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Significant emergency water and sanitation work was undertaken in 2017/18 for the Rohingya response to address life-saving needs of over 730,000 refugees who fled violence in Myanmar. The activities of Bangladesh authorities, UNHCR and its partners, and other international agencies helped avert a public health crisis. Despite the large number of agencies delivering services across one of the largest refugee settlements in the world, harmonized standards for WASH were established and adopted. A major remaining challenge is lack of space to build facilities like latrines and for safe desludging.

UNHCR is strengthening the response to better meet the needs of women, children, and persons with specific needs. This includes ensuring safe and well-lit facilities for use by all women and girls; segregated WASH facilities in all services, including learning centres.

### Progress

UNHCR and partners have developed as far as possible safe and dignified facilities, taking into account of the challenging topography and the emergency needs of the response. Improvements made over 2018 include upgraded latrines that have larger volume pits to last longer, and WASH facilities provided by UNHCR which currently cover all refugees within basic Sphere standards. Whilst fecal sludge treatment remains a priority, UNHCR has completed the construction of a treatment plant in partnership with Oxfam to serve 150,000 people. In addition, for a sustainable and safe water supply, a chlorinated water network plan is being implemented in the refugee settlements. 11 networks are now completed in Kutupalong settlements with others under construction. Water purification tablets and water containers for collection and storage were also distributed.

UNHCR also conducted hydrogeological surveys in Teknaf and Ukhiya to identify suitable locations to drill for safe and adequate amount of water. In 2018, UNHCR conducted training for WASH field teams, including partner organisations and refugee volunteers, who has assisted the rapid assessments and repair works. Hygiene kits, including menstrual hygiene kits, were distributed to girls and women, alongside hygiene promotion activities. UNHCR has helped repair drainage systems and latrines for schools in Bangladeshi host communities affected by the influx as part of its Quick Impact Projects.

**433,062** refugees in 16 settlements reached with UNHCR-supported WASH activities

**25 liters** of water per person each day achieved

**<30** persons per latrine

#### UNHCR WASH objectives:

- 1 Ensure adequate, acceptable, safe and dignified **life-saving water and sanitation services**
- 2 Ensure refugees have the **means and access to information promoting hygiene** in their communities
- 3 Ensure WASH assistance **is sustainable and cost-effective, and incorporates environmental protection approach**

7,691 latrines constructed, benefitting >150,000 refugees

674 tube wells installed serving over 168,000 refugees

60,203 hygiene kits distributed in UNHCR's target areas in 2018

677 field staff and volunteers trained in WASH emergency response

## Challenges

-  Need for long-term planning for WASH interventions, which would require commitments of multi-year funding, greater involvement of development actors, and agreement of authorities
-  Sanitation management challenges for Kutupalong settlement due to large population size, congestion, topography, and unavailability of land
-  Lack of easily reachable groundwater in Teknaf area and brackish quality of water in river requires alternative approaches, including introduction of catchment reservoirs

## Way Forward

To address acute water needs in Nayapara, Teknaf, an upgrade of surface and groundwater resources serving both refugees and host communities is being planned with the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) and the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE). Piped treatment systems are to carry/treat waste as part of ongoing pilots in Kutupalong and Choukali, as the de-sludging capacity poses a significant public health risk.

## Working in Partnership

UNHCR co-chairs the **Strategic Executive Group** together with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. The Refugee Agency leads the protection response for all refugees, and heads a **Protection Working Group** in Cox's Bazar. UNHCR welcomes its valuable partnerships with a number of UN agencies and coordinates the delivery of its assistance with humanitarian partners through various working groups under the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG). UNHCR's main government counterpart is the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and its Cox's Bazar-based RRRC. UNHCR works closely with the Camp-in-Charge officials in different refugee settlements as well as with a range of international and national actors. It has a strong network of 28 partners, including:

**Action Aid Bangladesh** | **ACF** (Action Contre la Faim) | **ADRA** (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) | **BNWLA** (Bangladesh National Woman Lawyer's Association) | **Bangladesh Red Crescent Society** | **BRAC** (Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee) | **Caritas Bangladesh** | **Center for Natural Resource Studies** | **CODEC** (Community Development Centre) | **COAST** (Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust) | **Danish Refugee Council** | **FH Association** (Food for the Hungry) | **GK** (Gonoshasthaya Kendra) | **IRC** (International Rescue Committee) | **IUCN** (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) | **Handicap International** | **Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation** | **Light House** | **Oxfam GB** | **Relief International** | **Mukti Cox's Bazar** | **NGO Forum for Public Health** | **RTMI** (Research, Training and Management International) | **Save the Children International** | **Sesame Workshop** | **Solidarites International** | **Terre des hommes** Foundation | **TAI** (Technical Assistance Incorporated)

UNHCR would also like to acknowledge the crucial role played by the refugees in the response; with over 3,000 volunteers from the refugee community who are often the first responders on the ground. UNHCR and partners have trained and work with safety unit volunteers (SUVs) who support the emergency response, community outreach members who support raising awareness on important issues and in addressing protection risks, community health workers who assist with outreach for health and nutrition, and others who provide further critical support to the emergency response.

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