**OHCHR Call for inputs to a report on cultural rights and governance**

**<https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2023/call-inputs-report-cultural-rights-and-governance-development>.**

1. **How are human rights generally integrated in your policies and programmes? Please indicate if human rights are mandatory considerations, at what stage of the programme they are integrated and if any, what kind of impact assessment and monitoring is done of their implementation.**

The Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre (RCMC) is a cultural project under the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) portfolio of the Migration Health Division (MHD) unit of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) at Cox's Bazar mission. This project aims to comprehensively document and preserve the Rohingya cultural heritage and promote psychosocial well-being by upholding and strengthening their cultural identity.

RCMC was conceived to address the refugees' mental health and psychosocial needs, specifically, the 'identity crises' reported by 50% of refugee respondents in the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) needs assessment conducted in 2018 by International Organization for Migration (IOM). The assessment revealed that Rohingya people view their culture as under threat, hence need to preserve the rich culture and connect the community with their culture while using it as a healing pathway.

In 2019, IOM started engaging skilled Rohingya artisans, craftspeople, and researchers to document and produce objects, artworks, stories, songs, tapestries, and cultural rituals representing Rohingya identity. The RCMC was designed collectively by IOM architects, Rohingya artisans, key leaders, and other stakeholders. The centre was opened to the public on 16 March 2022 and has conducted interactive and capacity-building activities such as masterclasses, women's day activities, children's day activities, storytelling sessions, and cultural programmes.

1. **Please provide examples of any programmes that contribute to the respect, protection and implementation of cultural rights, in particular:**

* **The right to choose and maintain one’s identity, and to take part in the cultural life of one’s choice;**

RCMC is a unique project by the IOM that contributes to the respect, protection, and implementation of cultural rights. The overall objective of the RCMC is to provide a safe and creative space where the Rohingya refugee community can share their knowledge, preserve their cultural heritage, and reconnect with their individual and collective memories towards promoting psychosocial well-being. The centre provides a safe and creative platform to build their dignity and adapt their identity positively through participatory contributions, eventually achieving mental well-being and happiness in their existence.

RCMC is a community space that is built for the community to come, learn and share their experience, cultural traditions, customs and heritage. The Rohingya community have been deprived of their cultural identity and this project gives them the opportunity to nurture their culture and form an individual and collective identity.

* **The right to access, enjoy and transmit cultural heritage, including languages and ways of life;**

RCMC is a community-run project and gives full access to the community. RCMC has a wide range of interactive activities like a guided tour of the gallery showcasing the cultural artefacts produced by the Rohingya artisans and how their traditional uses, activities dedicated to children where the children are informed about their cultural traditions, customs, symbols, farming, and fishing cultures, collectively everything about their homeland. The centre has a dedicated weekly schedule for women’s day activities. It gives a platform to the women to share their stories, memories, and experiences and portrays that through embroidery works and tapestries. There is also a monthly cultural programme for men and women respecting their culture. This cultural programme shows various cultural components, including proverbs, songs, drama etc, of Rohingya culture through which the community can learn about their cultural heritage and ways of life.

* **The right to access and transmit creative expressions and knowledge, and to access the creativity and knowledge of others;**

RCMC not only aims to preserve the cultural heritage of Rohingya but also encourages the exchange of creative cultural knowledge and skills. It is such a place that allows creative minds to exhibit their skills and hereditary knowledge. Through various activities, RCMC gives the community scope for inter-generational knowledge sharing, where the elderly generation is passing down their knowledge to the younger generation. For example, through the story-telling sessions, women share their own thoughts, experiences, and dreams with others.

The artefacts showcased in the centre are produced by skilled Rohingya artisans. They are actively engaged in the focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted for the research, production and documentation of the artefacts. This process allows them to transmit creative expressions and knowledge; the interpersonal exchange of opinions and techniques gives them the purview to learn about others’ creativity and knowledge.

The skill-building initiatives of RCMC, like a masterclass, are designed so that the skilled Rohingya artisans pass their knowledge to fellow community members. RCMC runs various daily, weekly, and monthly activities that help the Rohingya community access, enjoy, and transmit cultural heritage, including languages and ways of life.

* **The right to access to the benefits of science and its applications, including scientific knowledge, technology, and opportunities to contribute to the scientific enterprise;**

Various skills like basketry, carpentry, pottery, and gardening disseminated to the community through the expert artisans of the respective category give the community to experience and gain from the benefits of science as all these skills and techniques follow the language of science. For example, in a gardening masterclass, the community people learn about different gardening methods for different seasons and plants. The community also gets to know about the medicinal benefits of plants. This phenomenon is indirectly catering the scientific knowledge to the community.

* **The right to benefit from the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which one is the author;**
* **The right to take part in decision-making processes that have an impact on one’s cultural life, including:**
  + - **the right of effective participation and consultation for minorities;**

The project development was participatory to ensure involvement of the communities in the decision-making process right from needs identification via a needs assessment, and intervention process to ensure that the community’s right to effective participation and being consulted was upheld.

* + - **the right to free, prior, and informed consent by indigenous peoples and by local populations.**

The RCMC was established to provide a safe space to a community who were minorities deprived of their rights and had to face a lot of hurdles. The day-to-day operation of RCMC is designed in a way that ensures the participation of the community. From its early days, RCMC operated in such a way that the community felt the ownership of the centre. From the design of the centre, activity planning and designing, artefact production, and day-to-day centre maintenance, everything is decided by consulting the community.

In the case of portraying and exhibiting the creative works and ideas and sharing their stories with the world, RCMC ensures to take informed consent of the participants.

1. **Please provide recent examples of programmes, policies and commitments where:**

* **sustainable development is discussed beyond wealth accumulation model;**

RCMC thrives on sustainability through its process. RCMC follows a community participatory approach where everything is decided and conducted through consultation with the community. This approach builds a sense of ownership and belongingness in the community. The facilitators and participants belong to the same community for all the activities. This model leads to the sustainability of the project.

* **cultural rights are mentioned and explained;**

An important fundamental aspect of cultural rights is preserving and maintaining one's cultural heritage. This is especially important for communities like the Rohingya, who have faced significant challenges in maintaining their cultural identity. Another critical aspect of cultural rights is access and participation in cultural activities. The Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre serves as an accessible space for the community, allowing them to actively engage with their cultural heritage. By providing access to cultural activities and resources, the centre helps to promote the preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge and traditions.

* **cultural development is mentioned and explained**

The RCMC makes a substantial contribution to the cultural growth of the Rohingya community by safeguarding the cultural legacy and offering a venue for cultural events and contributing to the cultural development. The centre's efforts to preserve the cultural history aid in keeping the community's customs and identity alive. Various cultural artifacts are on display in the center, highlighting the rich history and culture of the Rohingya people. The center offers the community access to these resources so they can reconnect with their cultural history and pass it on to future generations. The centre's efforts to promote Rohingya culture increase public understanding of the history, customs, and identity of the group. The center aids in preventing community marginalization and isolation by giving members of the community a place to enjoy and engage with their culture.

* **the expression of cultural diversity is respected, protected and implemented;**

The Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre is an excellent example of a project that respects, protects, and implements cultural diversity. The centre seeks to break down stereotypes and promote cultural diversity through exhibitions, workshops, and cultural events. One of the ways the centre does this is by allowing people of all genders and ages to exhibit their creativity and share their cultural traditions. This approach helps to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to engage with their cultural heritage and express themselves creatively.

The centre has a dedicated space showcasing the creativity of wonderful women artisans of RCMC and has a particular day only for women’s activities. The centre also provides special activities designed for the children. This not only promotes diversity but also respects inclusivity as well.

* **marginalized voices and aspirations are identified and heard;**

The project is all about a marginalized community who have been deprived of their cultural rights. All the contributors who helped this project be up and running are cultural aspirators. These are the voices with knowledge and skill about their culture and tradition. Such resourceful assets have been identified and engaged in initiating the project. From its inception till now, the project has ensured to be a platform for the community to share their culture, their stories, and their memories.

* **commitments to ensure that development is self-determined, and community led are included;**

One of the fundamentals of self-determination is the ability to make decisions that affect one's community. The Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre recognizes this and operates on the premise that the community should be the ones to decide the direction of the project's development. The community members are involved in decision-making processes and consulted at every project development stage. The centre's approach to community-led development ensures that the community has agency and ownership over the project. This approach is essential for sustainable development, ensuring the project is tailored to the community's needs and aspirations. Additionally, it promotes a sense of ownership and responsibility, encouraging community members to take an active role in the project's development and implementation.

* **commitments to take into account the local aspirations, values and priorities, rather than work on a one-size-fits-all model, are explicit;**

The Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre is committed to documenting, preserving, and celebrating the unique cultural heritage of the Rohingya community. To do so, the Centre understands the importance of considering the community's local aspirations, values, and priorities.

To achieve this, the Centre works closely with the Rohingya community to understand their needs and preferences. The Centre engages community members in every step of the process. The Centre also respects and honours the community's old values, traditions, and customs in all activities and preservation efforts.

* **commitments are made to ensure forward-looking development.**

Many Rohingya children who have never seen their homeland were born in the camp. They did not know how the houses looked or how the boats were. They don’t know about their farming techniques. Even many grown-up Rohingya people have never been able to explore and exercise their culture in their own land. One of the primary aims of RCMC is to disseminate cultural knowledge from generation to generation. RCMC conducts various capacity-building activities like training, workshops, and masterclasses. Experts in diverse fields from the Rohingya community conduct masterclasses and help to spread cultural skills and knowledge to the other people of the community. Also, the project now focuses on extensive outreach to the community to build a robust cultural network by connecting more and more people. The project ensures forward-looking development by spreading and passing cultural knowledge, skills, and experiences.

1. **Please provide information on any monitoring or evaluation mechanisms assessing the impacts of your development programmes or policies on cultural rights. Also please discuss any mechanism to submit complaints and seek reparation in cases of violations.**

**As part of the Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism to assess the project's impacts, RCMC collects written and verbal feedback from the visitors who visit the centre to see the artefact collection, which is documented through a visitor's book. After every interactive activity like the cultural program, gardening session, children's activity or women's activity, feedback is collected from the participants. Post-activity assessment is conducted after capacity-building activities like masterclasses or workshops. Along with that, FGD is another tool for evaluation.**

**A Feedback and complaint box is available in the centre where anyone can drop a complaint or opinion about any irregularities. The authority maintains vital confidentiality in solving the issues raised through this box.**