliance opportunities.



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ANNEX

Activity	Timeline (months)											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Data collection on needs and priorities of women across Kutupalong camp												
Mapping of organizations engaged in female education and services and identification of implementation area and beneficiary group												
Assessment of digital literacy levels among beneficiary group												
Set up of solar-powered hubs in partnership with the SolarSPELL												
Development of gender and culturally sensitive educational resources to be uploaded in the offline library												
Training of Trainers on digital literacy and advocacy strategies												
Training of beneficiary group with the support of the peer-trainers												

Table 1: Workplan (Pilot Phase)

Risk Factor	Likelihood	Impact	Treatment Plan
National authorities running the camp show little interest in supporting the project or open hostility, hindering access to the beneficiaries	3 out of 5	4 out of 5	The project will rely on the support of well-established organizations within the camp, leveraging their positive relationship with the national authorities, thus gaining access through third parties.
Companies are not interested in donating solar panels and devices to establish new hubs and equip them	2 out of 5	3 out of 5	The project will take advantage of existing solar-panel energy within the camp to power its spaces. Additional funding will be sourced through crowdfunding campaigns, loans (e.g. World Bank), participation to international calls for proposals (e.g. EU, foundations, international cooperation financing from donor countries) and leveraging the potential of diaspora’s direct investments and remittances.
Low engagement from beneficiaries	2 out of 5	4 out of 5	The project will scale up its information and awareness raising campaigns on the benefits of digital access, engaging both the female and male population of the camp: the positive impact of digital access for women on households and communities will be highlighted to avoid male-led restrictions and protests.

Table 2: Preliminary Risks Matrix