

PROCEEDING

LEARNING SESSIONS: SUPPORTING HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVES FOR TRANSFORMATION IN ASIA (SHIFT ASIA)

NOVEMBER 2025 - JANUARY 2026

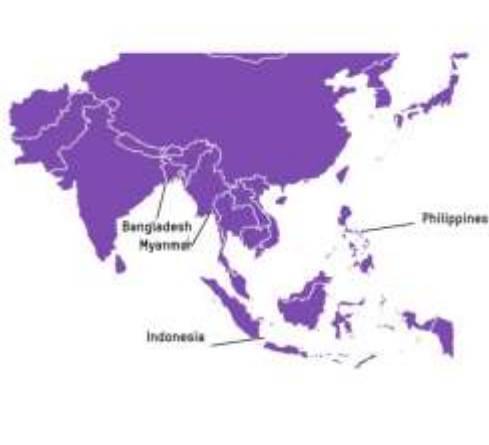


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Background

The **Supporting Humanitarian Initiatives for Transformation in Asia (SHIFT Asia) Project** is a regional initiative that builds on the achievements and learning of the first phase of **Women's Local Humanitarian Leadership (WLHL)** implemented in 2021–2023. Entering its second phase, SHIFT Asia expands its scope and ambition, operating across **Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Myanmar**, with a strengthened focus on regional collaboration and system-wide transformation.



Country / Region	Oxfam Office / Platform	Lead Partner(s) and Networks	Website / Link
Bangladesh	Oxfam Bangladesh	Association of Voluntary Actions for Society (AVAS) Networks: BWHP and WCLP	https://www.org.bd/
Indonesia	Oxfam Indonesia (Perabulu)	Asosiasi LBH APIK Indonesia Network: WLHL Consortium	shapik.or.id
Myanmar	Oxfam in Myanmar	Huaino Land Development Organization (HLDG) and Green Network Sitwa (GNS)	hldomyanmar.org Facebook: GNS
Philippines	Oxfam Pilipinas	Bayi Inc	angibayi.com
Asia Region	Oxfam Asia Regional Platform	–	–

Figure 1 Project Area and Partners of SHIFT Asia

The first phase (2021–2023) functioned as a learning and piloting phase, creating feminist spaces for collaboration across four countries. During this period, SHIFT Asia and its partners generated evidence-based approaches to women-led humanitarian leadership, tested feminist practices in diverse crisis contexts, and strengthened cross-country solidarity among women's rights and women-led organisations. This phase laid the foundation for understanding what feminist, locally led humanitarian leadership looks like in practice, and what systemic barriers continue to constrain it.

Building on these achievements, the **second phase (2025–2027)** focuses on **scaling and sustaining feminist, women-led humanitarian leadership** across Asia. This phase emphasises:

- Strengthening regional networks and solidarity,
- Advancing shared leadership models,
- Deepening community-centred humanitarian action,
- And embedding feminist principles more firmly within humanitarian systems.

SHIFT Asia is grounded in the recognition that women and girls are disproportionately affected by humanitarian crises, yet remain significantly underrepresented in humanitarian leadership and decision-making spaces. While women-led and women's rights organisations are often among the first responders at community level, they continue to face structural barriers related to recognition, access to resources, and influence over humanitarian priorities. By advancing ownership closer to local contexts, SHIFT Asia seeks to strengthen gender-transformative humanitarian systems that are more effective, inclusive, and just across the region.

Adopting a **feminist and participatory approach**, the project emphasises power analysis, collective leadership, and cross-border solidarity. Through the expansion of regional networks and feminist learning spaces, SHIFT Asia aims to challenge patriarchal

and exclusionary dynamics within humanitarian systems, while advancing models of disaster preparedness and response that centre women's leadership and lived experience.

Central to this second phase is the **SHIFT Asia Learning Agenda (2025–2027)**, which serves as a structured framework for collective learning, reflection, and accountability. The Learning Agenda prioritises:

- Feminist learning spaces and peer-to-peer exchanges,
- Collective capacity strengthening among women-led organisations and their networks,
- Shared learning in key areas such as Theory of Change (ToC) development and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) systems.



Figure 2 Theory of Change of SHIFT Asia

The **SHIFT Asia Learning Sessions** are a core component of this agenda, providing a regional platform where practitioners, feminist leaders, and humanitarian actors can collectively examine challenges, share practice-based insights, and advance a shared vision for feminist, locally led humanitarian leadership.

Objective and Learning Questions:

This learning event aims to:

1. **Generate and apply evidence** on women's leadership and feminist approaches in humanitarian action to strengthen accountability, improve program quality, and inform adaptive management across local, national, and regional levels.
2. **Foster cross - country learning and collaboration** by creating spaces for peer - to- peer exchange, feminist learning, and knowledge sharing among women's organizations, networks, and humanitarian actors, enabling collective action and systemic influence.
3. **Contribute to policy and practice** change by documenting and disseminating lessons, innovations, and best practices that highlight the role of women's organizations and leaders in advancing gender - transformative, locally led humanitarian systems.

Sessions

No	Date	Theme	Panel
1	27 November 2025	Amplifying Women's Leadership and Local Knowledge in Humanitarian Action	Moderator: Dheni Fidiyahfika, MEAL Coordinator, SHIFT Asia Speakers: 1. Shamin Ara Begum, Executive Director, Pollisree – <i>Women's Platforms Driving Inclusive Humanitarian Action in Bangladesh</i> 2. Khotimun Sutanti, Director, Asosiasi LBH APIK – <i>WLHL Consortium: Advancing Women-Led and Locally Driven Humanitarian Action in Indonesia</i> 3. Zir Than Hnuni, Managing Director, HLDO – <i>Women Humanitarian Leaders Navigating Change in Crisis Contexts in Myanmar</i> 4. John David L. S. Dayao, Bayi Inc – <i>Feminist Humanitarian Leadership from Local Communities in the Philippines</i>
2	18 December 2025	Strengthening Collaborative Networks: Advancing Local and Feminist Leadership in Asia's Humanitarian Systems	Moderator: Dheni Fidiyahfika, MEAL Coordinator, SHIFT Asia Speakers: 1. Aisha Gul, UN Women in Asia and the Pacific – <i>Gender-responsive Humanitarian Action in Asia</i> 2. Syamsul Ardiansyah, NEAR APLL – <i>Local Leadership in Humanitarian Action in Asia</i> 3. Holly Miller, Feminist Humanitarian Network – <i>Feminist Networks for Systemic Change</i>
3	29 January 2026	The FLHL Roadmap in Action: Centering Women-Led Responses and Grassroots Initiative	Moderator: Dheni Fidiyahfika, MEAL Coordinator, SHIFT Asia Speakers: 1. Gita Rani Adhikary, Oxfam Asia – <i>The FLHL Roadmap and Our 2030 Vision</i> 2. Rismawati, Flower Aceh (member of WLHL Consortium) – <i>Experience Sharing; Gender Responsive Response</i> 3. Akhyai Mong Marma, Annanya Kallyan Sangathon (AKS) Bangladesh – <i>Context and Initiative: A Blueprint for the Future</i>

Executive Summary

The **SHIFT Asia Learning Sessions** were convened as part of the second phase of the Supporting Humanitarian Initiatives for Transformation in Asia (SHIFT Asia) Project to advance collective learning on **feminist, locally led humanitarian leadership**. Across three sessions, women humanitarian leaders, feminist networks, civil society organisations, and humanitarian allies from across Asia examined how women-led leadership is already reshaping humanitarian practice, why existing systems continue to marginalise these actors, and what systemic changes are required to sustain and scale feminist approaches. Together, the sessions positioned SHIFT Asia not as a capacity-building programme alone, but as a regional platform for system change, grounded in lived experience, political analysis, and collective action.

The first session foregrounded the **central role of women-led organisations and networks** as first responders and knowledge holders, particularly in contexts where formal humanitarian systems are absent, restricted, or unable to reach affected populations. Participants highlighted how feminist perspectives redefine humanitarian action by recognising layered crises, intersecting vulnerabilities, and the unpaid and underpaid labour carried by women leaders. Despite their critical role, women's rights organisations remain under-recognised and under-funded, often excluded from humanitarian financing and decision-making. Expectations for SHIFT Asia's second phase included deeper capacity strengthening, sustained cross-country exchange, and stronger advocacy to challenge patriarchal humanitarian norms.

The second session examined **power and political economy within humanitarian systems**, critically reflecting on why commitments such as localisation and the *Grand Bargain* have delivered limited change. Speakers emphasised that feminist and locally-led humanitarian leadership is not a technical adjustment, but a structural transformation requiring shifts in power, resources, risk ownership, and governance. Regional and global mechanisms—including UN Women's GIHA Working Group, NEAR's Localization Performance Measurement Framework, and the Feminist Humanitarian Network's collective governance model—were highlighted as concrete alternatives to hierarchical and compliance-driven systems. Participants increasingly questioned incremental reform and called for a "new deal" grounded in collective pressure and cross-movement solidarity.

The third session focused on **operationalising transformation** through the Feminist Local Humanitarian Leadership (FLHL) Roadmap, using grounded case studies from Aceh, Indonesia and Bangladesh. These examples demonstrated how women-led and youth-led organisations lead across the full humanitarian cycle through community-embedded assessment, collective decision-making, advocacy, and policy engagement. The session underscored that flexible, trust-based funding, feminist learning spaces, and shared leadership are essential enablers of transformation.

Across all three sessions, a consistent message emerged: transforming humanitarian systems in Asia requires **institutional reform by donors, governments, and INGOs**, alongside sustained investment in feminist, locally led leadership rooted in communities.

SESSION 1

AMPLIFYING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

ZOOM MEETING | 27 November 2025



SESSION NOTES 01

Shift Asia Learning Session 1.0

Amplifying Women's Leadership and Local Knowledge in Humanitarian Action

Date: 27 November 2025

Platform: Zoom

Moderator: Dheni Fidiyahfika, MEAL Coordinator, SHIFT Asia

Speakers:

1. **Shamin Ara Begum**, Executive Director, Pollisree – *Women's Platforms Driving Inclusive Humanitarian Action in Bangladesh*
2. **Khotimun Sutanti**, Director, Asosiasi LBH APIK – *WLHL Consortium: Advancing Women-Led and Locally Driven Humanitarian Action in Indonesia*
3. **Zir Than Hnuni**, Managing Director, HLDO – *Women Humanitarian Leaders Navigating Change in Crisis Contexts in Myanmar*
4. **John David L. S. Dayao**, Bayi Inc – *Feminist Humanitarian Leadership from Local Communities in the Philippines*

1.1 Session Overview

The first SHIFT Asia Learning Session brought together women humanitarian leaders and allies from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, and the Philippines to share experiences on **women's leadership** and **local knowledge** in humanitarian action. Despite initial technical issues with the interpreter team time incorrectness for speaker from Myanmar, the session proceeded with four substantial presentations and a closing reflection on expectations for the second phase of SHIFT Asia.

The moderator framed the session as an opportunity to how feminist approaches and women-led initiatives are reshaping humanitarian responses in crisis and disaster contexts, and how cross-country collaboration can be strengthened in Phase 2.



and

learn

1.2 Key Highlights

- **Women's platforms and networks** (e.g., BWHP in Bangladesh, WLHL in Indonesia, HLDO networks in Myanmar, and Bayi's humanitarian leaders in the Philippines) are central to enabling inclusive and locally driven humanitarian action.
- **Women's organizations are often first responders**, especially in contexts where formal systems are absent, constrained, or unable to reach affected communities.
- Despite their significant contributions, **women leaders and women's rights organizations (WROs) remain under-recognised and under-funded**, frequently seen as "non-humanitarian actors".

- Feminist perspectives help **redefine “crisis” and “humanitarian work”** to reflect multi-layered impacts on women, gender-diverse communities, and those facing intersecting vulnerabilities.
- Local women leaders face **multiple burdens** (care work, income generation, and humanitarian leadership) and **high levels of unpaid or underpaid work**, yet continue to sustain response, coordination, and advocacy.
- Participants emphasised the importance of **localization** in highly restricted contexts such as Chin State (Myanmar), where external actors cannot access affected populations.
- Expectations for **SHIFT Asia Phase 2** include stronger capacity strengthening (especially on compliance for demanding donors), sustained cross-country exchanges, and more global advocacy to shift patriarchal humanitarian systems.

1.3 Summary of Presentations

1.3.1 Bangladesh

Speaker: *Shamin Ara Begum, Executive Director, Pollisree*

Topic: *Women’s Platforms Driving Inclusive Humanitarian Action in Bangladesh*

Summary:

Shamin Ara Begum presented the progress of the [Bangladesh Women Humanitarian Platform \(BWHP\)](#), which brings together 35 women-led and rights-based organisations to advance feminist humanitarian leadership. Through SHIFT Asia participation, strategic planning, and mentorship initiatives, the platform has strengthened grassroots leadership and enabled women to engage in disaster response mechanisms at local and national levels. Shamin shared examples of women leaders influencing disaster management structures, expanding community advocacy, and gaining public recognition. While challenges remain—including limited recognition, resource constraints, and restrictive gender norms—collective organising has increased women’s visibility and role as humanitarian actors. Shamin emphasized that continued collaboration, policy engagement, and feminist leadership are key to building more inclusive humanitarian systems.

Platform Background and Participation in SHIFT Asia

- The platform participated in **SHIFT Asia Phase I** during **April 2022 – May 2023**, and **May – October 2024**.
- It brings together **35 women-led and rights-based organisations** from across Bangladesh and beyond.
- Through the **Rising Voices** initiative, the platform also has links with **women-led organisations in Myanmar, the Philippines, and Indonesia**.
- Under funding from **AfD**, the platform developed a **three-year strategic plan (from 2024 onward)** and conducted a **constitution review of BWHP** to guide its governance and feminist agenda.

Leadership Development and Mentorship

- **15 women’s rights organisation (WRO) members** were selected as mentees.
- They were supported through **mentorship programmes** designed to: (i) Build **leadership capacity**; (ii) Increase **visibility**; (iii) Strengthen **confidence** as women leaders.

Key Activities of the Platform

The platform has organised **local and national-level activities** that:

- Strengthen **women's leadership in disaster and crisis response**.
- Support women to **speak publicly** and **confront authorities** when communities' voices are neglected.
- Connect **grassroots women leaders** with **national and international spaces**, expanding their networks and influence.

Examples of Local Women Leaders and Communities

Shamin highlighted concrete examples of women leaders emerging from the platform:

- **Khojista Begum Jonarky** – *Family Ties for Women Development (FTWD)* and *BWHP member*: Developed **safeguard capacity tools**, securing mentorship from the **Malala Fund**.
- **Rahima Sultana Kazal** – *Association of Voluntary Actions for Society (AVAS)*:
 - Expanded the roles of the **District Disaster Management Committee (DDMC)** and **Upazila Disaster Management Committee (UDMC)**.
 - Contributed to **activating disaster management committees in more than 10 wards**.
 - Helped mobilise **cross-regional support** during the **2022 floods**.
- Shamin noted broader patterns:
 - **Women mobilising in contexts** where voices of the poor and marginalised are ignored by local administration.
 - Communities where **women have taken “rebellious” initiatives** to challenge exclusion and bring their concerns directly to power-holders.

Women's Voice, Role Models, and Collective Power

- Before these efforts, **many women were not able to bring forward their needs** or concerns in public forums.
- Through compliance and collaboration with **feminist groups**, women are now **gradually raising their voices** in their communities and using these communities as platforms to **articulate and uplift their needs**.
- Shamin connected current leaders to earlier generations of women's rights advocates, noting that today's leaders draw inspiration from them to strengthen their community roles, establish themselves as leaders, and more intentionally claim space in public and humanitarian platforms.
- She emphasised that **platforms like BWHP** shows how the **collective strength of women** can set strong examples for communities and provide a **proper example of how collectivity works** in practice, especially in humanitarian and disaster contexts.

Increased Visibility, Recognition, and Awards

- Despite limited time for learning and organising, **women still lack adequate social and institutional support**, though stronger partnerships are gradually enabling them to raise and strengthen their collective voice.

- Women leaders in Bangladesh are **increasingly active in disaster response**, including in peripheral areas where they are now participating in local disaster management platforms.
- Many women leaders have received the [Joyeeta Award](#) in recognition of their contributions to women's welfare and social change.
- Women are progressively expanding their engagement from community level to national and international spaces, strengthening networks and visibility.

National Convention and Women's Leadership Circle

- In collaboration with **Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS)**, a women activist organisation, the platform held a **national convention** that brought together **51 women leaders**, allowed them to share experiences, build solidarity, and strengthen their collective agenda.
- The convention helped create a **sustained Women's Leadership Circle**, which strengthens social capital and expands women's influence in community and humanitarian spaces.

Engagement with Disaster Management Structures

- The platform has begun **building relationships with disaster management structures** at district and sub-district levels, enabling women leaders to engage in advocacy and legal support at the local level and influencing its processes.
- This engagement helps build **good relationships with district disaster management committees** and ensure these committees support and contribute to women's work in the future.

Ongoing challenges and policy engagement

While women's leadership has become more visible, Shamin underlined several **systemic challenges** that remain:

- **Limited social recognition** and **structural support** from communities and authorities.
- Persistent **financial and capacity constraints**, alongside the need to **expand reach** to more women and communities.
- **Ongoing gender norms** that restrict women's public participation and leadership.
- To **increase women's participation**, she stressed the need to engage with **legislative bodies and policymakers** and advocate for **policy amendments** that work in favour of women who are trying to break free from restrictive norms. It will enable more women to participate in shaping communities, societies, and platforms like the ones now emerging.
- If such changes are made and women come forward, Shamin believes that women will be able to increase their participation significantly in the future.

Overall emphasis

- Overall, Shamin underlined that **collective feminist organising** through platforms like BWHP has:
 - Allowed women to **strengthen their voice**.
 - Helped them be **recognised as humanitarian actors**, not just beneficiaries.

- Enabled them to contribute to **more inclusive disaster response** and **stronger community resilience** in Bangladesh.
-

1.3.2 Indonesia

Speaker: Khotimun Sutanti (Mba Imun), Director, Asosiasi LBH APIK

Topic: WLHL Consortium: Advancing Women-Led and Locally Driven Humanitarian Action in Indonesia

Summary:

Khotimun Sutanti shared the development of the [Women Local Humanitarian Leaders \(WLHL\) Coalition](#) in Indonesia, established to strengthen collaboration between women's rights organisations and humanitarian actors who have historically worked in parallel rather than together. Emerging from national convenings, cross-organisational reflection, and shared learning during humanitarian responses, the coalition now includes feminist organisations, humanitarian actors, and philanthropic institutions working to advance gender-transformative approaches in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

Through joint capacity building, advocacy, shared resources, and collective action—including engagement in humanitarian coordination spaces—the coalition has begun increasing visibility and participation of women in emergency response systems. Khotimun noted that despite progress, challenges remain relating to entrenched gender norms, tokenistic implementation of gender policies, and limited recognition of grassroots women responders. Continued collaboration, stronger institutional pathways, and resourcing were highlighted as essential to sustaining women-led and locally driven humanitarian leadership across Indonesia.

Origins and context

- The coalition grew out of engagement around the **Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDRR) in Bali** and a **National Convening in Makassar (2022)**, which brought together **around 67 organizations**, predominantly women's groups with diverse backgrounds.
- Participants included women's communities affected by:
 - Climate-related flooding (e.g., coastal and fisheries communities).
 - Armed conflict and tsunami in Aceh.
 - Other social and natural disasters.
- Approximately **12 humanitarian organizations** also joined, leading to critical reflection on **gaps between women's organizations and formal humanitarian systems**.

Key findings from these reflections

- Women's organizations have long contributed to **resilience-building and humanitarian response**, but their initiatives are **minimally recognised** and often **not counted** as part of "official" humanitarian work.
- Many women's organizations are treated as **non-humanitarian actors**, and are not fully included in coordination mechanisms, especially **before disasters occur**.
- Women's groups bring strong capacities:

- Local networks and deep community trust.
 - **Paralegals, women lawyers, and change-makers** working on gender justice and social inclusion.
 - Knowledge of basic rights and gender-transformative leadership.
- Structural barriers persist, including:
 - Social norms, gender injustice, and exclusionary practices.
 - Women's overrepresentation among disaster-affected populations (e.g., in Aceh, four women affected for every one man).

Coalition composition and partnerships

- A core team of **five organizations** initiated the coalition, including feminist legal aid and humanitarian organizations such as Asosiasi LBH APIK, Kayuana Mitra, Dompot Dhuafa, and Lingkar (as mentioned).
- Collaboration with **Oxfam** and **Penabulu Foundation** has been strategic in combining feminist perspectives with humanitarian practice.
- Indonesia has **significant domestic resources and philanthropic organizations**, some of which have humanitarian units and more sustainable funding sources. However, internal gender and safeguarding systems still need strengthening.

Feminist framing of crisis and humanitarianism

- The coalition was initially formed by Asosiasi LBH APIK, Kalyanamitra, Dompot Dhuafa, and Lingkar, and has since expanded to **52 member organisations**, working with support from **Oxfam** and the **Penabulu Foundation**.
- The coalition enables mutual learning despite differing perspectives—women's organisations can access humanitarian data, while humanitarian actors gain understanding of feminist and gender-responsive approaches
- During the Cianjur earthquake response, coalition members were able to leverage Dompot Dhuafa's facilities to support mobility and aid distribution.
- In the 2022 Makassar convening, 67 organisations endorsed the **Makassar Communique**, committing to (i) strengthening capacities, (ii) building networks and collaboration, and (iii) advancing recognition of women's perspectives and leadership in humanitarian action.
- The coalition promotes a **feminist understanding of crisis** grounded in gender and social inclusion, intersectionality, woman's lived experiences, and principles of power sharing and collaboration.
- It highlights multi-layered impacts often overlooked in formal humanitarian frameworks. For example, during COVID-19, responses focused on health and the economy while spikes in gender-based violence went largely unrecognised.
- The coalition also noted that certain climate-related impacts, such as tidal flooding, are not legally classified as "disasters," preventing affected women's groups — such as those in Demak, Central Java — from accessing disaster funding.
- WLHL advocates that **risk analysis** in disaster management (from mitigation through to recovery) must integrate **gender-based violence risks** and intersectional vulnerabilities, which are often absent from formal tools.

Coalition activities

- The coalition **strengthens local women's leadership** across diverse organisations, including domestic worker groups. Recognising that although they face disproportionate burdens and are often overlooked, they have consistently contributed as first responders during crises such as the pandemic and natural disasters.
- **Capacity building** for women's organizations on disaster preparedness and risk reduction, recognising Indonesia as a “*supermarket of disasters*”.
- Joint activities and advocacy at:
 - **National Conference on Localization in Aceh**
 - **Disaster Risk Reduction Month** events in Mojokerto and Banyuwangi, discussed with UN Women and other Wos about disaster risk reduction.
- Engagement in **humanitarian coordination platforms**, such as:
 - The Alliance for Development and Humanity Indonesia (APKI), where WLHL became the 8th member in 2024.
 - Other emerging national humanitarian networks and forums, including Indonesia Humanitarian Coordination Platform (IHCP).
- Development of:
 - A **disaster preparedness manual** (currently in Bahasa Indonesia).
 - Inspiring stories from women leaders in humanitarian actions (currently in Bahasa Indonesia).
 - A [WLHL microsite](#) to document stories, tools, and resources, with plans to expand in the next phase of SHIFT Asia.

Overall emphasis

Khotimun concluded that the coalition seeks not only **greater inclusion** of women's organizations in humanitarian systems, but also **transformative changes** in how crises are defined, whose knowledge counts, and how local leadership is supported.

1.3.3 Myanmar

Speaker: *Zir Than Hnuni (Nuni), Managing Director, HLDO*

Topic: *Women Humanitarian Leaders Navigating Change in Crisis Contexts in Myanmar*

Summary

Zir Than Hnuni described the severe and evolving humanitarian situation in Myanmar, particularly in Chin State and Magway region, where conflict, displacement, and limited access by international actors have made locally led response essential. In this context, [Hualngo Land Development Organization \(HLDO\)](#) and women's groups have become frontline responders, delivering community health services, protection support, food distribution, and camp management, despite security risks, mobility restrictions, and funding barriers.

Hnuni emphasized that women leaders—drawing on local knowledge, informal networks, and

community trust—have been able to reach vulnerable groups more effectively than formal agencies, particularly where male mobility is restricted due to conflict. While women continue to face safety risks, lack of institutional support, and patriarchal expectations, feminist leadership models and solidarity networks have enabled new forms of protection, advocacy, and crisis response. She highlighted that enabling resources, capacity strengthening, and regional learning platforms remain crucial for sustaining women-led humanitarian work in Myanmar’s highly restricted environment.

Context and humanitarian situation

Total population of Myanmar	57 Million	Women and Girls	Children	Elderly	With Disabilities
People in Need	19,9M	52%	32%	12%	13%
People Targeted	5,5M	52%	34%	11%	13%

- Myanmar’s population is around **57 million**, with **19.9 million people in need of humanitarian assistance**.
- Humanitarian actors, including the UN, are only able to reach an estimated **5.5 million people**, leaving major gaps.
- In Chin State, from approximately **540,000 people**, **more than half of the population internally displaced**, many forced to move repeatedly.
- In neighbouring **Magway region**, over half of the 320,000 people in HLDO’s five target townships are displaced.
- Conflict includes:
 - Ongoing confrontations between the military regime and resistance groups.
 - Internal tensions among local resistance groups.
- The conflicts continue to drive repeated displacement in Chin State, with many families repeatedly relocating or crossing into **Mizoram, India**, where they are not formally recognised as refugees – then being subjected as “*external displacement*” – and receive limited support.
- Women leaders noted that **cross-border internally displaced persons (IDPs)** are hard to reach due to **funding restrictions, geographic barriers, and legal constraints**, while communities face worsening conditions, including food insecurity, limited healthcare access, and rising disease outbreaks affecting children and vulnerable groups.
- There is **no functioning health system**: hospitals have collapsed, vaccination has halted, and preventable diseases (e.g., diarrhoea, malaria, respiratory infections) are taking lives.
- **Protection threats** encompass:
 - Landmines, airstrikes, artillery attacks over long distances.
 - Constant surveillance and risk of arbitrary arrest.
 - Increasing gender-based violence.
- Basic infrastructure (roads and other services) is severely damaged, and **banking systems have shut down**, forcing organizations to rely on informal channels to transfer funds.

- Funding is constrained further by **access limitations**: for example, the Myanmar Humanitarian Fund (MHF) did not prioritise any township in Chin State because donors cannot physically verify aid delivery.

Women's leadership and localized response

- In this context, **localisation is not optional but essential**: external humanitarian workers cannot safely access Chin State, so **local leadership and local knowledge are the only way to reach communities** because they are who truly knows what they need, so no one is left behind.
- Starting humanitarian response with women's leadership strengthens inclusion and effectiveness because when women lead, men and wider community structures naturally engage.
- This paradigm shift has of gender dynamics of women previously perceived as "**passive recipient**" to "**active decision makers/responders**" been proven in crisis settings to better reach the most vulnerable and advance gender equality, inclusion, and women's empowerment in humanitarian action.
- HLDO had previously worked with **women's self-help and SME groups**, building their capacity before the coup. These groups have now become **first responders**:
 - Over **50 women's groups** act as first responders and decision-makers.
 - They organise **rice banks**, community-level protection systems, and support mechanisms.
- Women have formed **GBV response units** to:
 - Advocate with local (often male-dominated) authorities.
 - Prevent GBV and respond when cases occur.
- HLDO has trained **female community health workers**, many of whom were previously traditional birth attendants:
 - 53 villages in Chin State now have women community health workers providing basic health care, handling childbirth, minor injuries, and referrals.
 - HLDO provides basic medicines and ongoing online trainings.

Camp management and leadership

- HLDO supports more than **20 IDP camps in southern Chin State** and several in northern Chin State, where **women-led camp management** has proven effective.
- Women have organised **community-led health and protection systems** within camps, despite limited external support.

Personal and organisational challenges

- Hnuni shared her own experience as a **tribal woman, wife, and mother of two**, navigating patriarchal norms while leading a humanitarian organization.
- HLDO faces:
 - **There are very few women-led organisations in Chin State**, resulting in limited inclusion within wider humanitarian networks
 - **Safety risks** related to registration and visibility, forcing the organisation to operate discreetly.

- **Mobility restrictions:** field staff cannot leave Chin State; capacity building and coordination must rely on online platforms.
- **Limited funding and human resources,** as external experts cannot travel to Chin State for in-person support.

Overall emphasis

Despite these challenges, HLDO has continued to create **spaces for women's collective action**, including organising **International Women's Day celebrations** with over 1,000 women at the India–Myanmar border, where airstrikes were less likely. The event included dialogues, panel discussions, and debates tailored to the context.

1.3.4 Philippines

Speaker: John David L. S. Dayao, Bayi Inc

Topic: *Feminist Humanitarian Leadership from Local Communities in the Philippines*

Summary

John David L.S. Dayao reflected on lessons from community engagements under the [Bayanihan Local Humanitarian Leadership](#) initiative, which aims to strengthen feminist leadership and gender-inclusive humanitarian practice in the Philippines. Through intersectional and arts-based methodologies, the project supported women and gender-diverse leaders to articulate their lived experiences, leadership challenges, and resilience strategies during disaster response.

John highlighted stories of women leaders navigating multiple roles as caregivers, volunteers, advocates, and humanitarian responders. Often even undertaking unpaid work driven by community commitment and care ethics. The research and capacity-building process generated policy recommendations calling for strengthened safeguarding, improved representation, accessible learning spaces, fair compensation, and livelihood support for women responders. The initiative demonstrated that feminist leadership approaches rooted in community realities can strengthen humanitarian systems and advance more inclusive and equitable response mechanisms.

Project focus and approach

- The project, implemented in partnership with Oxfam, works with women humanitarian leaders in:
 - **Butuan (Agusan del Norte)**
 - **Del Carmen (Surigao del Norte)**
 - **Tabaco (Albay)**
- It aims to surface a **localized, decolonial, gender-transformative understanding** of humanitarian leadership through:
 - Arts-based methods.
 - Safe spaces for sharing lived experiences.
 - Recognition of intersectional identities (gender, class, disability, sexuality, age, ethnicity).

Feminist leadership principles

Bayi's work is grounded in the “**seven Cs**” of feminist leadership:

- **Critical** – constantly interrogating unequal power relations and structural inequalities.
- **Contextual** – ensuring approaches are inclusive, context-specific, and intersectional.
- **Connected** – grounding work in the lived realities of communities.
- **Consultative** – enabling participatory spaces that respect agency, rights and participation
- **Caring** – embedding empathy and care in organisational and administrative practices.
- **Collective** – empowering shared leadership and accountability.
- **Creative** – resisting entrenched power structures through innovative strategies.

These principles frame how Bayi, Inc engages partners, communities, and stakeholders.

Lived realities of women humanitarian leaders

John David highlighted multiple realities and examples:

- **Multiple roles and burdens:**
 - Women often combine roles as farmers, caregivers, and humanitarian responders, working beyond formal hours and prioritising community needs over their own.
- **Gendered division of labour:**
 - Women dominate **unpaid or volunteer frontline roles**, while men often occupy **paid administrative and leadership positions**, reflecting broader gender disparities.
- **LGBTQIA+ humanitarian workers:**
 - Gender-diverse responders facilitate aid and community cohesion but remain **largely invisible in scholarship and media**, due to regressive social views and self-perception challenges.

Stories of leadership

- **Rehima Orandig, *President of the Tabaco Muslim Women Organization*:**
 - Opened her home to evacuees during Typhoon Rolly.
 - Mobilised resources, coordinated aid, and simultaneously cared for her family.
 - Initiated livelihood programmes for Muslim women to address economic vulnerability and social exclusion.
- **Rosita Almonte Villar:**
 - A cancer survivor, widow, caregiver, breadwinner, and humanitarian leader.
 - Continued to coordinate disaster preparedness and relief despite her health condition, driven by a sense of responsibility because “people rely on her”.
 - Rosita exemplifies feminist leadership shaped by **resourcefulness in the face of limited institutional support**, grounded in **care, community values, and faith**. Her leadership reflects how many women leaders mobilise compassion, responsibility, and relational strength to serve their communities, undertaking unpaid care work at home while leading humanitarian response with commitment and creativity.
- **May Jehan Buena:**

- A community leader who organised farmers and fisherfolk in a marginalised rural area to access government aid.
- Led documentation and geotagging of typhoon damage, enabling communities to submit claims.
- Balances her unpaid leadership work with her roles as wife and mother.
- May Jehan Buena's story reflects how many local women humanitarian leaders view their work as **voluntary service rather than paid labour**, deriving motivation from **community appreciation rather than compensation**. Despite balancing caregiving roles and response duties —often at the expense of their own well-being — many women express pride in helping others and carry a sense of guilt when unable to respond, shaped by their own past experiences of not receiving support.

Policy recommendations from women leaders

Where women and gender-diverse humanitarian leaders gathered in local and national workshops, they articulated several needs and recommendations:

- **A system of accountability and grievance systems** to protect women, children, and gender-diverse people from gender-based violence during disasters.
- Expanded **education and awareness** for humanitarian workers on gender and its intersectionality with class, disability, and sexuality.
- **Dedicated spaces and opportunities** for women to organise and build care networks and peer support structures.
- **Increased representation and participation** of women in decision-making and policy spaces, backed by gender-, equality-, disability-, and social inclusion (GEDSI)–informed leadership.
- **Dedicated budgets** for insurance, emergency funds, and fair compensation for women humanitarian workers in times of disaster.
- **Context-specific livelihood opportunities** for women responders, co-created with communities.

Overall emphasis

The initiative has fostered a shared learning space grounded in care, empathy, and active engagement, enabling peer support and allowing women leaders to facilitate learning within their own communities. Gradually empowering more women in humanitarian work.

Knowledge products, training modules, research findings, and policy recommendations are now publicly available through the [Bayinihan microsite](#), supporting ongoing learning, advocacy, and efforts to influence institutions toward more equitable working conditions.

1.4 Q&A and Reflections

Due to time limitations, the Q&A segment was kept short. The moderator invited at least one question from participants and then posed a collective question to speakers:

“What are your expectations and hopes for the second phase of SHIFT Asia, especially in terms

of carrying forward best practices, cross-country collaboration, and support from global stakeholders?”

Key points from responses

From Hnuni (Myanmar)

- Emphasised the need for **organisational capacity strengthening**, particularly:
 - Meeting **high compliance standards** of UN agencies and major donors.
 - Recruiting **experienced experts** who can train and support local staff from within the organisation, given that external advisors cannot enter Chin State.
- Requested that SHIFT Asia Phase 2 consider **budget space to hire 1–2 expert staff** to strengthen internal systems, compliance, and mentoring of local teams.
- Highlighted the importance of **regional networking and learning platforms**, where feminist leaders from Asia (and beyond) can:
 - Share experiences, challenges, and strategies.
 - Reinforce solidarity and mutual support.

From Libby (Oxfam Global)

- Congratulated the speakers and underlined the **value of learning from Asia** for Oxfam’s global humanitarian work.
- Noted that many participants in the call are already “convinced” of the value of women’s leadership, but **real change requires reaching those who are not yet convinced**, especially within broader humanitarian systems that remain **patriarchal** and resistant to feminist approaches.
- Reiterated that Oxfam’s global humanitarian pillars include:
 - **Feminist humanitarian action**, and
 - **Local humanitarian leadership**.
- Shared that Oxfam is starting a **global scoping** to understand:
 - Where feminist and women-led humanitarian leadership is already happening (beyond Asia, including Africa and Latin America).
 - How to engage more systematically with women’s rights and LGBTQIA+/queer organizations across responses.
- Expressed commitment to continuing to **learn from SHIFT Asia partners** and to explore ways for them to engage in **global processes and discussions**.

From Janice Ian Manlutac (Oxfam America):

- Appreciated the **powerful presentations** and highlighted a persistent pattern: women’s organisations and women’s work in humanitarian contexts remain **unrecognised and unpaid**, despite their central roles.
- Raised the question of **“entry points”** for accelerating recognition:
 - How can women’s contributions be more formally acknowledged and integrated into **official structures and coordination mechanisms**?
 - What are the tensions between women’s rights organizations, often not seen as “humanitarian”, and the formal humanitarian system—and how can these be bridged?

- Encouraged ongoing reflection on **formalisation vs. autonomy**, and how to navigate these tensions while preserving feminist principles.
- Janice noted the ongoing tension where women's rights and women-led organisations are often expected to redefine themselves as "humanitarian" to be recognised in response systems, even though many are already contributing during crises. She emphasized that these organisations do not need to change their identity or mandate; **rather, they need access to humanitarian principles, basic training, and shared language to engage in coordination spaces.**
- She shared an example from Puerto Rico, where a development organisation continued its core work on GBV and community development but received humanitarian training to access funding and meet minimum standards. Janice stressed that **the priority is not transforming feminist organisations into humanitarian actors**, but ensuring they can access resources, recognition, and certification pathways. She encouraged both women-led organisations and global humanitarian actors to **identify faster entry points for funding and acknowledgment** so that frontline contributions are no longer unpaid or overlooked.

1.5 Closing and Next Steps

The moderator closed the session by:

- Thanking all speakers for their **substantive and often deeply personal contributions.**
- Acknowledging the **emotional weight** of stories shared, especially from conflict-affected contexts.
- Appreciating participants' flexibility as the session slightly overran the scheduled time.

Participants were informed that:

- **This is the first of three SHIFT Asia learning sessions.**
- These **Session Notes** will serve as a basis for a **full proceeding document** to be compiled after all three sessions are completed.
- The moderator noted that the next session, scheduled for **18 December**, will continue exploring the feminist local humanitarian leadership roadmap with inputs from the feminist local humanitarian network and SHIFT Asia Laboratory.

The third session in **January** will focus on flexible funding under SHIFT Asia, including how flexible funding mechanisms—particularly for women-led organisations—can be shared, strengthened, and implemented.

SESSION 2

STRENGTHENING COLLABORATIVE NETWORKS: ADVANCING LOCAL AND FEMINIST LEADERSHIP IN ASIA'S HUMANITARIAN SYSTEMS

ZOOM MEETING | 18 December 2025



SESSION NOTES 02

Shift Asia Learning Session 2.0

Strengthening Collaborative Networks: Advancing Local and Feminist Leadership in Asia's Humanitarian Systems

Date: 18 December 2025

Platform: Zoom

Moderator: Dheni Fidiyahfika, MEAL Coordinator, SHIFT Asia

Speakers:

1. **Aisha Gul**, UN Women in Asia and the Pacific – *Gender-responsive Humanitarian Action in Asia*
2. **Syamsul Ardiansyah**, NEAR APLL – *Local Leadership in Humanitarian Action in Asia*
3. **Holly Miller**, Feminist Humanitarian Network – *Feminist Networks for Systemic Change*

2.1 Session Overview

The second SHIFT Asia Learning Session focused on **how power operates within humanitarian systems** and what it takes to meaningfully advance **feminist and locally led humanitarian leadership** beyond rhetoric. Drawing from regional and global perspectives, the session examined existing coordination mechanisms, localization frameworks, and feminist movement-building approaches, while critically reflecting on why progress under commitments such as the **Grand Bargain** has remained limited.

Speakers collectively emphasized that localization and feminist humanitarian action are not technical adjustments but **systemic transformations** that require shifts in power, resources, decision-making, and risk ownership. The session highlighted concrete tools and practices—such as regional GIHA mechanisms, NEAR's localization performance framework, and FHN's collective governance model—alongside persistent barriers faced by women-led and feminist organizations.

The discussion was framed as a continuation of SHIFT Asia's effort to support women-led organizations, feminist networks, and local actors not only as implementers, but as **agenda-setters and system shapers** in humanitarian action.



2.2 Key Highlights

- Localization and feminist humanitarian leadership remain **severely constrained by power imbalances**, despite over a decade of global commitments.

- Women-led and feminist organizations continue to be **first responders** in crises, yet remain under-recognised, under-funded, and excluded from decision-making spaces.
- Existing humanitarian systems prioritize **efficiency, compliance, and donor risk**, often at the expense of local knowledge, gender justice, and transformative impact.
- UN Women's GIHA Working Group plays a critical role in **bridging regional coordination, national mechanisms, and women-led organizations**, including through tools such as gender alerts, anticipatory action studies, and the [WE Respond dashboard](#).
- NEAR frames localization as a **political and structural process**, not merely a funding modality, and advocates for shared definitions and performance measurement through its Localization Performance Measurement Framework (LPMF).
- The Feminist Humanitarian Network demonstrates that **non-hierarchical, collective governance models** are both viable and effective alternatives to dominant humanitarian power structures.
- Speakers and participants increasingly questioned the relevance of the **Grand Bargain**, calling instead for a "new deal" that moves beyond incremental change.
- Collective action, cross-movement solidarity, and sustained pressure on power-holders were identified as essential for advancing feminist and locally led humanitarian systems.

2.3 Summary of Presentations

2.3.1 Regional Perspective: Gender in Humanitarian Action

Speaker: Aisha Gul, UN Women Asia and the Pacific

Topic: Gender-responsive Humanitarian Action in Asia

Summary:

Aisha Gul presented the work of the Asia-Pacific [Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group \(GiHAWG\)](#), one of the longest-standing regional working groups in the humanitarian system, established in 2015. Co-chaired by UN Women and UN OCHA, the GiHA Working Group aims to embed gender equality and women's leadership across humanitarian preparedness, response, and recovery. She emphasized that GiHA's role extends beyond coordination to include knowledge generation, advocacy, and system accountability, particularly in relation to women-led and women's rights organizations (WLOs/WROs).

Mandate and Structure of the GIHA Working Group

- GIHA operates at **regional, national, and sub-national levels**, with national working groups in countries including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh (including Cox's Bazar), Myanmar, and the Philippines (including Mindanao).
- The working group collaborates with multiple regional thematic groups, including:
 - GBV in Emergencies
 - Cash Working Groups
 - Anticipatory Action
 - Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)
 - PSEA and Emergency Preparedness
- Regular engagement takes place with **IASC Regional Directors**, including ad hoc briefings during major system shifts (e.g. humanitarian funding cuts and system resets).

Areas of Work and Activities	Lead Agencies	Supporting Agencies
1. Regional level Joint Activities among GIHA AP members		
Continue with Regional GIHA Quarterly Meetings	GIHA co-chairs (UN Women, UNOCHA, Plan Int'l)	
Continue with rapid joint work on RGAs, Gender Alerts, Rapid Response publications (1-pagers) and other technical support among members	GIHA co-chairs (UN Women, UNOCHA, Plan Int'l)	
Strengthen regional coordination with women's groups, feminist networks, and other stakeholders through knowledge sharing and regional webinars	UN Women & Gender Stakeholder Group	
Regional GIHA Indicator and linking it with the Accountability Framework	GIHA co-chairs (UN Women, UNOCHA, Plan Int'l)	
Regional Humanitarian Partnership Week 2025	GIHA co-chairs (UN Women, UNOCHA, Plan Int'l)	
2. Inter-Regional Working Group Coordination		
Collaboration with regional humanitarian working groups	EF WG, AAP WG, Cash WG, GBVw, PSEA etc.	
Joint Advocacy under Climate change, Anticipatory Action, Early Warning and Emergency Preparedness for sudden-onset slow onset disasters	GIHA co-chairs (UN Women, UNOCHA, Plan Int'l)	Inter Regional WGs
GIHA Climate Change brief- resource and tool sharing	UN Women, GBVw WG	
Pre-Crisis Gender Briefs (Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Papua New Guinea)		
Expand participation, maintainance for the WE Respond Dashboard and strengthen the capacity of member WGFs through a blended online and in-person capacity-building, including sessions on access to resource mechanisms, fundraising, grant writing, donor engagement knowledge sharing, peer learning	UN Women	UNOCHA, UN WOMEN, UNICEF
3. Country Level Activities		
Consultations with local GIHA/equivalent actors on Engagements at the Regional level (governments, stakeholders WROs, WLOs & GFOs)	GIHA co-chairs (UN Women, UNOCHA, Plan Int'l)	
Formalize regular engagement with National GIHAs or equivalent	GIHA co-chairs (UN Women, UNOCHA, Plan Int'l)	

Figure 3 Focus of GiHA Working Group in 2025

Key Regional Activities and Knowledge Products

Aisha highlighted several core initiatives undertaken by GiHA in 2024–2025:

- **Anticipatory Action Study** conducted across four countries (Vietnam, Bangladesh, Philippines, Thailand), in collaboration with the Anticipatory Action Technical Working Group.
- Use of the **Gender Accountability Framework (GAF)** to track and evaluate GIHA's own performance and outcomes.
- Development of **pre-crisis gender briefs and gender portfolios**, including a forthcoming Bangladesh brief to strengthen preparedness and gender-responsive planning.
- Production of **gender alerts** for rapid-onset crises, including recent alerts for the Philippines and Sri Lanka following major disasters.
- Ongoing collaboration with the Feminist Humanitarian Network on **localization and power-shifting strategies** within humanitarian coordination spaces.

WE Respond Dashboard: Mapping Women-Led Organizations

A major focus of Aisha's presentation was the [WE Respond Dashboard](#), a regional mapping tool designed to address the persistent invisibility of women-led and women's rights organizations during crises.

- The dashboard currently includes **124 organizations across 18 countries**, detailing:
 - Areas of humanitarian focus
 - Staffing and organizational capacity
 - Funding situations
 - Contact details for coordination and partnership
- The tool was developed with explicit attention to **data protection and consent**, resulting in the exclusion of organizations from high-risk contexts such as Myanmar and Afghanistan.
- The dashboard responds to a recurring challenge: the lack of time and mechanisms to identify local women-led actors during emergencies, despite their central role in response.



Figure 4 WE Respon Dashboard - Regional Overview

Engagement, Funding, and Decision-Making

Aisha acknowledged the significant structural barriers women-led organizations face in accessing humanitarian funding and coordination spaces, including:

- Complex UN due diligence and partner registration systems
- Heavy compliance requirements
- Limited access to Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) and pooled funding mechanisms

She outlined GIHA's efforts to mitigate these barriers by:

- Supporting women-led organizations to navigate UN systems
- Advocating for their inclusion in regional pooled funding
- Ensuring national GIHA co-chairs elevate local women's perspectives in regional and global forums

Overall emphasis

Aisha stressed that **collaboration and unity** across feminist, local, and humanitarian actors are essential to shifting power. While progress remains slow, GIHA's role is to **create entry points, amplify women's voices, and challenge tokenistic engagement** within humanitarian systems.

2.3.2 Localization and Power: A Regional Perspective

Speaker: Syamsul Ardiansyah, Network for Empowered Aid Response – Asia Pacific Localisation Lab (NEAR – APLL)

Topic: Local Leadership in Humanitarian Action in Asia

Summary:

Syamsul Ardiansyah shared [NEAR](#)'s perspective on localization as a **political, cultural, and structural process**, rather than a technical intervention to improve aid efficiency or delivery mechanisms. He emphasized that localization has gained global recognition since the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain, yet remains poorly defined and unevenly implemented, particularly in ways that fail to shift power to local actors.

Drawing on regional experience, especially from Indonesia, Syamsul highlighted the persistent disconnect between **global commitments to localization** and the realities faced by local, women-led, community-based, and faith-based organizations who are often the first responders in crises but remain marginalised within formal humanitarian systems.

NEAR and its positioning on localization

- NEAR (Network for Empowered Aid Response) was established in 2016 as a global network of local and national NGOs from the Global South.
- NEAR identifies itself as a **movement**, not only a network, with a shared goal of creating a fair, equitable, and dignified humanitarian aid system.
- NEAR's vision is a world where local communities have the **resources and agency** to address crises affecting them.
- Its mission focuses on:
 - Reinventing aid through innovative ideas
 - Knowledge sharing
 - Policy influence and system reform
- Core values include being:
 - Holistic
 - Inclusive
 - Member-driven
 - Adaptive and evolving
 - Willing to challenge and disrupt existing systems

How NEAR defines localization

- Localization is understood as a **process of change**, not an end state.
- It aims to:
 - Make humanitarian aid more effective and sustainable
 - Respond more appropriately to local needs
 - Challenge unequal power relations embedded in humanitarian systems
- Localization is positioned as:
 - A response to growing humanitarian needs
 - A solution to structural failures of the current aid architecture
- NEAR intentionally uses the term “localization” as a **strategic entry point** for reform, despite recognising its limitations, because it remains a “global currency” within humanitarian discourse.
- Syamsul stressed that local organizations themselves do not need to “localize”—they are already local—but the term is used to **hold global actors accountable**.

Role of international actors in localized response

- Localization does **not** mean excluding international NGOs or UN agencies.
- NEAR recognises that international actors hold valuable experience, resources, and knowledge.

- However, their role should be reframed around: (i) Trust; (ii) Equity; (iii) Solidarity; (iv) Complementarity
- International actors should support and strengthen what communities and local organizations are already doing, rather than replacing or controlling them.
- Current practice often treats localization as delegation of tasks, rather than redistribution of authority.

Gaps and challenges in current localization practice

Syamsul highlighted several persistent challenges:

- **Lack of shared definitions and methodologies:**
 - Localization is widely discussed but poorly operationalised.
 - Different actors interpret localization differently, leading to confusion and superficial compliance.
- **Top-down discourse:**
 - Localization conversations are often driven by donors and international actors.
 - Local actors, including women-led organizations, are invited late or symbolically.
- **Limited donor engagement:**
 - Even among Grand Bargain signatories, participation in localization dialogue is weak.
 - Example: donor dialogues in Indonesia were poorly attended despite repeated outreach.
- **Shrinking civic space and gender bias:** Women-led and grassroots organizations face additional barriers related to social norms, discrimination, and political constraints.
- **Persistent scepticism toward local leadership:**
 - Local actors' capacity to lead coordination and response is often questioned.
 - Localization remains mediated through intermediaries rather than directly empowering frontline actors.

Localization Performance Measurement Framework (LPMF)

- NEAR developed the **Localization Performance Measurement Framework (LPMF)** to address the absence of accountability tools for localization.
- The framework is intended for donors, international NGOs, local and national organizations
- LPMF seeks to:
 - Establish common language and shared understanding of localization
 - Measure localization beyond funding percentages
 - Capture dimensions such as:
 - Decision-making power
 - Quality of partnerships
 - Inclusion of women-led, community-based, faith-based, and other local actors
- Syamsul emphasized that LPMF is **not a checklist**, but a facilitative tool to enable more honest conversations about power, responsibility, and trust.

Contextual examples from Indonesia

Syamsul shared concrete examples from disaster responses in Indonesia to illustrate localization

in practice:

- **Central Sulawesi (2018):**
 - The Indonesian government declined international assistance, allowing only offers implemented through local actors.
 - This created opportunities for localized response but also exposed gaps in funding access, coordination, and capacity support.
- **Aceh (current flooding response):**
 - Multiple provinces and districts affected, with many areas physically cut off.
 - Communities have relied on: (i) informal networks; (ii) local resource; (iii) community solidarity
 - Many first responders were non-humanitarian actors unfamiliar with humanitarian systems.
- Four key challenges faced by local responders were identified:
 1. Limited access to humanitarian funding mechanisms
 2. Exclusion from coordination platforms
 3. Capacity mismatches with formal humanitarian requirements
 4. Differing understandings of accountability between local actors and international systems
- Syamsul stressed that these challenges do not reflect a lack of capacity, but rather a **misalignment between systems and local realities**.

Gender and intersectionality within localization

- Syamsul noted that early localization discourse focused narrowly on efficiency, ignoring gender and diversity.
- NEAR's approach seeks to:
 - Include women-led organizations explicitly
 - Recognise diverse local actors (elder groups, disability organizations, faith-based groups)
 - Address gender-based violence risks in crisis contexts
- Localization must engage with social systems already present within communities, including informal care, protection, and mutual aid structures.

Overall emphasis

Syamsul emphasized that localization requires **transformational, cultural, and incremental change** within humanitarian systems. He argued that current approaches often shift responsibility to local actors without transferring power, resources, or influence. He called for moving beyond the Grand Bargain toward a **new deal for humanitarian action**, one that centres local and women-led leadership, recognises existing community capacities, and redistributes decision-making authority in a meaningful and sustained way.

2.3.3 Feminist Movement-Building and System Transformation

Speaker: Holly Miller, *Feminist Humanitarian Network*

Topic: *Feminist Networks for Systemic Change*

Summary

Holly Miller presented the [Feminist Humanitarian Network \(FHN\)](#) as both a **systemic critique of the current humanitarian architecture** and a **practical alternative model** grounded in feminist values, collective leadership, and intersectionality. She emphasized that feminist humanitarian leadership is not only about influencing policies or improving inclusion, but about fundamentally **reimagining how power, resources, and decision-making are organised** within humanitarian systems.

Her presentation highlighted how the humanitarian system continues to reproduce patriarchy, colonialism, racism, and neoliberal logics, resulting in the persistent exclusion, under-resourcing, and invisibilisation of women-led and feminist organizations—despite their central role as first responders and community anchors during crises.

The Feminist Humanitarian Network: purpose, composition, and identity

- FHN is a **global, member-based network** of feminist leaders working to transform the humanitarian system toward an intersectional feminist ecosystem.
- The network currently comprises around **105 members** across all regions, including:
 - 58 Women-led organizations in the Global South (the majority)
 - National and regional feminist and women's rights networks
 - 10 international NGOs (e.g. Oxfam, CARE, ActionAid) with headquarters in the Global North
 - 29 individual feminists working within humanitarian institutions
- FHN operates as a **collective rather than a hierarchical organization**, grounded in a shared identity that values collective power, solidarity, and mutual accountability, with no single actor positioned above others.

Vision, goals, and feminist analysis of the humanitarian system

- FHN's vision is an **intersectional feminist ecosystem** in which grassroots and national feminist actors hold the power to ensure the rights and needs of women, girls, and gender-diverse people are fulfilled before, during, and after crises.
- Its goal is to contribute to transforming the humanitarian system by dismantling structural inequalities that drive crises, including patriarchy, racism, colonialism, and neoliberalism.
- The current humanitarian system was described as:
 - Excluding women-led and feminist organizations from decision-making
 - Prioritising donor and intermediary power over frontline leadership
 - Producing gender-blind responses when women and gender-diverse people are absent from coordination spaces
- Holly noted that such exclusions continue to result in basic failures in response quality, including the omission of essential gender-responsive needs.

Governance model and power-sharing practices within FHN

- FHN is intentionally structured to **avoid replicating dominant humanitarian power dynamics**.

- Key features include:
 - Collective leadership and shared decision-making across the network
 - A Steering Committee and thematic committees that reflect the diversity of membership
 - Time-bound project groups driven by member priorities
- At least **70% of organizational members are women-led organizations** in crisis-affected contexts, by design.
- International NGOs participate in supportive roles and do not dominate agenda-setting.
- The Secretariat functions as a facilitator and coordinator, implementing decisions agreed collectively rather than directing strategy.

Feminist principles and approaches to humanitarian action

- FHN defines feminism as a political and transformative practice that:
 - Centres power analysis at individual, organizational, and systemic levels
 - Requires continuous self-reflection on internalised patriarchy and colonial thinking
 - Recognises lived experience and diverse forms of knowledge as legitimate expertise
- Feminist humanitarian action is understood as:
 - Addressing immediate humanitarian needs
 - While simultaneously advancing long-term structural change
- Feminist organizations often work across the humanitarian–development–justice continuum, challenging rigid sectoral boundaries imposed by donors and institutions.

Feminist humanitarian practice: evidence from member experiences

- Across multiple contexts, feminist humanitarian response is characterised by:
 - **Collaboration rather than competition**, with organizations coordinating roles and responsibilities
 - **Comprehensive and holistic responses**, where different actors address GBV, education, livelihoods, and SRHR in parallel
 - **Pooling of resources**, including funding, staff time, and technical capacities
 - **Collective advocacy** to secure representation in humanitarian coordination and decision-making spaces
- Holly cited examples from Liberia (COVID-19), Palestine, and Nepal, where feminist organizations successfully advocated for sustained inclusion in humanitarian response structures.
- Intersectionality is embedded in practice, with deliberate inclusion of women with disabilities, young women, refugee women, LGBTQIA+ communities, and sex workers.

Structural barriers faced by feminist organizations

Persistent barriers include:

- Chronic underfunding and donor priorities misaligned with feminist and nexus-based work
- Risk and compliance frameworks that disproportionately burden local feminist organizations while ignoring the risks they themselves face
- Decision-making and coordination spaces that are formalised, male-dominated, and often unsafe for feminist voices

- Systematic invisibilisation of women-led humanitarian work, which remains unpaid or underpaid
- Shrinking civic and political space, increasing risks for feminist leaders and movements globally

Overall emphasis

Holly emphasised that feminist humanitarian leadership represents not only a critique of the existing system, but a **demonstrated alternative** grounded in collective governance, care, and intersectional practice. She argued that meaningful transformation will require moving beyond polite advocacy to sustained collective pressure on those who hold power, unwavering commitment to gender justice, and greater recognition that feminist and women-led organizations are not peripheral actors, but essential leaders in humanitarian action.

2.4 Q&A Session

The Q&A session and closing reflections allowed participants and speakers to further unpack key themes emerging from the presentations, particularly around socio-cultural barriers, gender and intersectionality within localization, system accountability, and the limits of existing global commitments such as **the Grand Bargain**.

Socio-cultural barriers to feminist leadership

A participant from Nepal named Eak Raj shared a reflection rather than a direct question, drawing on the **Nepal context**:

- Socio-cultural factors were identified as a significant barrier to feminist movements and women's leadership.
- The participant asked to Holly Miller whether similar socio-cultural challenges are present in other contexts.

Holly Miller's response highlighted that:

- Socio-cultural barriers, misogyny, and sexism are widespread and affect feminist movements globally.
- Different expectations placed on women, girls, and gender-diverse people create structural barriers to leadership and participation.
- Feminist organizations consistently work to challenge these norms within their own contexts.
- Over the past one to two years, there has been a noticeable global shift in attitudes toward women, girls, and gender-diverse people.
- This shift has resulted in:
 - Shrinking civic and political space for feminist movements
 - Increased risks for those speaking out
 - Instances of activists being denied entry to countries or imprisoned
- Socio-cultural constraints are not static, but fluctuate across contexts and time, requiring continuous adaptation and resistance by feminist movements.

Gender and intersectionality within localization frameworks

- The moderator posed a direct question to **Syamsul Ardiansyah** on:

- The extent to which existing localization frameworks meaningfully accommodate **gender perspectives, diversity, and intersectionality**
- Concerns that localization is often reduced to funding targets (e.g. 10% commitments under the Grand Bargain, with actual allocations remaining far lower)
- **Syamsul's response** emphasised that:
 - Early localization discourse focused narrowly on **efficiency and effectiveness**, not justice or equity.
 - Localization has often been framed as shifting operational responsibility to local actors without corresponding transfer of resources, authority, or accountability.
 - Recent humanitarian “reset” processes risk reproducing this pattern by replacing international coordination structures without real transformation of power or resources.
 - Localization, from NEAR's perspective, is about **changing systems**, not merely improving aid delivery.
 - Local organizations do not need to be “localized”, as they are already local; the term is retained as a strategic space to hold global actors accountable.
- He reiterated that NEAR's **Localization Performance Measurement Framework (LPMF)** aims to:
 - Bring localization concepts grounded in local realities into global conversations
 - Create shared language, methods, and understanding
 - Be applicable across diverse local actors, including women-led, community-based, faith-based, and elder-focused organizations
- Drawing on current disaster response in Aceh, Syamsul illustrated that:
 - Large areas remained cut off from external assistance weeks after the disaster.
 - Communities relied on their own resources, social systems, and informal networks.
 - These local capacities are often overlooked or undervalued by formal humanitarian systems.
 - Gender-based violence risks increase in such contexts due to displacement, lack of services, and infrastructure collapse.
- He concluded that LPMF is intended as a tool to help align humanitarian systems with existing local strengths and realities, rather than impose external models.

Formalising women-led and local voices in decision-making

- The moderator asked **Aisha Gul** how the GiHA Secretariat plans to:
 - Strengthen engagement with regional stakeholders
 - Avoid siloed or echo-chamber approaches
 - Ensure that local and women-led perspectives directly influence regional decision-making processes
- **Aisha's response** acknowledged that:
 - Commitments to funding women-led organizations (including references to 70% targets) remain weakly implemented.
 - UN systems involve complex and burdensome processes, including extensive due diligence and registration requirements, which are major barriers for grassroots organizations.

- She outlined current efforts by GiHA, including:
 - Supporting women-led organizations to navigate UN partner portals and registration processes
 - Working with UN OCHA to facilitate access to regional pooled funds
 - Advocating for inclusion of women-led organizations not only as implementers, but as participants in HCTs and decision-making platforms
 - Leveraging national and sub-national GIHA working groups to gather and elevate local women's perspectives
 - Using regional IASC Directors meetings to surface systemic barriers and advocate for change
- Aisha emphasised that:
 - These efforts are ongoing and incremental
 - Structural change requires sustained collaboration and unity across feminist, local, and humanitarian actors
 - Partnerships with networks such as FHN are critical to identifying power gaps and reform opportunities

2.5 Reflections and Closing

In closing the session, the moderator, Dheni Fidiyahfika, emphasised that the discussion marked **the beginning of a longer and necessary conversation** on advancing feminist and locally led humanitarian leadership, rather than a standalone event.

The speakers were invited to share expectations for collaboration to advance a more gender-transformative humanitarian system:

- **Holly Miller** emphasised that:
 - Nearly a decade after the World Humanitarian Summit, progress under the Grand Bargain has been minimal.
 - The lack of change reflects insufficient political will rather than lack of evidence or solutions.
 - Feminist and local actors must be prepared to apply sustained pressure on those who hold power and to engage in difficult, confrontational conversations where necessary.
- **Syamsul Ardiansyah** reinforced this position by stating that:
 - The Grand Bargain has reached its limits.
 - The sector should move beyond bargaining toward a **new deal** that genuinely redistributes power.
- **Aisha Gul** concluded by stressing that:
 - Collaboration and unity are essential.
 - Women-led and local organizations are indispensable to humanitarian response, particularly in contexts where international actors cannot access affected communities.
 - Collective demands for change may need to be made more assertively in order to be heard and acted upon.

Key closing reflections included:

- The session underscored the need to **target power directly**, particularly in the context of global commitments such as the Grand Bargain, which are approaching their tenth year with limited transformative impact.
- Advancing feminist and locally led humanitarian leadership requires:
 - **Stronger, louder, and more coordinated voices** from women-led, feminist, and local organizations
 - Collective efforts to ensure that resources, recognition, and decision-making authority are aligned with those who are most central to humanitarian response
- Women's rights organizations, local organizations, and community-based organizations were reaffirmed as:
 - Central actors in humanitarian response
 - Key contributors to shaping humanitarian decision-making, knowledge, and practice
- While acknowledging that humanitarian systems remain constrained by **patriarchal and colonial dynamics**, the closing stressed that these challenges should not deter collective action.
- Instead, the session called for:
 - **Stronger collaboration across actors**
 - Continued efforts to amplify feminist and local leadership within humanitarian systems
- Looking ahead, the upcoming **10-year milestone of the Grand Bargain** was identified as a critical moment to:
 - Increase collective advocacy
 - Make "more noise" to demand meaningful system change
 - Push beyond incremental adjustments toward genuine transformation
- Oxfam's role as an intermediary organization was reaffirmed, particularly its commitment to:
 - Elevating women's rights organizations as leaders in humanitarian response
 - Supporting feminist and locally led leadership in Asia, drawing on experiences since the 2018 Central Sulawesi response
- Participants were encouraged to:
 - Remain connected beyond the session
 - Continue collaboration within their respective spheres of influence
 - Carry forward the momentum generated by the discussion into future collective action

The session concluded with appreciation for participants' engagement and contributions, recognising the discussion as rich, reflective, and energising, and with an invitation to continue the dialogue in future SHIFT Asia learning spaces.

SESSION 3

THE FLHL ROADMAP IN ACTION: CENTERING WOMEN-LED RESPONSES AND GRASSROOTS INITIATIVE

ZOOM MEETING | 29 January 2026



SESSION NOTES 03

Shift Asia Learning Session 3.0

The FLHL Roadmap in Action: Centering Women-Led Responses and Grassroots Initiative

Date: 29 January 2026

Platform: Zoom

Moderator: Dheni Fidiyahfika, MEAL Coordinator, SHIFT Asia

Speakers:

1. **Gita Rani Adhikary**, Oxfam Asia – *The FLHL Roadmap and Our 2030 Vision*
2. **Rismawati**, Flower Aceh (member of WLHL Consortium) – *Experience Sharing: Gender Responsive Response*
3. **Akhyai Mong Marma**, Annanya Kallyan Sangathon (AKS) Bangladesh – *Context and Initiative: A Blueprint for the Future*

Discussant:

1. Jermaine Bayas, Regional Humanitarian Manager for Asia, Oxfam
2. Libby, Oxfam Asia

3.1 Session Overview

The third SHIFT Asia Learning Session focused on operationalising the [Feminist Local Humanitarian Leadership \(FLHL\) Roadmap](#), shifting the discussion decisively from conceptual alignment to practical application. Through grounded case studies and institutional reflection, the session examined how feminist, locally led leadership is enacted in diverse humanitarian contexts, and what systemic changes are required to enable such leadership at scale across Asia.

The session brought together strategic framing of the FLHL Roadmap, grassroots-led response and learning initiatives, and reflections from humanitarian leadership on funding, power, and organisational responsibility. Collectively, the discussion positioned FLHL not as a project approach, but as a **system-change agenda** requiring political commitment, institutional reform, and sustained collaboration.



3.2 Key Highlights

- The FLHL Roadmap functions as a **practical system-change framework**, not a set of abstract principles or funding targets.
- Women-led organisations exercise leadership across the full humanitarian cycle, from assessment and response to advocacy and policy engagement.

- Feminist leadership is enacted through “**power-with**” **approaches**, collective decision-making, and community-embedded assessment.
- Flexible, trust-based funding enables rapid response, learning, and organisational strengthening, particularly for grassroots actors.
- Youth-led feminist learning initiatives illustrate how FLHL contributes to **long-term transformation**, not only immediate response.
- Transforming humanitarian systems requires shifts in donor behaviour, government policy, and INGO practice—not only local capacity strengthening.

3.3 Summary of Presentations

3.3.1 Framing the FLHL Roadmap

Speaker: *Gita Rani Adhikary, Oxfam Asia*

Topic: *The FLHL Roadmap and Our 2030 Vision*

Summary:

Gita Rani Adhikary presented the FLHL Roadmap as a **deliberate feminist response to the failure of existing humanitarian commitments** including localisation and gender equality to meaningfully shift power to women-led and grassroots organisations. She emphasised that the roadmap was developed not as a technical tool or funding guideline, but as a **system-change framework** grounded in feminist principles, lived experience, and collective leadership.

Gita positioned the roadmap as both a critique of current humanitarian practice and a practical guide for action, intended to reshape how humanitarian actors—including Oxfam itself—understand leadership, partnership, accountability, and resourcing.

Why FLHL Roadmap was Developed

- Despite years of global commitments to localisation and gender equality, women-led and grassroots organisations continue to be:
 - Under-recognised as humanitarian actors,
 - Under-resourced, and
 - Excluded from decision-making spaces.
- Localisation has often been reduced to:
 - Funding percentages,
 - Efficiency arguments,
 - Delegation of implementation without transfer of power.
- Gender equality commitments have similarly remained siloed, project-based, and disconnected from power analysis.
- The FLHL Roadmap emerged as a response to these gaps, explicitly asking:
 - **Who holds power?**
 - **Who is recognised as a leader?**
 - **Who defines priorities and accountability?**

How the Roadmap was Developed

- Gita emphasised that the FLHL Roadmap is co-created, shaped through:

- Consultations with women-led organisations,
- Feminist networks,
- Grassroots leaders across Asia.
- It reflects lived realities of:
 - Emergency response,
 - Informal leadership,
 - Underfunded yet high-risk humanitarian work.
- The Roadmap was intentionally designed to:
 - Avoid one-size-fits-all prescriptions,
 - Remain adaptable across contexts and crises,
 - Serve as a shared reference point for dialogue and action.
 -

Core Element of the FLHL Approach

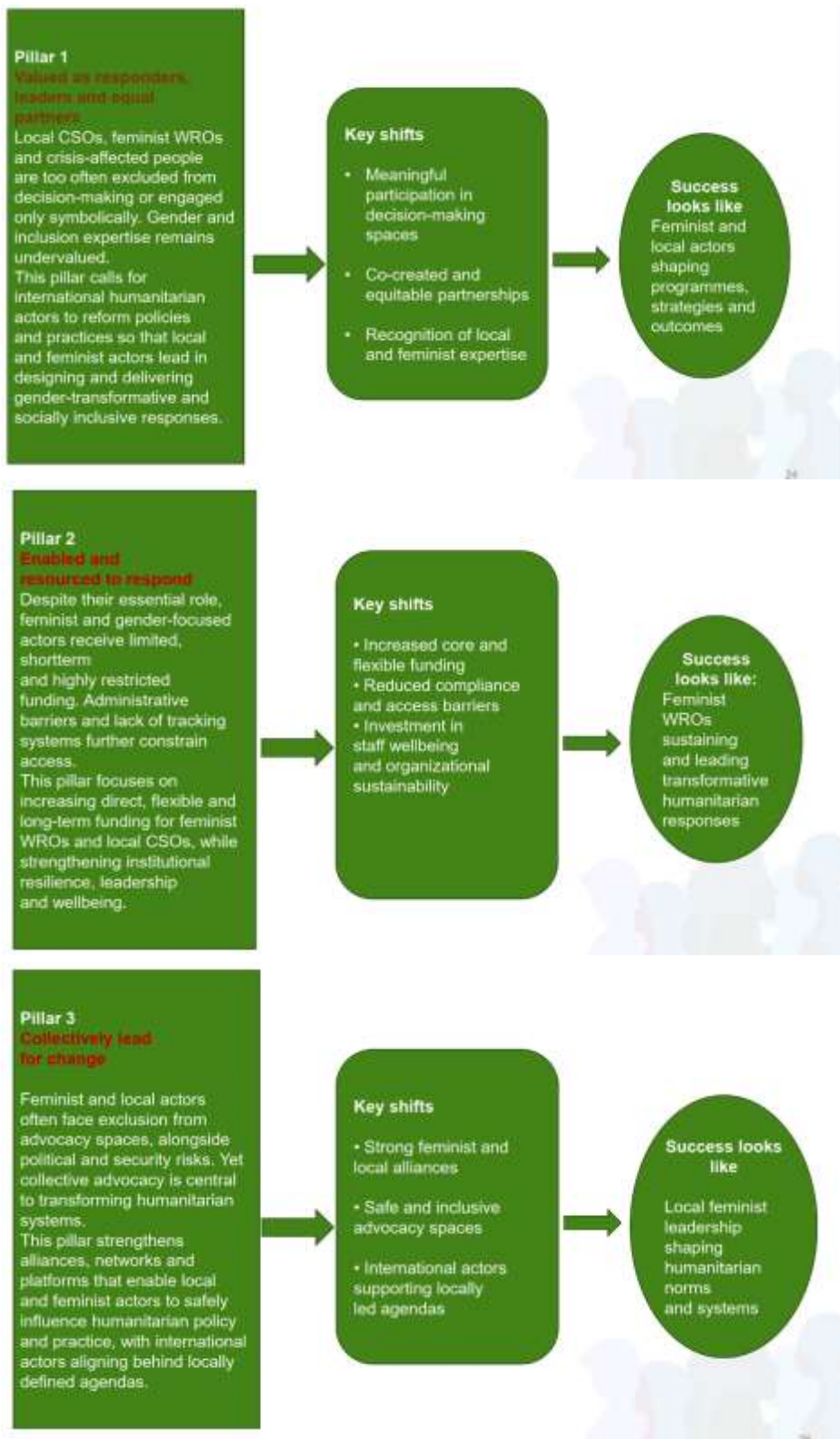
The FLHL Roadmap is anchored in three interlinked elements:

- **Intersectional and locally led**
Leadership must reflect the diversity of communities, recognise intersecting identities, and value knowledge rooted in local social systems rather than external expertise.
- **Gender-transformative and socially inclusive**
FLHL challenges patriarchal norms, gendered power relations, and exclusionary practices, rather than accommodating them within existing systems.
- **Feminist localisation**
Localisation is framed as a political process of power redistribution, not a technical handover of tasks, positioning women's rights organisations as leaders and agenda-setters.

The Three Pillars of the FLHL Roadmap

Gita outlined three mutually reinforcing pillars:

1. **Valued as responders, leaders, and equal partners**
Recognition of women-led and grassroots organisations as legitimate humanitarian actors, not peripheral implementers.
 2. **Enabled and resourced to respond**
Access to flexible, predictable, and timely funding that supports response, preparedness, and organisational sustainability.
 3. **Collectively lead for change**
Emphasis on networks, peer learning, and collective advocacy rather than individual leadership models.
- Gita also outlines the **fourth pillar of accountability** as **cross-cutting** pillar, embedded across all pillars rather than treated as a standalone outcome:
- 4 **Able to safely seek accountability**
Protection, safe participation, and mechanisms to hold power-holders accountable without exposing local actors to harm. Ultimately, it aims to ensure robust and inclusive accountability mechanism for local actors especially WROs within humanitarian system.



What the Roadmap demands of humanitarian actors

- The FLHL Roadmap is not intended as a checklist or branding exercise.
- It demands:
 - Shifts in mindset,
 - Redistribution of power,

- Institutional change within INGOs and donor systems.
- Gita emphasised that Oxfam must also be accountable, acting as:
 - Facilitator rather than controller,
 - Learner alongside partners,
 - An organisation willing to change its own practices.

Overall emphasis

Gita emphasised that the FLHL Roadmap is a **political and practical tool for transforming humanitarian systems**, not an add-on to existing approaches. Without confronting power, legitimacy, and accountability, she argued, localisation and gender equality efforts will continue to fall short.

3.3.2 Case Study 1: Women-Led Flood Response in Aceh, Indonesia

Speaker: *Rismawati, Flower Aceh (member of WLHL Consortium)*

Topic: *Experience Sharing; Gender Responsive Response*

Summary:

Riris shared [Flower Aceh](#)'s experience leading a women-led humanitarian response to severe flooding in Aceh, offering a detailed account of how feminist, locally led leadership operates in practice during an emergency. She highlighted how Flower Aceh combined **community-embedded, gender-responsive assessment**, collective decision-making, and cross-organisational collaboration to identify and respond to differentiated needs, including those of women, persons with disabilities, elderly people, and children. Beyond immediate response, Riris demonstrated how women-led organisations simultaneously engage in advocacy, network strengthening, and policy dialogue, using humanitarian response as an entry point to address structural inequalities and advance longer-term gender justice, even within constrained, under-resourced, and rapidly evolving crisis contexts.

Operational background: Who is Flower Aceh

- Flower Aceh is a **women-led organisation based in Aceh**, with long-standing experience in:
 - Gender justice
 - Women's rights
 - SRHR
 - GBV prevention and response
- The organisation has a strong presence at community level and is trusted by women survivors, which enabled rapid mobilisation during the floods.
- Riris emphasised that Flower Aceh's humanitarian engagement is grounded in feminist values, community accountability, and collective leadership, rather than project-driven mandates.

Context and scale of the Aceh floods

- Riris described the floods as **large-scale and widespread**, affecting multiple districts across Aceh.

- She provided specific figures during the presentation to illustrate:
 - The number of affected areas
 - The scale of displacement
 - The severity and duration of flooding
- The scale of the disaster far exceeded the immediate response capacity of local authorities, particularly in the early phase.
- Many affected communities experienced:
 - Delayed assistance
 - Limited access to basic services
 - Weak coordination across response actors

Gendered impacts and vulnerabilities

Riris detailed how the floods disproportionately affected women, children, and elderly people:

- **Women**, including pregnant and lactating women, faced:
 - Increased health risks
 - Limited access to maternal and reproductive health services
 - Heightened care burdens in evacuation and shelter settings
- **Children** experienced:
 - Disrupted routines and schooling
 - Unsafe and overcrowded shelter conditions
- **Elderly people** faced:
 - Mobility constraints
 - Health risks exacerbated by displacement
- Across communities, there were critical gaps in:
 - Access to clean water
 - Sanitation facilities
 - Safe and dignified shelter
- Riris highlighted that **reliable, disaggregated data was largely unavailable** during the initial response, making many vulnerabilities invisible within formal humanitarian systems.

Feminist, community-embedded assessment

- Flower Aceh treated assessment as a **core feminist practice**, not merely a technical requirement.
- The organisation collaborated with:
 - Jaringan Mitra Kemanusiaan (JMK)
 - Lokadaya
 - Penabulu
 - LBH APIK
 - WLHL Consortium
 - Oxfam
- Key elements of the assessment approach included:
 - Capacity strengthening on gender-responsive and digital assessment tools
 - Formation of a **community-based enumerator team** (around 25 people), largely women and flood-affected community members

- Use of aggregated data to identify differentiated needs across locations and population groups
- Assessment findings informed both immediate response and advocacy with other humanitarian actors and authorities.

Women-led operational response: *posko* and public kitchens

- Riris described Flower Aceh's direct operational role in:
 - Supporting and managing ***posko* (temporary shelters)**
 - Organising and running **public kitchens**
- These interventions were critical for:
 - Ensuring food access
 - Supporting women, children, and elderly survivors
 - Creating safer, more dignified spaces for displaced communities
- Public kitchens were framed not simply as logistics, but as:
 - Sites of care
 - Collective organisation
 - Women's leadership in practice
- Flower Aceh's proximity to communities enabled rapid adaptation to changing needs, even with limited resources.

Beyond response: Advocacy and policy engagement

- Riris highlighted Flower Aceh's **R3P approach**:
 - Response
 - Recovery
 - Preparedness
 - Policy engagement
- The flood response was used as an entry point to:
 - Strengthen CSO and WRO networks
 - Advocate for gender-responsive and socially inclusive disaster policies
 - Push for better data, coordination, and recognition of women-led organisations
- She stressed that policy change must be accompanied by changes in mindset and practice, not only regulation.

Overall emphasis

Riris emphasised that women-led organisations are already acting as **first responders, care providers, assessors, coordinators, and advocates**, often without adequate recognition or resources. Feminist leadership, as demonstrated by Flower Aceh, enables humanitarian responses that address immediate survival needs while simultaneously challenging structural inequalities and advancing long-term gender justice.

3.3.3 Case Study 2: Youth-Led Feminist Leadership and Learning in Bangladesh

Speaker: Akhyai Mong Marma, Annanya Kallyan Sangathon (AKS) Bangladesh

Topic: Context and Initiative: A Blueprint for the Future

Summary

Among presented a detailed case study from Bangladesh illustrating how the FLHL Roadmap can be operationalised through **youth-led feminist leadership and learning**, particularly in marginalised and Indigenous contexts. Drawing on AKS's organisational history and a learning-oriented project supported by flexible funding, he demonstrated how small-scale, trust-based interventions can generate meaningful leadership outcomes, strengthen collective agency, and contribute to longer-term humanitarian system transformation. His presentation underscored that feminist leadership development is incremental, relational, and deeply rooted in local social realities.

Organisational background: AKS Bangladesh

- [AKS \(Ananya Kallyan Sangathon\)](#) is a grassroots organisation based in Bandarban District, Chittagong Hill Tracts, working primarily with Indigenous and marginalised communities.
- Among explained AKS's organisational journey:
 - Informal community work since 1997
 - District-level registration in 1998
 - National NGO Affairs Bureau registration in 2024
- AKS works across:
 - Women's rights
 - Youth empowerment
 - Child protection
 - Community development
- Organisational governance includes:
 - An executive committee
 - A general body
 - Community accountability mechanisms
- Among emphasised that AKS's long-term presence and community trust are critical foundations for feminist leadership and humanitarian engagement.

Context and rationale: Why youth feminist leadership

- Among highlighted that adolescent girls in Bandarban face:
 - Structural gender inequality
 - Limited access to leadership spaces
 - Strong socio-cultural restrictions on voice and participation
- These challenges are intensified by:
 - Geographic isolation
 - Ethnic marginalisation
 - Limited institutional presence
- Youth, particularly adolescent girls, are often:
 - Excluded from humanitarian decision-making
 - Treated as beneficiaries rather than leaders
- The initiative was designed to address these gaps by creating **safe, feminist learning spaces** where young people could build confidence, skills, and collective agency.

The “Young Feminist Voices” learning project

- The project emerged directly from Among’s participation in the **Asian Feminist Humanitarian Leadership training**, which influenced both content and methodology.
- It was intentionally designed as a **learning project**, not a service-delivery intervention.
- Key project parameters included:
 - Location: Bandarban District
 - Duration: approximately four months
 - Budget: EUR 3,050
 - Donor: Oxfam
- Target group:
 - 16 adolescent girls
 - 8 adolescent boys
- Inclusion of boys was framed as part of a **gender-transformative approach**, rather than dilution of feminist intent.

Project activities and feminist learning methodology

Among described the project activities in detail:

- **Feminist leadership training**
 - Adapted from regional FLHL and feminist leadership curricula
 - Contextualised for adolescents
 - Focused on gender, power, leadership, and rights
- **Debate-based learning**
 - Training on public speaking, critical thinking, and advocacy
 - Engagement with teachers and debate practitioners
- **Establishment of debate clubs**
 - Two school-based or community-level clubs
 - Provision of basic resources and facilitation support
- **Practice and exchange**
 - School-level debates
 - District-level workshops and peer exchange
- **Youth-led humanitarian actions**
 - Small, self-managed initiatives responding to local needs
 - Examples included hygiene support and mutual aid activities
- Throughout the project, emphasis was placed on:
 - Safe spaces
 - Confidence-building
 - Collective learning rather than competition

Outcomes and observed changes

Among highlighted several outcomes emerging from the project:

- Increased confidence and leadership capacity among adolescent girls
- Improved public speaking and advocacy skills
- Greater participation of young people in community discussions

- Strengthened relationships between youth participants, families, and community leaders
- Emergence of youth-led spaces for dialogue on gender and rights

He stressed that these outcomes were **qualitative and relational**, reflecting shifts in agency and confidence rather than easily quantifiable indicators.

Learning and reflections

Learning and reflections

Among framed the initiative as a learning process, identifying key reflections:

- Feminist leadership development requires:
 - Time
 - Trust
 - Continuity
- Small, flexible funding enabled:
 - Adaptation to context
 - Responsiveness to participant needs
 - Reduced administrative burden
- Youth leadership should be understood as:
 - A long-term investment
 - A foundation for future humanitarian leadership
- Learning-oriented projects create space for experimentation and reflection that is often absent in conventional humanitarian programming.

Feminist leadership beyond funded projects

- Among shared extensive examples of **voluntary humanitarian engagement**, including:
 - COVID-19 response
 - Winter relief
 - Support for elderly people and persons with disabilities
- These experiences highlighted:
 - The invisible labour carried by grassroots leaders
 - Personal risks assumed without formal recognition or remuneration
- He used these examples to argue for:
 - Greater recognition of informal leadership
 - Trust-based, flexible funding that values lived commitment.

Overall emphasis

Among emphasised that the FLHL Roadmap enables humanitarian actors to **invest in leadership before crises occur**, particularly among young people who are often excluded from decision-making. By supporting feminist learning, collective agency, and grassroots legitimacy, FLHL contributes to long-term transformation of humanitarian systems rather than short-term project outcomes.

3.4 Discussion Session

The Q&A session and closing reflections allowed participants and speakers to further unpack key

themes emerging from the presentations, particularly around socio-cultural barriers, gender and intersectionality within localization, system accountability, and the limits of existing global commitments such as **the Grand Bargain**.

Institutional reflections

Jermaine Bayas

- Reflected on Pillar 2, emphasising that women-led organisations are structurally excluded from humanitarian funding.
- Framed flexible funding as a **long-term investment** that enables preparedness, learning, and organisational strengthening.
- Positioned Oxfam as a system actor responsible for changing funding models and donor risk perceptions.

Libby

- Reflected on the Roadmap's shift from aspiration to practice through grassroots case studies.
- Explicitly named humanitarian systems as patriarchal and colonial.
- Emphasised Oxfam's role as enabler, learner, and non-controller of feminist leadership processes.

Disability inclusion in women-led humanitarian response

- A participant (Neo), through a question read by Gita, raised a critical concern regarding **disability inclusion** in the Aceh flood response, specifically asking:
 - How persons with disabilities were identified during the emergency,
 - What concrete measures were taken to ensure equitable access to:
 - Critical information,
 - Emergency shelters,
 - Relief distribution,
 - Safe and decision-making spaces,
 - And noting that disability-focused actions were not clearly articulated in the initial presentation, despite well-documented heightened vulnerability of persons with disabilities during disasters.
- In response, Riris acknowledged that **disability inclusion presents significant operational challenges**, particularly in the early stages of emergencies, and explained that:
 - At the onset of the floods, **reliable data on persons with disabilities was largely unavailable**, as communities were displaced and mixed across multiple *posko* (temporary shelters).
 - Official shelter data did not consistently capture disability status, making many persons with disabilities effectively invisible within formal response systems.
- Riris outlined how Flower Aceh addressed these gaps through **direct, field-based identification**, rather than relying solely on official datasets:
 - Coordinating with social services to access existing disability data where available.

- Conducting direct visits to shelters, camps, and affected neighbourhoods to meet survivors and identify specific needs through face-to-face engagement.
- Using these encounters to determine what immediate interventions were possible within Flower Aceh's limited organisational capacity and funding.
- She emphasised that Flower Aceh is a **small, women-led organisation**, not an international NGO or large donor, and therefore:
 - Interventions were prioritised based on urgency and feasibility.
 - Assistance focused on what could be delivered quickly and directly, rather than comprehensive coverage.
- Riris provided concrete examples to illustrate how disability inclusion was operationalised in practice:
 - Identifying persons with physical disabilities who were **stranded on upper floors** of flooded buildings because evacuation systems had failed or been overlooked.
 - Coordinating with social services to ensure these individuals received support once identified.
 - Responding to cases of persons with psychosocial disabilities (ODJG), including a family with two members with mental disabilities sheltering in a government building, by:
 - Communicating with medical associations and health workers,
 - Facilitating appropriate health and psychosocial intervention.
- She further explained that **basic needs support** was provided immediately where possible, including:
 - Food,
 - Daily necessities,
 - Blankets and clothing,
 drawing on resources available at shelters and through Flower Aceh's response operations.
- Riris highlighted the role of **disaggregated data in strengthening disability inclusion**, particularly through collaboration with Penabulu and JMK:
 - Assessment tools were designed to capture sex-, age-, and condition-disaggregated data, including:
 - Persons with disabilities,
 - Elderly people,
 - Children, including infants.
 - This data became the basis for:
 - Targeted assistance,
 - More appropriate distribution of support according to specific group needs,
 - Ongoing response planning rather than one-off interventions.
- She concluded that disability inclusion in humanitarian response:
 - Requires **active identification and prioritisation**, not passive reliance on existing systems.
 - Is closely linked to feminist leadership practices that emphasise proximity to communities, responsiveness, and accountability.

- Remains constrained by limited resources, but can be meaningfully advanced through community-based assessment, coordination, and advocacy, even within highly challenging emergency contexts.

Enabling and resourcing women-led response (FLHL Roadmap Pillar 2)

- The moderator introduced a discussion on **Pillar 2 of the FLHL Roadmap (“Enabled and resourced to respond”)**, linking it to:
 - Flower Aceh’s women-led response in Aceh,
 - The role of sensitivity, proximity, and feminist assessment in identifying unmet needs,
 - Questions around what “accessible and flexible funding” means in practice under the Roadmap.
- Drawing on Flower Aceh’s experience, Riris explained that:
 - As a local women-led organisation, Flower Aceh initially **did not have the capacity to conduct systematic humanitarian assessments**, despite being deeply embedded in affected communities.
 - Through collaboration with JMK, Lokadaya, Penabulu, WLHL, LBH APIK, and Oxfam, Flower Aceh received **targeted capacity strengthening**, including:
 - Training on digital and gender-responsive assessment tools,
 - Support to input and aggregate assessment data through shared platforms.
 - This enabled Flower Aceh to:
 - Identify differentiated needs across locations, even among women affected by the same disaster,
 - Tailor assistance according to context (e.g. clean water and mobility aids in severely flooded villages, shelter support in urban areas).
 - An enumerator team of around **25 people**, largely women and flood-affected community members, was established and trained to conduct gender-responsive assessments, reinforcing **local leadership and ownership** of the response process.
- The moderator synthesised this learning by noting that feminist leadership simultaneously addresses:
 - **Practical needs** (such as water, shelter, food, and mobility),
 - And **strategic needs**, including participation, voice, and recognition of women-led leadership.
- Responding directly to the Pillar 2 question, **Jermaine Bayas, Regional Humanitarian Manager for Asia at Oxfam**, emphasised that:
 - Women’s rights organisations and other non-traditional actors face **systemic barriers to accessing humanitarian funding**, including exclusion from donor mechanisms because they are not recognised as “humanitarian actors”.
 - Limited access to resources constrains not only emergency response, but also:
 - Organisational capacity strengthening,
 - Preparedness and readiness before crises occur.
 - Pillar 2 therefore calls for a **shift toward flexible, trust-based funding**, allowing feminist and community-based organisations to:
 - Allocate resources according to contextual priorities,
 - Invest in preparedness and long-term capacity, not only short-term response.

- Such funding should be understood as **long-term investment**, requiring donors and INGOs to reassess risk, legitimacy, and leadership.
- Jermaine cited Oxfam's **Humanitarian Action Fund** and rapid response modalities as practical examples of how Pillar 2 is being piloted:
 - Flower Aceh's response was supported through quick and flexible funding,
 - These mechanisms are intended to influence broader humanitarian funding practices.
- **Libby, representing Oxfam Asia**, added an institutional reflection, noting that:
 - While the FLHL Roadmap may appear aspirational or conceptual on paper, the case studies demonstrated how Pillar 2 is enacted in practice.
 - She explicitly acknowledged that humanitarian and development systems remain **colonial and patriarchal**, with entrenched power imbalances.
 - From Oxfam's perspective, Pillar 2 requires INGOs to reposition themselves as:
 - Supporters and enablers,
 - Rather than controllers of resources or agendas,
 - Committed to system transformation, not only aid delivery.
- The discussion collectively reinforced that:
 - Enabling and resourcing women-led response is not solely a funding issue,
 - It requires coordinated shifts in:
 - Capacity strengthening approaches,
 - Donor recognition and eligibility criteria,
 - INGO roles and power relations within humanitarian systems.

Collective leadership for change (FLHL Roadmap Pillar 3)

- A participant from **Oxfam Novib (Jad Karam)** raised a question regarding **Pillar 3 of the FLHL Roadmap ("Collectively lead for change")**, specifically asking:
 - What kinds of "capacity strengthening" are envisioned for local CSOs and women-led organisations under the Roadmap.
 - How these capacities are identified and prioritised in ways that reflect local priorities and lived expertise, rather than external prescriptions.
- Jad further emphasised that Pillar 3 should not be framed as one-way support, but as a space for mutual learning, where INGOs also learn from feminist, grassroots organisations.
- He expressed interest in exploring how Oxfam Novib could contribute to and learn from this process through responsive, non-prescriptive partnership, shaped collaboratively with local and feminist actors.
- Responding to this, **Gita Rani Adhikary (Oxfam Asia)** clarified that capacity strengthening under Pillar 3 is not understood as technical training alone, but as a long-term feminist leadership process grounded in practice and collective experience.
- She outlined several concrete approaches already underway:
 - **Feminist Humanitarian Leadership Learning Programme**, a nine-month programme attended by speakers such as Riris and Among, covering:
 - Gender and gender-transformative leadership,
 - Power analysis,
 - Humanitarian standards,

- Gender in emergencies.
- The programme is designed to enable participants to:
 - Apply learning in their day-to-day work,
 - Strengthen organisational development,
 - Amplify feminist leadership within their own contexts.
- Gita linked Pillar 3 closely with **Pillar 2**, noting that:
 - Flexible funding is essential for enabling learning and leadership development,
 - Women-led organisations often require small, flexible grants for organisational development, not only large-scale project funding,
 - Oxfam is actively working to simplify funding processes to make them more accessible to women's rights organisations.
- She further highlighted the importance of network strengthening and collective advocacy, explaining that:
 - Feminist and women-led networks are being strengthened at country level and connected regionally,
 - Through consultations, women leaders collectively identified **six shared advocacy priorities** to influence humanitarian systems at regional and global levels,
 - These agendas emerged from feminist activists themselves, rather than being externally defined.
- Gita emphasised that under Pillar 3:
 - Women leaders are not treated as participants or beneficiaries,
 - They are positioned as decision-makers throughout programme design, implementation, and advocacy,
 - Oxfam's role is to facilitate and support, not to direct.
- Jad responded by reaffirming interest in deepening collaboration, including sharing practices from Oxfam Novib, reinforcing Pillar 3 as a space for reciprocal learning rather than capacity transfer.
- In closing her response, Gita connected Pillar 3 to broader system change, stressing that:
 - Transforming humanitarian systems requires amplifying the voices of women's rights and feminist activists in decision-making spaces,
 - Leadership must be built from the grassroots upward, not only through engagement with formal power-holders,
 - Achieving this requires:
 - Shifting mindsets,
 - Challenging entrenched power structures,
 - Addressing persistent social and institutional inequalities.
- She cautioned against treating feminist leadership as a short-term or "tick-box" commitment, arguing that Pillar 3 must be pursued as a strategic, long-term process embedded across humanitarian action.

3.5 Reflections and Closing

In the closing segment of the session, the moderator invited speakers to reflect on **what must change to transform humanitarian systems in Asia**, particularly systems that remain gender-

blind, patriarchal, and exclusionary. The reflections brought together insights from grassroots practice, feminist leadership development, and collective action, reinforcing the session's central argument that transformation is both necessary and possible.

Transforming gender-blind and patriarchal humanitarian systems

Reflection by Rismawati (Riris), Flower Aceh

- Responding to the question on how to transform humanitarian systems that remain gender-blind or patriarchal, Riris emphasised that **capacity building is a critical entry point**, particularly feminist humanitarian leadership training.
 - She reflected on her own experience participating in feminist humanitarian leadership capacity building supported through Oxfam and partners.
 - The training equipped her with practical knowledge and feminist analytical tools that proved directly applicable during field response.
 - She stressed that such capacity building should be expanded and institutionalised at national and provincial levels, not limited to individual participants.
- Riris highlighted collective strength and collective action as a second, equally important pillar of transformation:
 - Grassroots CSOs and women's organisations cannot work in isolation, especially during large-scale emergencies.
 - Existing networks (such as Lokadaya, JMK, Kalyana Mitra, WLHL, Penabulu, and Oxfam) played a crucial role in enabling coordinated response.
 - Being part of the WLHL Consortium strengthened Flower Aceh's ability to respond, learn, and advocate collectively.
 - Collective action allowed learning and capacity to extend beyond individual organisations to partner CSOs, volunteers, and community members themselves.
- She further stressed the importance of policy and regulatory frameworks that are explicitly gender-responsive and socially inclusive:
 - Disaster management systems require clear guidelines or blueprints that integrate Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) principles.
 - Policies alone are insufficient if not accompanied by perspective change among implementing actors.
 - Without gender and inclusion perspectives, policies risk remaining symbolic and ineffective during actual emergencies.
- Riris concluded that transformation requires:
 - Strengthening feminist perspectives across multiple actors,
 - Ensuring that gender, age, disability, and other vulnerabilities are considered as immediate priorities during response,
 - Embedding feminist analysis into both preparedness and response, rather than treating it as an add-on.

Building a transformative humanitarian system in Asia

Reflection by Akhyai Mong Marma (Among), AKS Bangladesh

- Responding to the question on what needs to change to achieve a more transformative humanitarian system in Asia, Among framed transformation as a long-term, interconnected process rather than a single intervention.
- He emphasised that meaningful transformation must begin at the grassroots level, particularly through leadership development among young people.
 - AKS's youth-focused feminist learning initiatives were cited as intentional investments in future leadership.
 - Young feminist leaders, once supported and nurtured, are expected to become community leaders capable of influencing social and humanitarian change over time.
- Among highlighted that:
 - Transformation does not occur instantly or at scale without sustained effort.
 - Small, locally rooted initiatives can generate long-term impact by shifting mindsets, confidence, and leadership practices.
 - Linking grassroots leadership with wider networks, including organisations like Oxfam, creates pathways for local leadership to influence broader humanitarian systems.
- He concluded that:
 - Building strong, ethical, and feminist leaders within communities is a foundational step toward systemic change.
 - Investment in grassroots leadership today shapes the humanitarian leadership of tomorrow.

Collective action, transition, and closing reflections

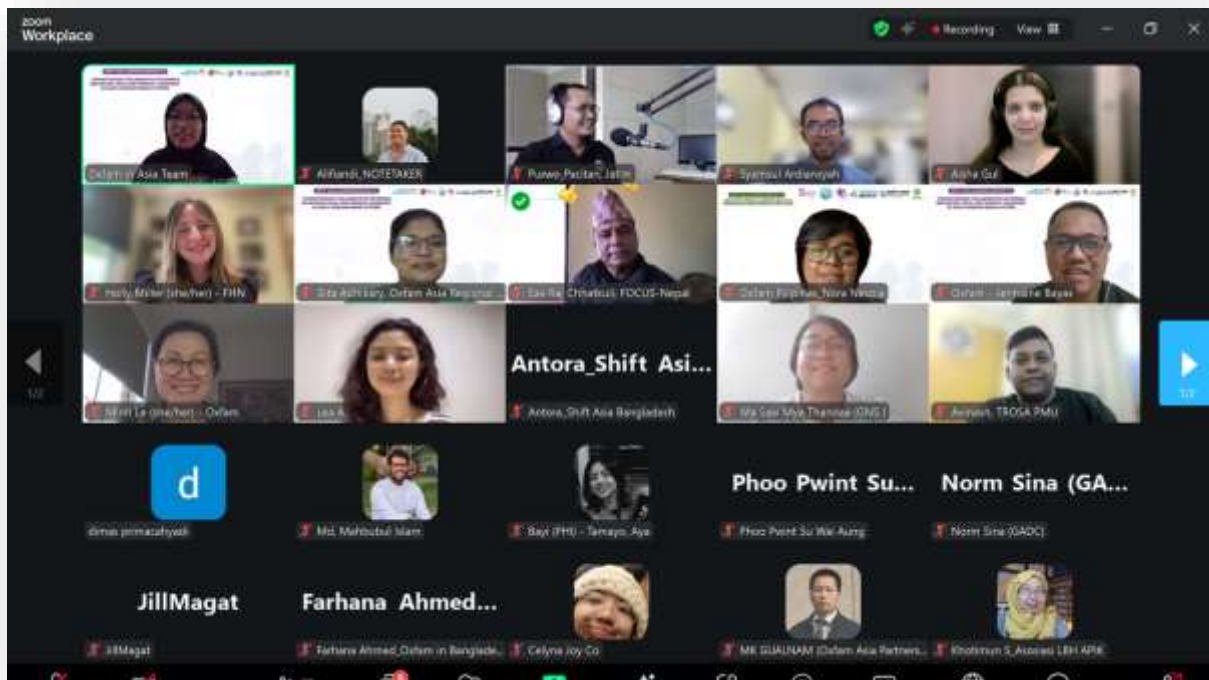
- In her closing reflection, the moderator synthesised the speakers' insights, underscoring that:
 - Capacity building, collective action, and policy influence must operate together.
 - Structural change cannot occur without shifts in perspective, power, and practice.
- She reinforced the importance of **collective action**, networking, and shared learning:
 - Working together enables greater impact than isolated efforts.
 - Feminist leadership thrives through collaboration, mutual support, and solidarity.
- Dheni also acknowledged a moment of transition within the SHIFT Asia community:
 - She shared that Gita Rani Adhikary would be moving on to new opportunities, continuing her work toward gender-transformative change in other spaces.
 - She expressed appreciation for Gita's leadership, contributions, and legacy within the SHIFT Asia Learning Series.
- In closing the session, Dheni:
 - Thanked all speakers and participants for their engagement across the **three sessions of the SHIFT Asia Learning Series**.
 - Emphasised that while humanitarian systems urgently need change, transformation is not impossible, as demonstrated by the practical examples shared by Riris and Among.
 - Encouraged continued connection, knowledge sharing, and collaboration beyond the session.
 - Confirmed that session materials would be shared with participants and invited continued engagement in future learning agendas.

Overall closing emphasis

The closing reflections reaffirmed that advancing feminist, locally led humanitarian leadership requires **intentional capacity building, collective action, grassroots leadership development, and systemic policy change**. While the humanitarian system in Asia remains shaped by patriarchal and exclusionary structures, the session demonstrated that alternative, feminist approaches are already being practised and can be scaled through sustained collaboration and shared commitment.

Annex

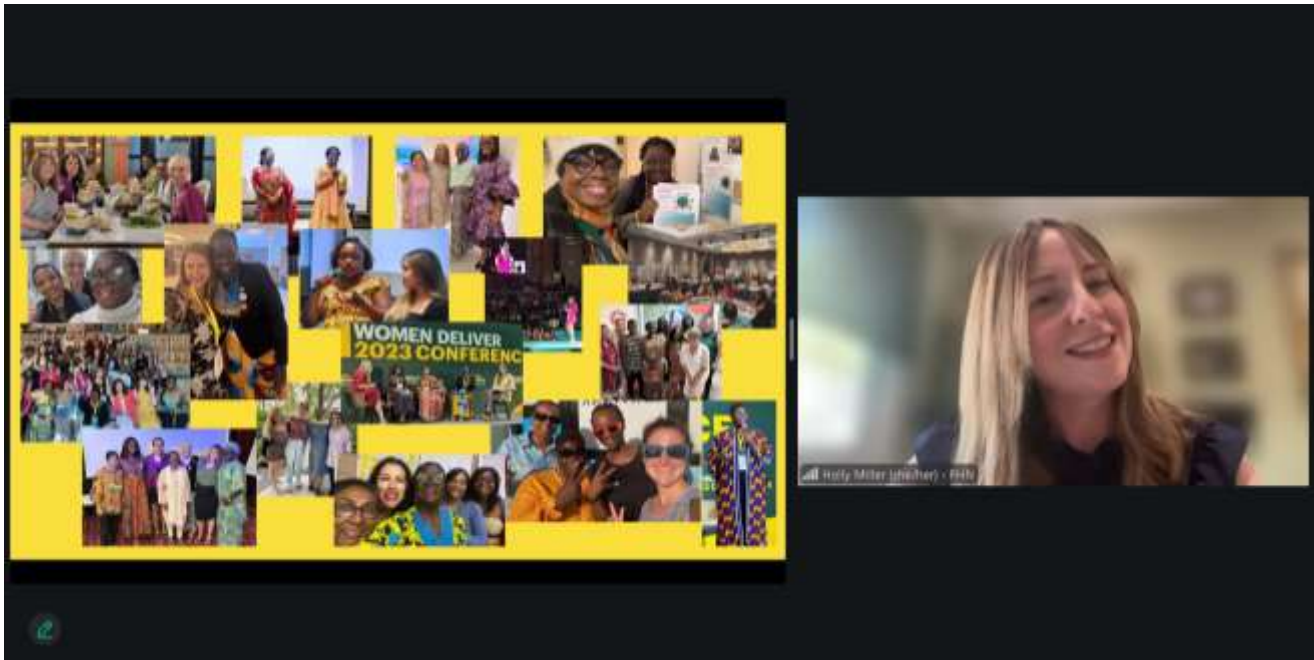
Documentation

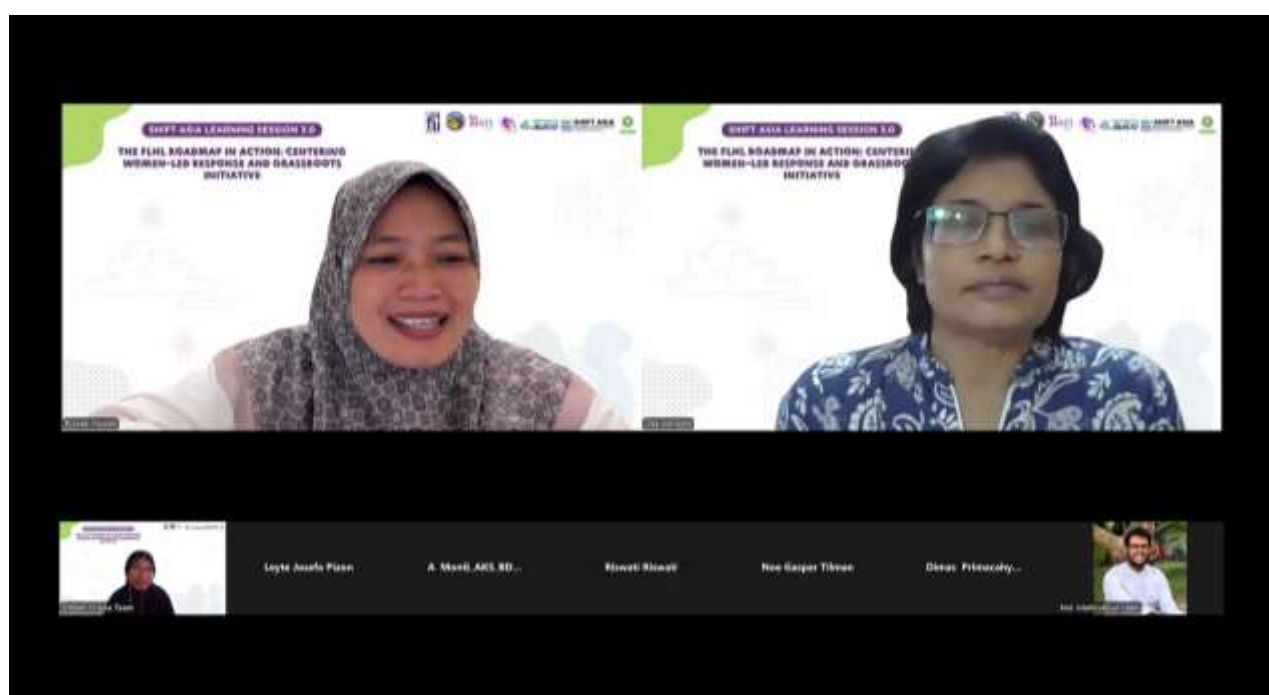


Leadership That Delivers

- Have conducted Mentorship for selected 15 WROs (workshop on Gender sensitive humanitarian response for WROs)
- Organized National convening meeting with Women leaders and WROs
- Workshop conducted with WRO's and leaders of Women Humanitarian Rights Organizations on Gender Responsive Humanitarian Action.
- *Though this Leadership Journey:*
 - Khojista Begum Jonaky (FTWD) on of BWHP Members Safeguarding capacity built; tools integrated and secured Malala Fund mentorship.
 - Rahima Sultana Kazal (AVAS): Expanded DDMC/UDMC roles; activated committees in 10+ wards; cross-regional support during 2022 floods.







Resources (video recording and presentation materials)

- Session 1: <https://oxfam.app.box.com/s/os14cr7ynf17s6t8r13fxnm06zxr5tg5>
- Session 2: <https://oxfam.app.box.com/s/oag4niokqyf3znqiw03ywu21tga6672i>
- Session 3: <https://oxfam.box.com/s/tw0nmp2mj2sxxgqgohlcjvwyg307eo0m>