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The arrival of refugees to Cox's Bazar from Myanmar put a large strain on the local environment. During the initial phase of the emergency, hundreds of thousands of refugees struggled to build emergency shelters with the materials they could find, and used firewood from forest areas for cooking. This led to forest areas being cleared and trees cut extensively. UNHCR has been working with the authorities and other humanitarian agencies in Cox's Bazar on sustainable and safe solutions for refugees helping to mitigate the impact on the environment.

Progress

Efforts to stop deforestation and restore wildlife habitats are progressing with the ongoing provision of LPG fuel for cooking which reduces the need for refugees to cut and collect forest wood, and helps conserve the environment and wildlife habitats. Inter-agency collaboration is underway for the distribution of LPG and cooking sets to both refugee and host community families as an eco-friendly cooking solution, aiming to cover all refugee families. The switch will improve air quality and reduce the harmful health effects associated with fumes from cooking with wood inside shelters. It also mitigates some of the physical risks posed to children and women as the main collectors of firewood in isolated forest areas. The introduction of LPG is also creating employment for the host community as it requires supporting infrastructure such as refilling stations. UNHCR and partners are simultaneously planting trees to help regenerate vegetation, control soil erosion, and reduce landslide risks. Efforts were made by UNHCR with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) also to mitigate human-elephant conflict by having watchtowers and trained teams organised to lead elephants safely away from the camps and protect human life. Solar street lights continue to be installed in the settlements and in nearby Bangladesh host communities for their convenience at night and additional security.

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

50 Elephant Response Teams (ERT) composed of refugee volunteers and host community formed to manage human-elephant conflicts

95 elephant watchtowers setup in settlements greatly reducing the risk of incursions to living areas and serious incidents

79,506 households received new LPG sets along with stoves and **197,793** refills

4,269 street lights installed in refugee and local community areas

43.5 h.a. planted with mixed vegetation in refugee settlements

67,807 households reached with LPG Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) and cooking kits providing cheaper, safer, and a more efficient and cleaner source of energy

UNHCR is working to create a better environment by:

- 1 Reducing the environmental impact** of hosting refugees through environmental protection efforts, restoration, promoting conservation and awareness among refugees
- 2 Increasing the use of safe and alternative energy sources** in both refugee and host communities
- 3 Improving protection and wellbeing** in refugee settlements through solar street lights installations and other environment-friendly energy initiatives

Among the challenges

-  Additional land needed for nurseries to develop resources (e.g. trees or vetiver grass) to restore the environment, and for use for natural prevention of soil erosion.
-  Further conservation measures needed to address the situation of wild Asian elephants as the refugee settlements are on a vital migration corridor they once used.
-  Limited facilities at present to manage and treat waste, including human and household waste, with risk of contamination for water supply and aquatic biodiversity of stream water.

Way Forward

UNHCR and partners are expanding beyond the distribution of clean cooking fuel and cooking stoves and looking at how pressure cookers can be piloted to eventually ensure greater fuel efficiency. All refugee families and 20,000 host community families will receive LPG sets by the end of 2019. Partnering with EDF, ICC and local universities and enterprise, further efforts will be made to harness solar energy. Several solar mini-grids will be developed inside the settlements to facilitate the operation of health care facilities, lighting for safety and security (e.g. additional street lights), as well as other requirements. A multi-year reforestation plan with the Bangladesh Forest Department and other partners is in progress. Environment sensitive management protocols, integrating greening, soil stabilization, e-waste management procedures, watershed management principles, and climate change risk consideration for disaster risk deduction in compliance with applicable environmental regulations in Bangladesh are being worked on.

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'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) | 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 | World Vision | Solidarites International | Terre des Hommes | TAI (Technical Assistance Incorporated) | NRC (Norwegian Refugee Council) UNHCR would also like to acknowledge the crucial role played by the refugees in the response. **Over 3,000 volunteers from the refugee community** are working side by side with humanitarian agencies.

Donor country contributions to UNHCR Bangladesh (2018/2019)

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