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The influx of refugees to Cox's Bazar from Myanmar in 2017-18 put a large strain on local environment. Over 730,000 refugees struggled to build emergency shelters and used trees for makeshift structures and cooking fuel. UNHCR has worked with the authorities and other humanitarian agencies in Cox's Bazar on sustainable and safe solutions to mitigate the impact of the newly-established presence of Rohingya refugees on the environment.

To restore wildlife habitats and stop deforestation, 'greening' activities in refugee settlements and provision of LPG fuel have started. Those activities reduce the need for refugees to cut and collect forest wood and create employment for the host community. UNHCR works with **BRAC** on tree planting project, the **International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** on human-elephant mitigation efforts and **private sector partners** for the LPG distribution. UNHCR also renovated five offices of the Bangladesh Forest Department in Ukhiya and Teknaf to help strengthen its operational capacity. Furthermore, solar street lights are installed in both refugee settlements and Bangladeshi community areas to ensure safety at night.

Progress

Inter-agency collaboration is underway for distribution of LPG and cooking sets to both refugees and host families as an eco-friendly alternative cooking fuel. The switch to a cleaner form of energy helps improve air quality and reduce harmful health effects from cooking inside shelters. The reduced need to cut forest mitigates physical risks to women and children they were exposed to during firewood collection. UNHCR and partners are also planting trees to help regenerate vegetation, control soil erosion, and reduce landslide risks. UNHCR and IUCN have mitigated human-elephant conflicts by setting up watchtowers with trained teams who work with refugee communities to lead elephants safely away from the refugee settlements. IUCN, with UNHCR's support, is also exploring elephant conservation measures.

The following are some highlights of the progress made with refugees' active participation:

<p>37,583 families received LPG and stoves with 17,023 families already refilling</p>	<p>2,381 street lights installed in refugee and local community areas by UNHCR's partners</p>	<p>1,155,880 tree saplings planted, covering about 40 hectares of land</p>	<p>95 elephant watchtowers set up in refugee settlements, preventing 35 events of elephant intrusion</p>	<p>45 Elephant Rescue Teams of refugee volunteers formed to manage human-elephant conflicts</p>
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35,000 households received LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas) and cooking kits by end of 2018, providing cost-effective, safer, more efficient and cleaner source of energy

UNHCR is working to create a better environment by:

- 1 Reducing the environmental impact** of refugee situation through restoration and promoting awareness among refugees
- 2 Increasing the use of safe and alternative energy sources** in both refugee and Bangladeshi communities
- 3 Improving protection** in refugee settlements through **solar street lights installation** and other environment-friendly energy initiatives

Challenges

-  Additional land needed for plant nurseries to increase supply of seeds and plants
-  Refugee settlement cuts through a vital migration corridor of wild Asian elephants
-  Limited facilities to manage and treat waste, including human and household waste, with risk of water supply contamination

Way Forward

UNHCR and partners have been expanding the distribution of clean cooking fuel and cooking stoves and reached more than 35,000 families by the end of 2018. UNHCR will support up to 120,000 families in 2019. Additional solar street lights are also planned to be installed in settlements and host communities. Stream restoration through ecosystem-based approach is being planned to create healthy living environment and peaceful coexistence between the refugee and Bangladeshi communities. UNHCR is providing technical expertise for developing a multi-year reforestation plan with the Bangladesh Forest Department and other partners that is needed at the national level, as well as camp management protocol in Cox's Bazar refugee settlements which incorporates environmental consideration.

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 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 and FAO are co-chairing the **Energy and Environment Technical Working Group** and facilitating environmentally-sensitive policy and guideline development, in close collaboration with relevant government counterparts. 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:

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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