



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

Executive Committee Summary

Country: Bangladesh

Planning Year: 2005

2005 COUNTRY OPERATION PLAN: BANGLADESH

Executive Committee Summary

(a) Context and Beneficiary Population(s)

Rationale

UNHCR's operation in Cox's Bazar District, Bangladesh, started in 1993 as a result of a massive influx between 1991 and 1992 of some 250,000 refugees who fled the Northern Rakhine State of Myanmar due to political and social reasons. While the majority of them, i.e. 236,000 refugees, have returned since then, a caseload of 20,000 still remain in two camps in Bangladesh. UNHCR's involvement and presence is to provide protection and assistance to these refugees while seeking durable solutions. The search for durable solutions, with repatriation as the preferred option, has been pursued vigorously in 2002 and 2003. In 2003, 3,231 refugees returned to Myanmar, the highest return rate in one year since 1998. However, only 200 refugees have returned by mid-2004.

UNHCR has presented a proposal to the Government of Bangladesh for a self-reliance programme for the refugees pending their return. UNHCR's programme aims to empower the refugees by affording them an opportunity to be independent of external assistance upon their return.

In urban areas, there are 153 refugees who are mainly coming from the Northern Rakhine State of Myanmar, Iran and Somalia. They are found in Dhaka and other major cities. UNHCR will continue to provide protection as well as assistance in the form of monthly allowances and self-reliance grants to these groups and will continue to seek durable solutions for them.

Security Situation

The overall security situation in most parts of the country has deteriorated. There has been an increase of violence, reports of extortion and theft, clashes of armed gangs with security personnel and seizures of caches of weapons. This has prompted some embassies to look into possibilities of weapon - smuggling operations in the region. The country also witnessed a growing number of politically motivated crimes in 2004. The number of political killings in the regional cities and towns is growing. The numbers of hartals (strikes) and mass demonstrations organised by various political parties has also increased.

Bangladesh has no security phase except the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Area, which is categorised as Phase I. Security clearance is required to enter into this area. Security in the refugee camps as well as throughout the area of Cox's Bazar has been generally calm, although sporadic incidents of violence and political demonstrations were reported. However, there were law and order problems in one of the two camps in May and June 2004 where refugees refused to collect their food because of arbitrary arrests and refugees' leadership problems. The Government of Bangladesh has the responsibility of ensuring law and order. UNHCR monitors the situation and advises the government accordingly. Orientation and information sessions will be organised for local law enforcement bodies to improve the security management of the camps.

Protection Issues

UNHCR will continue to provide international protection to the refugees, will monitor repatriation and ensure the voluntary nature of the process. UNHCR will also focus on the respect of human rights of refugees. This will take the form of advocacy against physical harassment inclusive of gender-based violence, arbitrary arrest and detention, incarceration on inadequate grounds and forced repatriation. The modality for addressing these issues will be through monitoring of security situation, timely and appropriate interventions with the authorities, providing legal representations and raising awareness.

Despite the fact that Bangladesh has been host to thousands of refugees, it has not yet developed any national normative and administrative legal framework to provide protection to asylum-seekers and refugees. It is also not a signatory to either the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol. This has resulted in a situation where UNHCR has to fill the gap to provide access of individual asylum-seekers to a standard asylum procedure and to provide them with international protection.

UNHCR's Role

UNHCR's primary function of providing and ensuring protection to camp and urban refugees will be strengthened. Another role in the area of protection will be promotion work. UNHCR will continue to encourage the Government of Bangladesh to establish a national legal framework in dealing with asylum-seekers and refugees as well as accession to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. This role will be played through further dialogue with legislators, policy makers and key government ministries and by expanding the number of lawyers, legislators and officials with knowledge of refugee law. These activities could convince lawmakers of the need for adopting laws and international legal instruments on refugees.

UNHCR will play a co-ordinating role for the smooth delivery of programmes that will improve the life of the refugees. UNHCR will work in very close collaboration with sister UN agencies and other local and international NGOs. UN agencies have been encouraged to include the refugee caseload in their planning and assistance activities in the concerned region in 2005 and beyond. UNHCR will monitor all activities to be undertaken by implementing partners, and will update donors regularly.

Overview of each beneficiary population

Refugees from the Northern Rakhine State of Myanmar

UNHCR's statistics at end December 2003 shows that there were 19,647 refugees in two camps in Cox's Bazar. At the end of August 2004 the figure had grown to nearly 20,000. They are the residual caseload from the 250,000 refugees who crossed over to Bangladesh in 1991-1992. Among the current population, 50% are women and 60% are under the age of eighteen. Their language and culture are similar to those of the local population living in the Cox's Bazar area. Prior to their flight to Bangladesh, the majority of them worked as farmers and some as day labourers. Most of them belong to a Muslim minority ethnic group while a few families are Hindus. Many are uneducated with a literacy rate of around 10%. Of the total number of families, approximately 4.5% are female-headed households. They are

considered as a particularly vulnerable group in a society where the role of women is traditionally restricted.

Urban Refugees/Promotional Activities

The majority of the 153 urban refugees are from Myanmar, others are from Iran and Somalia. Their presence is tolerated by the Government of Bangladesh and they benefit from assistance provided by UNHCR. UNHCR assists the non-vulnerable cases to become self-sufficient by providing funds for income generation.

Policy Issues

The UNHCR team will focus on addressing additional needs for vulnerable groups which includes women and children, and women-headed households. The protection activities will incorporate Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) issues as well as trafficking of women and children. Specific assistance projects will be implemented for these categories. Sectors such as education, health and community services will be supported through a concerted effort by NGOs and UN agencies.

Environmental programs will be encouraged and supported to mitigate ecological damage. A reforestation and soil conservation project will be implemented for environment regeneration benefiting not only refugees but also the local communities.

Efforts will be made to ensure that refugees are not seen as a burden and are accepted by the communities. Co-ordination with administrative and law enforcement authorities will be enhanced through regular contacts and briefings on refugee issues, and the role of UNHCR.

Linkages to other countries

UNHCR Bangladesh will maintain its close link with UNHCR Myanmar where the process of reintegration of the repatriated refugees is ongoing. UNHCR will closely monitor the repatriation process. The repatriation will be closely co-ordinated with UNHCR colleagues in Maungdaw. Both sides will continue to monitor the border areas and share information on any unusual movements of people. Monthly or on an as needed basis, meetings will be held between the two field offices while country to country contacts at the capital level will be maintained.

Role of NGOs and UN Agencies

UN Agencies are generally supportive of UNHCR's activities. WFP will continue to provide food to the refugees until durable solutions are found. Extensive discussions will continue to be held with all agencies.

Local NGOs with expertise will be identified to run projects in some of the relevant sectors. UNHCR will co-operate and give support to such NGOs. Refugee Counselling Services Unit (RCSU), UNHCR's current partner, will continue to ensure that urban refugees are given opportunities and resources to undertake self-reliance projects.

(b) Selected Programme Goals and Objectives

Name of Beneficiary Population/Theme: Refugees from the Northern Rakhine State of Myanmar	
Main Goal(s): Provide protection and assistance pending repatriation to Myanmar.	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced protection is provided to refugees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refugees' basic rights recognised and respected.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refugees are receiving skill trainings pending their return. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upon their return, refugees are able to do some income generation activities to sustain themselves and improve their lives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absorption capacity of the local communities is enhanced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refugees accepted in the local communities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNHCR's activities are supported. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNHCR programme supported by all stakeholders and accepted by local community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNHCR encourages other agencies to include refugees in their activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refugees included as part of other agencies' operations.

Name of Beneficiary Population/Theme: Urban Refugees	
Main Goal(s): Ensure international protection for refugees and advocate for adopting legal framework on refugee protection.	
Principal objectives	Related outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide access to asylum seekers to RSD procedures and ensure refugees' international protection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RSD conducted by UNHCR. Refugees recognised and assisted.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate durable solutions for refugees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refugees repatriated/resettled. Refugees become self-supporting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage the Government of Bangladesh to consider adoption of a national legal framework for asylum-seekers, refugees and to accede to relevant international legal instruments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government officials and/or institutions initiated in adopting national refugee legislation and acceding to the Refugee Convention.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and expand a pool of human resources that deal with the legal aspects of refugee issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant government officials, people and groups in the civil society and media trained on refugee law.