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UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies in Cox’s Bazar are working on sustainable solutions to mitigate the impacts of environmental degradation for refugees and the host communities and therefore to minimize protection risks. The immediate goals are to stop deforestation and restore wildlife habitat, as well as improve access to safe water and cleaner fuel in refugee settlements. The massive influx of refugees in August 2017 has put an enormous strain on the environment in Cox’s Bazar district that hosts the majority of the Rohingya refugee population. Since over 725,000 refugee women, men, girls and boys struggled to find shelter and secure fuel, many trees have been cut and used as materials to build makeshift structures and cooking fuel.

The impacts are visible – hills and lands were denuded of vegetation that exposes the refugee settlements to risks of landslides and soil erosion; wildlife areas were encroached on; and groundwater has been exploited for basic survival.

UNHCR i) distributes LPG and cooking sets to both refugees and host families as an eco-friendly alternative cooking fuel with **private sector partners**; ii) plans trees with **BRAC** to help regenerate vegetation, stabilise land and control erosion in refugee settlements; iii) mitigates human-elephant conflict in collaboration with **International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**; iv) installs street lights; and v) constructs water supply systems within the settlements that will benefit both refugee and host communities.

Progress

The following are the major progresses made by UNHCR and its partners, with the active participation of refugees in Cox’s Bazar, in the area of energy and environmental protection:

45 Elephant Rescue Teams (ERT) comprising refugees volunteers are functional to manage human-elephant conflicts

77 elephant watchtowers set up in refugee settlements

5,798 families received LPG and stoves

1,629 street lights installed in refugee and local community areas

18,195 tree saplings planted

Challenges going forward



Limited space for planting due to congestion within the refugee settlements



Expanding the settlement areas has created challenges for wild Asian elephants cutting off a vital migration corridor



Limited facilities at present to manage and treat waste (e.g. faecal and others)

By end of 2018, approx. **60,000 families** will receive LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) and cooking kits: cheaper and more efficient and cleaner source of energy

UNHCR is working to make the environment better by:

- 1 **Reducing the environmental impact** of the refugee emergency through environmental restoration, biodiversity conservation, and awareness raising among the community including students
- 2 **Increasing safe and alternative energy sources**
- 3 **Increasing engagement** of refugee and host communities, using a gender lens

Way Forward

UNHCR and partners will expand the LPG distribution for up to 50-60,000 families both in the refugee and host communities by the end of 2018. The switch to a cleaner form of energy will bring positive impacts, such as 1) improvement of air quality in the settlements and decreased household fumes harmful for health, especially for women and children; 2) reduction of tree cutting activities; 3) enabling replanting programs to thrive; 4) enhancement of protection of refugees who would otherwise travel to isolated areas for wood collection, putting them at risk of gender-based violence and exploitation; and 5) job creation for the host community. Further investment will be made in harnessing solar energy for water networks in Kutupalong refugee settlement. Additional solar street lights are also planned to be installed by the end of the year. A multi-year reforestation plan with the Bangladesh Forest Department and other partners will be pursued.

Working in Partnership

UNHCR co-chairs the **Strategic Executive Group** together with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. The Refugee Agency leads on the protection response for all refugees, and heads a **Protection Working Group** in Cox's Bazar. UNHCR is member and rotating chair of the **Technical Working Group on LPG** in Cox's Bazar with IOM, whose role is to ensure compliance with the safety and other technical aspects of the LPG and cooking stoves distribution programme benefiting refugees and Bangladeshi communities. UNHCR welcomes its valuable partnership with a number of UN agencies and coordinates the delivery of its assistance with humanitarian partners through a number of 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 Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC). UNHCR staff work 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:

ACF (Action Contre la Faim) | **ACTED** (Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development) | **ADRA** (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) | **BDRCS** (Bangladesh Red Crescent Society) | **BNWLA** (Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association) | **BRAC** (Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee) | **CARITAS BANGLADESH** | **CODEC** (Community Development Centre) | **CSI** (Center for Social Integrity) | **DRC** (Danish Refugee Council) | **FH** (Food For the Hungry) | **GK** (Gonoshasthaya Kendra) | **HELVETAS** Swiss Intercooperation | **HI** (Handicap International) | **IUCN** (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) | **IRC** (International Rescue Committee) | **MTI** (Medical Teams International) | **NGOF** (NGO Forum) | **OXFAM** | **PIN** (People in Need) | **PUI** (Première Urgence Internationale) | **REACH** | **RI** (Relief International) | **RTMI** (Research Training and Management International) | **SCI** (Save the Children) | **SI** (Solidarités International) | **TAI** (Technical Assistance Incorporated) | **TDH** (Terre Des Hommes Foundation)

UNHCR would also like to acknowledge the crucial role played by the refugees in the response; with over 1,000 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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