

# BANGLADESH

## Area-Based Approaches to Foster Community in Refugee Camps





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## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

**Country:** Bangladesh

**Location:** Zone BB, Kutapalong Camp, Cox's Bazaar

**Conflict:** Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh

**Project Duration:** 3 months

**Target Population:** 493 residents of Majhi 17 and 20, Zone BB

**Cost per household (USD):** \$484

**Donor:** UNHCR

**Partner:** Caritas Bangladesh



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## What did CRS and Partners do?

A pilot area-based project in the BB site in the Rohingya camp at Cox's Bazaar sought to improve living conditions for refugee families and communities through a shelter and community site improvement project. The CRS/Caritas BB project successfully supported 182 families with shelter improvements, along with significant improvements to water, sanitation, access routes, and disaster resilience. At the same time, the project sought to build community cohesion through its program model that was later promoted to other sector partners by the shelter cluster.

### Background

Between August and December 2018, escalating tension and violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State forced an estimated 688,000 Rohingya from their homes. They have been the victims of violence including sexual assault, burning of villages creating mass displacement. Their needs for the most basic human essentials were tremendous and include shelter, food, clean water, living supplies, protection and child safety. Most of the influx happened near the town of Cox's Bazaar, in the South of Bangladesh, joining the resident host population and the existing Kutapalong camp where around 300,000 Rohingya had settled in previous years. Due to security issues, return to their birth land is unlikely for some time, and so their future is very uncertain.

### Problem Statement, including core questions

The Kutapalong camp has been extended and subdivided into zones and sub-zones, under the leadership of a "Majhi" (community leader), who may represent between 50 and 200 households. Due to the conflict and displacement, there are many women and child headed households as well as other types of vulnerability, related to age, gender, and disability.

The landscape is made up of a series of knolls and valleys, which present challenges that limit the available space. They also have inherent hazards that are exacerbated during the monsoon and cyclone season. Few level areas exist, so terracing of the slopes was required to create the plots for shelters to be constructed, increasing the risk of landslide. The loss of

vegetation and the density of shelters have also reduced the ground's ability to soak up rainwater, which has increased the likelihood and severity of flash flooding.

In addition, the Rohingya come from a rural context, whereas the camp resembles a city in terms of density of people. The lack of space is challenging for both physical and psychological reasons, compounded further by the risks of monsoon and cyclone, the lack of incomes and livelihoods, trauma from the past, and uncertainty about the future.

Many people who self-settled did so with little or no external support, and homes were constructed using locally sourced timber, bamboo and low-quality plastic sheeting. The community had no time or resources to plan or prepare the site.

The Shelter Sector designed an Upgrade Shelter Kit (USK) that included humanitarian grade tarpaulin, bamboo, materials for binding and fixing, and tools. It was intended that this kit be provided to targeted groups to supplement the materials provided by households themselves. In addition, it was the recommendation of the Sector that technical support be available for vulnerable households to construct their shelters.



The community working on installing drainage and retaining walls.

Photo credit: Jamie Richardson / CRS

## Project Process

### Area based approach

Having selected the site as a typical example of a self-settled community in need of shelter upgrading and site improvement, the community was consulted to see if they would be willing to take part in the project. This was presented as a partnership between the community and Caritas Bangladesh, and intended to build upon the existing capacity of the community so that it was central to the decision-making process and responsible for implementation of the work. After meetings with the community there was agreement to work together.

Caritas Bangladesh (with technical support from CRS) began activities in an area of the camp referred to as 'BB' zone by doing a household and community needs assessment to facilitate a process of informed decision making and planning. This included:

- Household survey, including demographics and shelter characteristics and conditions.
- Physical mapping of the site using drone imagery (produced by IOM) and community verification.
- Hazard mapping by overlaying risk assessments for flooding, landslide produced from the drone topographical survey, and on the ground assessment by the community.

Following these data collection activities, Caritas Bangladesh worked with the residents of the zone to:

- Analyze the data and plan the site accounting for the above elements.
- Plan activities and resourcing for shelter upgrades and site improvements.
- Implement site improvements—including construction of drainage, steps, retaining walls, and street lights—with community in partnership, who supplied labor.
- Demonstrate safe shelter construction techniques and provide technical assistance to families building their homes.
- Establish Maintenance and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) committees.

### Technical Assistance

Technical support was provided to compliment the USK and the Cluster developed information on how to construct shelters that can better withstand wind loads, including foundations, wall, roof, and connection details.

As the Rohingya people are mainly from rural areas, they have practical skills in construction and are familiar with using bamboo. This capacity and the ability and willingness to work proved to be an essential strength to meeting their shelter needs. Caritas engineers stayed with the community throughout the construction to provide technical support and advice. Skilled laborers from the community were paid to construct shelters for families who could not build for themselves.

### DRR

To evaluate the environmental risks perceived by the communities, Caritas Bangladesh organized focus groups to identify vulnerabilities related to specific types of disasters (landslides, flooding, cyclone, fire, and sanitation issues), and to identify appropriate preparedness and response activities. This included deciding

upon evacuation routes and meeting points, and to find out where the community wanted to add more latrines, bathing spaces and water points to improve sanitation.

Notably, mosques were often seen as a place of refuge but, since women cannot enter the mosques, the Child Friendly Space (CFS) building was considered suitable for women. However, the CFS in the pilot site is situated in an area that is at risk of flooding. Furthermore, both mosques and the CFS will also not be able to withstand cyclone strength winds. The community needed to consider alternatives. One suggestion was to organize in small household clusters, and to reinforce one shelter as a cyclone shelter. DRR for cyclone recommendations also included strengthening of the shelters, and preserving assets and belongings if a cyclone is imminent.

The project did not include the implementation of the DRR plans beyond improvements to shelters and site, but DRR was included in discussions around future activities

### Shelter Design and Construction

Each household received an Upgrade Shelter Kit (USK) with two lengths of the thick Borak bamboo. During a focus group discussion on safer building, the community complained that there was insufficient material to make an improved shelter. It was decided that the construction of a demonstration shelter would help to illustrate and define the minimum quantities of materials needed, while also showing techniques for improving the shelter.

The demonstration shelter was constructed following the main guidelines provided by the Shelter Cluster and other improvements, which included:

- Plot preparation, including retaining walls or drainage.
- A raised plinth to avoid surface water entering the dwelling during heavy rains.
- Ground connections fitted to vertical posts to prevent uplift.
- Strong walls, roof connections and diagonal bracing for cyclone resistance.
- Bamboo mesh to fix the tarpaulin wall and roof covering.
- Bamboo mesh at the eaves to provide ventilation.
- Lock and chain for doors for security and privacy.

Skilled laborers from the community constructed the demonstration shelter with technical support from Caritas engineers. This allowed others to visit and discuss the construction, and learn about the different techniques being used.

After construction of the demonstration shelter, it was found that ideally 8 Borak (larger 3"-4" / 75mm-100mm diameter bamboo members) were needed for construction. This information was fed back to UNHCR and the Shelter Cluster who agreed to increase the materials in the USK to 4 pieces of Borak, based on the assumption that most households could reuse materials from their old shelters. Caritas engineers determined that the area had insufficient usable materials and decided to distribute an additional 4 Borak per household. This enabled all families to have enough materials to construct to the recommended standards.





Images from the same street in November 2017 (left) and February 2018 (right) showing the extent of the improvements.  
Photo credit: Jamie Richardson (left), Christopher M. Reichert (right) / CRS

## Site Improvements

To assist with site improvements, the Camp Management cluster developed a guide on how to make sites safer, and how to improve access. These technical guidelines were used throughout the project. The following main elements of site improvement have been used to form the acronym DASH (UNHCR):

- Drainage - surface water management to prevent flooding, erosion and landslide.
- Access - steps, paths, handrails, bridges, street lighting.
- Stabilization - retaining walls and structures.
- Haven - creating safe places to go in the event of an emergency.

Caritas engineers and community members worked together to experiment with techniques to improve different aspects of the camp's environment, including:

- Building of retaining walls made of sandbags and bamboo, 'stitched' back using rope and pegs—a technique used in WW1 trench construction.
- Creation of steps made from bamboo and earth backfilled.
- Construction of drainage channels to remove rain water and water from washing and other domestic activities. The bamboo-lined channels were constructed with cement lining to the base.
- Installation of new boreholes, pumps and pit latrines for water and sanitation.
- Installation of 22, 20W LED, solar street lights.
- Introduction of simple grow bags by Caritas agricultural specialists, who also provided plants and seeds so that families can grow vegetables.

## Participant Selection

Caritas Bangladesh used an area-based approach, meaning that all residents of the zone selected for this pilot project benefited from the site improvements and shelter construction assistance. The boundaries of the area were defined by geographic features and

community membership. This was complemented with targeted assistance for families identified as including Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVI).

## Learnings & Recommendations

The community / area-based approach had the effect of bringing together people who were living side-by-side but had no prior connection with one another. Through the process of assessment, planning, and implementation, new collaborations were formed, allowing the residents of BB to become a community. This was an important development that would better equip the community to live together and cope with future challenges. As the Rohingya are unlikely to return to their homes soon, it is important that communities are equipped in this way.

The program built and relied upon the skill and capacities of community. Respecting and partnering with the community in developing designs and solutions is essential to motivating and empowering the community. Having the community be part of any experimentation was identified in CRS 'Extending Impact' study as an important part of the learning process.

Caritas Bangladesh provided social and technical support and accompaniment, which directly and immediately helped the community, and allowed vulnerable families to receive additional support. It also allowed for quality standards to be promoted and replicated by the entire community. This support is essential for quality programming.

## Where can I find out more?

[Full report](#)

## Acknowledgements

Jamie Richardson, CRS Technical Advisor  
Seki Hirano, CRS Senior Shelter and Settlements Technical Advisor  
Livia Mikulec, Researcher, CRS Evaluation  
Cover photo: Christopher M. Reichert / CRS