



ROHINGYA CRISIS RESPONSE IN BANGLADESH

Is a strategic shift from the current approach needed?



Aerial view of Rohingya camps

PHOTO: BRAC

Approximately one million people from the Rohingya community escaping violence in Myanmar arrived in Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh in August 2017. Five years have passed and the crisis has now evolved from an emergency to a protracted mode. The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and international humanitarian agencies are working together towards a "strategic shift". Having passed the initial emergency response phase (2017-2019) and pandemic response phase (2020 – 2021), this response plan has now entered into the protracted phase, which is characterised by uncertainty due to delays in repatriation and fund crunch. BRAC and the Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka organised a policy dialogue on 30 November 2022, bringing together government officials, diplomats, researchers, and development professionals to discuss accountable ways of delivering services to the Rohingyas while making the best use of the shrinking funds. A summary of the discussion is presented in this special supplement.

INAUGURAL SESSION



SM Monjur Rashid, head of programme, Advocacy for Social Change, BRAC

The goal of today's policy dialogue is to influence policymakers, implementers, and development partners to create a framework for managing the Rohingya crisis in a cost-effective way, taking into account the changing needs and priorities of the Rohingyas and the availability of necessary resources.

This dialogue has brought together a variety of actors and agencies who share our goals and interventions that will contribute to a comprehensive Rohingya response mechanism to meet the basic needs and priorities of the forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals. In the last five years, we have achieved impressive results together in responding to this humanitarian crisis in one of the world's largest refugee settlements.



Prof Dr Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir, chairman, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka

The persecuted Rohingyas in Bangladesh camps are in protracted crisis, following much exodus since genocide in Myanmar. In the camps, there are four main actors: the government, the Rohingya community, the host community, and international humanitarian agencies. Rohingyas live a sub-human life since the four actors operate within constraints of 'bounded response' as the durable solution of safe, dignified voluntary repatriation remains a far cry, with no walking the talk by the international community.

Our research suggests that the response strategy to the crisis is particularly concerning, as there is a significant mismatch between the basic requirements and the services provided in camps in view of changes in the population pyramid. In view of the high birth rate and shifts in age-structure in the camped population, the response strategy has to be re-designed to reflect the evidence and to address the needs, amongst others, in provisioning of basic services, education and training in skills for employability. The role of responding agencies – local, national, and international NGOs – requires changes in efficiency and capacities to address the changing nature of services while being mindful of reduction in overlapping. The changing nature of milieu and the contingent shift requires a re-think in host-Rohingya relationships.

During this phase, there has been a reduction in the flow of support, which is causing significant problems in addressing the needs associated with demographic patterns, with contingent consequences for education, health, basic services, skills, and employability. The downside is hopelessness.

During the Emergency Response Phase of 2017-2019, about 75% of the assistance requirement was met, declined to 65% during Pandemic Response Phase of 2020-2021. Currently – in the Protracted Phase, beginning in 2022, the level of assistance is only 44%, which is below the 50% mark. The international community needs to decide on an urgent basis how it will respond to this crisis in light of the Sustainable Development Goal; Leave No One Behind; since the crisis is in the emergency room while the government of Bangladesh with its limited capacities continue to bear the brunt.

According to our provisional estimates, the fund requirements for the Rohingya crisis

response are USD 1315.2 million in 2023, USD 1578.24 million in 2024, USD 1893.88 million in 2025, USD 2272.66 million in 2026, and USD 2727.19 million in 2027. If the durable solutions are put on limbo, the funds requirement almost doubles in 2027 due to population growth. It is alarming that there has been a trend of gradual decline in the amount of funds received compared to the actual fund requirement. There has been no calculation of loss and damage in terms of the environment, which would require a significant amount of additional funding.



Vivek Prakash, head of cooperation, Rohingya Refugee Response, High Commission of Canada to Bangladesh

Canada's second strategy for the Myanmar and Rohingya crisis recognises this protracted situation. The first element of Canada's strategy is to continue advocating for and bringing attention to the Rohingya crisis, including to pressure the government of Myanmar to create conditions for the safe and dignified return of the Rohingya.

Secondly, Canada continues to provide essential services, such as healthcare and food as well as LPG, which has helped to address environmental degradation caused by deforestation. The camps today are much more lush than in 2019, because people use a lot less firewood. LPG and reforestation is a success story in this ecologically sensitive

agency to live a dignified life.



Soo Jin Rhee, UNHCR Deputy Country Representative in Bangladesh

For the one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, conditions in Cox's Bazar – one of the country's poorest districts and home to the world's largest refugee camp – remain overcrowded with most of the refugees remaining fully reliant on humanitarian assistance for their survival. Most refugees continue to be entirely dependent on food distributions, primary and specialist health care, support for access to water, sanitation and hygiene, cooking fuel through LPG distribution, and a multitude of critical protection interventions. These critical life-sustaining activities require continuous assistance and support from the Government and the humanitarian community.

While the ultimate solution to the crisis lies in creating conditions conducive for the voluntary, safe and dignified return to Myanmar, Rohingya refugees are likely to be staying in Bangladesh for the foreseeable future. In order to help Rohingya refugees live a dignified life in the refugee camps and become more productive members of society, bolstering resilience and self-reliance through investment of education, skill development and livelihoods is all the more important. This will require providing them with the necessary resources and support to develop

It is essential to consider the role of security and stabilisation as we look towards a longer-term approach.

It is essential to change the current response to the Rohingya crisis to sustain it in the present and future as long as this community remains in Bangladesh. Therefore, it is essential to reflect on the response's scope, governance, resourcing, and participation aspects and consider how they can be improved.

Robust education skills development opportunities are required for a sustainable approach. As resources and aid are decreasing, a more efficient and integrated mechanism of delivery services should be explored.



Kathryn Davis Stevens, mission director, USAID Bangladesh

Providing education and equipping Rohingya with skills and livelihood opportunities is essential not only for the refugees themselves, but also for the host communities. This will contribute to security, stability, and economic opportunity in those regions. It is also important to move beyond a focus on humanitarian assistance and adopt a multi-year approach that addresses the long-term needs of the Rohingya refugees. It is important to recognize that significant progress has been made in the Rohingya response effort, including the recent enactment of a skills

Rohingya vulnerable, particularly women and children. It is essential to address the issue of nighttime security to ensure the protection of all members of the community.

Given the decline in funding, it may be necessary for Bangladesh to tie the funding for humanitarian assistance in Cox's Bazar to a multi annual framework to ensure that it is not redirected to other priorities. This will help to provide a more stable and long-term approach to addressing the needs of the Rohingya and supporting their self-reliance.



MA Manman, minister, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Initially, the prioritised needs of the Rohingya, such as shelter, food, medical care, education, and skill development, were addressed in a scattered manner. However, with the help of NGOs and UN bodies, humanitarian assistance has gradually been structured into a more organised framework. However, this is not enough; we need more financial support and a deeper understanding of the Rohingya crisis.

The lack of security, particularly at night, in the camps is a major concern. The Ministry of Home Affairs, the RRRRC, and other relevant authorities must work together to address this issue and find possible solutions. The lack of security is not only alarming for the Rohingya population but also for NGO professionals, both local and international, who are unable to properly perform their roles without proper security measures in place.

The Government of Bangladesh believes in engaging with the Myanmar regime in an effort to find a solution to the Rohingya crisis. While past attempts at dialogue have not been successful, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue to pursue this approach in the future. It is hoped that by working with the international community, a stable regime in Myanmar can be engaged in dialogue and discussion to find a way for the Rohingyas to return to their homeland.



Prof Dr Maksud Kamal, pro-vice chancellor (Academic), University of Dhaka

The funding deficit for Rohingya humanitarian assistance is increasing every year, and it will be difficult for Bangladesh to provide the necessary assistance without continuous financial support from the international community. As the host country, Bangladesh should adopt an interim strategy with a short-term approach, given the current situation. It is not realistic to pursue a long-term strategy to support the needs of the Rohingyas, including education and livelihood support, until the crisis is resolved. It is essential that the international community continue to provide the necessary financial support to help Bangladesh address the needs of the Rohingyas in a sustainable manner.

The Rohingya crisis has had significant environmental impacts in the camp area, including a decline in groundwater levels, landslides, and soil erosion. For example, landslides have occurred almost every year, with one in 2022 resulting in the deaths of eight individuals, the displacement of 13,000 people, and more than 500 injuries. Soil erosion has also increased as a side effect of efforts to protect against landslides, rising from 59 pounds per hectare in 2015 to 80 pounds per hectare in 2020. It is essential to comprehensively address these environmental issues in order to protect the health and well-being of the Rohingya and the surrounding community.



PHOTO: BRAC

skills and access to livelihood opportunities in a sustainable manner.

Following the signing of the MoU in October 2021, UN operations have been engaged and scaled up its humanitarian assistance and services for the 30,000 refugees which to date have been relocated. To ensure the success of the Bhasan Char project, it is key to provide refugees with viable livelihood opportunities and facilitate market linkages. Without such longer-term interventions, it will be difficult to sustain the humanitarian operation on the island.



Asif Saleh, executive director, BRAC

There is no denying that our utmost priority is to advocate for the safe return of Rohingya refugees to their homeland. However, there is growing recognition that the current efforts to support the Rohingya community should shift from a short-term, crisis-focused approach to a more developmental approach that takes a mid-term view of the situation. This shift is essential not only from a humanitarian standpoint but also from a security perspective.

When young people are confined to a densely populated area with nothing to do, there is a genuine risk of instability and conflict.

development framework and volunteer engagement guidelines. Since 2017, the United States has contributed \$1.9 billion to the response, with \$1.5 billion going towards supporting the Rohingya in the camps and the host communities.



H.E. Mustafa Osman Turan, ambassador of Turkey to Bangladesh

As a country hosting the largest refugee population, Turkey is well positioned to understand the situation in Bangladesh. We understand that the Government of Bangladesh is committed to starting repatriation as soon as possible, and we are supporting Bangladesh in international platforms and at the International Court of Justice to put pressure on Myanmar to accept the Rohingyas.

The increasing density of the Rohingya population is raising concerns about security, the provision of services, and the relationship between the host community and the Rohingya. If a longer-term policy is not adopted, this could be a recipe for disaster. The lack of employment and hope among the Rohingya can create a breeding ground for radicalization and other illegal activities. Law enforcement agencies often leave the camps at night, which leaves the