

Case Study: **Bangladesh**

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## INTER-COMMUNITY BRIDGING: AN INDICATOR OF SOCIAL COHESION IN ROHINGYA REFUGEE CAMP, COX'S BAZAR



### ■ Background

In August 2017, thousands of Rohingya flee their homes in Myanmar and arrived at Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. As of April 2022, there were 925,380 refugees accommodated in 34 camps around the towns of Ukhiya and Teknaf. Rohingya refugees and host communities in Cox's Bazar live with inadequate water and sanitation facilities resulting in adverse health impacts. Besides this, such huge influxes of refugees accelerated the depletion of water resources in the area. Cox's Bazar is already a geographically challenging area to explore groundwater or other sources of water.

Globally, studies have demonstrated that a massive refugee influx has a huge impact on the water resources<sup>1</sup> and this has been witnessed in Cox's Bazar as well. The sudden rise in water demand in Ukhiya union has adversely affected water security for both refugees and host communities. Approximately 15 million litres of groundwater are being drawn each day, putting the camp and surrounding area under threat of water scarcity in the future.<sup>2</sup>

Climate trends significantly impact water source availability in camp areas as water source dries up in the summer. A study<sup>3</sup> shows that the water source significantly decreases from January to March, as the soil is

<sup>1</sup> Water security challenges in Rohingya refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, Sustainability 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis, 2018

<sup>3</sup> Water security challenges in Cox's Bazar

much drier in this period. There is more evapotranspiration during May, which leads to loss of available water. Water availability is sufficient during July and onwards due to precipitation. This fluctuation in water availability affects the water supply to refugees and the host community.

Due to limited water availability in the area, the quality of living is compromised. Refugees and the host communities face this problem as both communities share the same water source. This increases the chance of inter-community conflict. Exclusion from water supply services may give rise to violence as well.

Around 70 per cent of shallow tube wells and dug wells were already drying and experienced a lowered water table as the area has limited surface water. Refugee camp number 22 shares surface water with the host community which not only threatens water security but food security as well. There are many non-functional hand pumps in the camps as the water table has gone down and re-adjusting/reinstalling pipes will be expensive.

Refugee camps are divided into blocks and sub-blocks. Cox's Bazar UNICEF works in eight camps, serving 256,182 refugees (as of the end of April 2022). Besides this, UNICEF is supporting the host community of respective camps.

This case study aims to explore UNICEF implementing partners' strategy to prevent inter-community conflict and maintain social cohesion. Such strategies may be useful in preventing inter-community conflict that may arise while sharing the same resources and may help in strengthening social bonding.

### ■ Strategy and implementation

UNICEF's Global Strategy (2022-2025) recognizes access to water and sanitation are not only rights in themselves but also contribute to other sectors such as health, nutrition, education, etc. The Strategy points out to "do no harm" and ensures that interventions must be conflict-sensitive and non-discriminatory. The Global Strategy (2022-2025) states that UNICEF will design and implement conflict-sensitive programmes that contribute to social cohesion and peace – a unique and valuable role that WASH programmes can play in addressing the root cause of conflict. Additionally, UNICEF has proposed a Framework for WASH Sector Resilience in Fragile and Conflict-affected Contexts, designed to prevent and reduce disaster while achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG 6.

In Camp 22, UNICEF supported the installation of a surface water treatment plant to meet the water demand of refugee camp number 22. The source is just outside the camp in the host community's territory. The same source is used and shared by the host community and refugees for agriculture and drinking purposes respectively.

UNICEF installed a water treatment plant through OXFAM and local implementing partners. The treated water is supplied throughout the camp and a few tap points are provided to the host community. The project included building and operating a programme.

## ■ Progress and results

1. UNICEF through OXFAM organized a community consultation meeting with host community people in presence of a government representative (i.e., Camp in Charge, Union chairman and other community leaders). This ensured meaningful community participation in decision-making. The government authority and host community leaders jointly agreed to tap surface water and supply it as needed. It was agreed that host community members should get a share of treated water and employment opportunities during the construction and operation phase of the plant. UNICEF and OXFAM started the emergency response programme in Camp 22 in October 2017.
2. Initially, UNICEF and OXFAM started supplying safe drinking water through four tap stands. To meet the survival requirements during emergencies, water trucking was the suitable option to supply water. It then tapped water from two locations through Roikhong and Mirjachara canal which has one and two dams respectively. Water from these three dams is channeled to Surface Water Treatment Plant (SWAT) on a routine basis. Roikhong channel is the primary source for the host community and the remaining two as secondary as those are situated in the forest area. It installed a high-tech SWAT which consists of the pumping station, Lamella filtration, settling tanks, filtration, chlorine dosing, reservoir tanks, distribution tanks and distribution system/network. This treatment plant resulted in improved quality of drinking water. The treatment plant supplies water to 22,746 refugees and host community people. 101 tap stands are set for the camp area whereas 5 tap stands are allocated for the adjacent host community. The total water supply capacity is 460,000 to 480,000 liters per day. This includes water supply twice a day and each flow tap serve less than 70 persons and is within 100 meters' distance from the user's residence. The total pipe network within the camp is 15 KM.
3. UNICEF and OXFAM avoided possible inter-community conflict that could have occurred (due to sharing the same water source) by ensuring sharing of safe drinking water and job opportunities to host community people.

## ■ Lessons learned and way forward

- Stakeholders' involvement is important in the decision-making process
- Ensuring the "Leave No One Left Behind" strategy
- Inclusion in services or benefit-sharing
- Ensuring access to services by all community members
- Conduct a conflict sensitivity assessment and stakeholder mapping
- Explore conflict triggers and correlate them with water resource sharing.

## ■ Way forward and potential application

UNICEF is now supporting the operation and maintenance of the water treatment plant through its implementing partner under a new project to continue its support to provide safe water to the refugee and host communities. UNICEF will continue its support for the smooth operation of the water treatment plant. The Rohingya refugee camps in Ukhiya still face water shortages during the dry season and may require water trucking. However, the reservoir system developed under this water treatment plant can support the water supply during the hardship. Preventing and ending conflicts is linked with inclusive approaches.

Likewise, constantly navigating the political situation and responding accordingly can be applied to other similar contexts.

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Related links:

- [Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Assessment: Dry Season Follow-up.](#)
- [Sustainability 2020. Drinking Water Security Challenges in Rohingya Refugee Camps of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.](#)
- [UNICEF, Conflict Sensitivity and Peacebuilding in UNICEF, Technical Note.](#)

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