



OXFAM

ROHINGYA **CRISIS**

**FROM HUMANITARIAN
RESPONSE TO
SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS**

Rohingya Crisis

From Humanitarian Response to Sustainable Solutions

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EDITOR'S NOTE

On 27 August 2017, I stood at one of the entry points in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, and collected stories as thousands of Rohingya families crossed into Bangladesh. I saw a two-year-old girl crying alone on a muddy pathway. No one picked her up; everyone was carrying their own fear, exhaustion and loss. Then a host-community member and I lifted her, comforted her and helped connect her with a Rohingya family.

I never knew her name. Nine years later, she would be around eleven, perhaps growing up somewhere in the camps. Her journey captures what this crisis has become: an emergency that has lasted long enough for a generation to grow up inside it.

The response has changed since 2017, from immediate lifesaving assistance to complex systems of WASH, protection, health, education, livelihoods, disaster preparedness and community engagement. Yet those gains are now under pressure from declining funding, ageing infrastructure, evolving protection risks and continued uncertainty. The publication also reminds us that host communities, local actors and Rohingya volunteers are not peripheral to the response; they are central to its resilience and future.

As the crisis enters its tenth year, the question is no longer only how to respond, but how to sustain what saves lives while moving towards dignity, resilience and shared responsibility.

This publication brings together those realities, lessons and human stories with the urge for micro- and macro-level sustainable solutions.

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ROHINGYA CRISIS

FROM

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO

SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS



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FROM HUMANITARIAN SOLIDARITY TO A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION

Ms. Shama Obaed Islam

Honourable State Minister for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

As the Rohingya crisis approaches its tenth year, Bangladesh finds itself at an inflection point between an extraordinary record of humanitarian responsibility. For nearly a decade, we have demonstrated extraordinary humanitarian solidarity by providing shelter, protection and essential assistance to more than 1.2 million forcibly displaced Rohingyas. This responsibility has been shouldered despite Bangladesh's own developmental priorities, demographic pressures, limited land and resource constraints. Yet, a fundamental question can no longer be deferred: how do we move from managing a protracted humanitarian emergency to creating the conditions for a just, durable and sustainable solution?

The humanitarian response remains indispensable. Declining international funding, however, is placing increasing pressure on an already stretched system. The reduced requirements of the 2026 Joint Response Plan should not be interpreted as a reduction in humanitarian needs. Food assistance, healthcare, nutrition, education, WASH services, protection and other essential interventions remain lifelines for

the Rohingya population. Any significant funding gap could have serious humanitarian, socio-economic and security consequences, affecting not only the displaced population but also the host communities of Cox's Bazar.

Bangladesh has consistently emphasized that humanitarian assistance, while essential, cannot substitute for a political solution. The crisis originated in Myanmar and its sustainable resolution must ultimately be found there. The objective must therefore be to create conditions that enable the Rohingya to return to their homeland in Rakhine State safely, voluntarily and with dignity.

Achieving this objective requires credible progress on several fronts. The verification of those eligible for return must be expedited on the basis of agreed bilateral instruments and updated information, including children born in the camps and persons who have arrived from Rakhine since the 2017 influx. Accurate and comprehensive verification is an essential confidence-building measure and should remain insulated from political narratives or inaccurate statistics.

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At the same time, repatriation cannot be viewed merely as a logistical exercise. It requires addressing the underlying causes of displacement, ensuring security and rights, restoring confidence, and creating conditions in Rakhine State conducive to sustainable return. Stronger international engagement, accountability, conflict prevention and constructive diplomatic dialogue are therefore essential.

The international community must also recognize that responsibility-sharing means more than expressions of solidarity. It requires predictable financing, sustained diplomatic engagement and political action. Support for the host communities is equally important. The people of Cox's Bazar have carried an extraordinary burden, and investment in their resilience, livelihoods, public services and environmental sustainability is integral to the humanitarian response.

Bangladesh's humanitarian response has also been rooted in a long tradition of compassion

and responsibility. In 2017, when the latest influx began, the late Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia was the first among the political leaders who made a statement for the Rohingyas to be allowed refuge in Bangladesh on humanitarian grounds. Bangladesh also draws on earlier experiences: under the leadership of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman in 1978 and late Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in 1992, repatriation was successfully pursued. The circumstances today are considerably more complex. Nevertheless, the principle remains unchanged: And now, under the able leadership of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, Bangladesh will continue to pursue a dignified and sustainable return of the Rohingyas through both bilateral and multilateral engagement.

Ten years should not become twenty. The international community must act with renewed urgency to sustain humanitarian assistance today while creating the political, security and institutional conditions necessary for the Rohingya to return home safely, voluntarily and with dignity.



SUSTAINING HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT, STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE

Mohammad Saiful Islam

Secretary
Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief

As the Rohingya crisis enters its tenth year, Bangladesh faces a difficult dual responsibility: sustaining essential humanitarian support for a large displaced population while protecting the resilience, safety, and development prospects of the communities that have hosted them for nearly a decade.

From the outset, the Government of Bangladesh has led and coordinated the response. Through the Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), and in close collaboration with other ministries, district authorities, United Nations agencies, development partners, NGOs, and local actors, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) has helped sustain an extraordinarily complex humanitarian operation across Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char. Within the national response architecture, MoDMR plays a central role in emergency coordination, while the RRRC leads field-level management and oversight in Cox's Bazar.

Over the years, the response has evolved from immediate emergency relief into a more comprehensive system encompassing camp management; water, sanitation, and hygiene

(WASH); protection; health; education; disaster preparedness; livelihoods; and community engagement. Successive Joint Response Plans reflect this progression. While protection and life-saving assistance remain fundamental, host community well-being, sustainable repatriation, livelihood and skills development, localization, disaster risk management, and climate resilience have increasingly become integral to the response framework.

The tenth-year milestone should therefore become a moment of renewed international responsibility—not one of declining attention.

This progress, however, is now undersignificant pressure because of funding cuts. Underfunding must not be regarded merely as a budgetary concern. Reductions in water, sanitation, hygiene, shelter, health, food, nutrition, education, and critical protection services can rapidly create wider risks to public health, safety, and social stability. Similarly, inadequate support for host communities may deepen socioeconomic pressures

and weaken the resilience that has enabled Cox's Bazar to shoulder this responsibility for so long.

Moving forward, three parallel commitments are essential.

First, the international community must ensure predictable financing for essential humanitarian

services while recognizing Bangladesh's substantial contribution and the immense pressures borne by host communities. The systems painstakingly built over many years must not be allowed to deteriorate because of inadequate maintenance or neglected preventive investment.

Second, we must strengthen resilience and improve efficiency. Disaster risk reduction, climate-responsive infrastructure, localization, stronger government systems, effective local partnerships, and meaningful community participation can enhance sustainability and ensure better value for money. Investment in skills and capacities can also reduce vulnerability and help prepare the Rohingya population for their eventual return and reintegration.

Third, humanitarian action must remain connected to the search for a political solution. Bangladesh

has provided refuge and humanitarian space, but the root causes of the crisis lie in Myanmar. Safe, voluntary, dignified, and sustainable repatriation will be possible only when conditions in Rakhine State guarantee security, rights, and genuine opportunities for the Rohingya to rebuild their lives.

The tenth-year milestone should therefore become a moment of renewed international responsibility—not one of declining attention. Bangladesh will continue to fulfil its humanitarian and coordination responsibilities, but durable progress will depend on sustained, predictable, and genuinely shared international partnership.

Our task is clear: to protect lives today, strengthen resilience for tomorrow, and work collectively towards a future in which humanitarian assistance is no longer a substitute for a sustainable solution.





EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT: LESSONS FROM A DECADE IN COX'S BAZAR

Mohammed Mizanur Rahman
Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC)

The Rohingya response in Cox's Bazar has changed profoundly since August 2017. I had the opportunity to witness the most challenging phase of the influx while serving as Additional Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) from 2017 to 2020, and I returned as Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner in 2022. This experience has allowed me to observe the response through both its emergency and protracted phases.

In the early days, the priorities were immediate: saving lives, providing shelter, water, sanitation, food and basic protection, and establishing effective management of an unprecedented humanitarian emergency. Over time, the response has evolved into one of the world's largest and most complex refugee operations. Today, the camps depend on interconnected systems covering water and sanitation, health, education, shelter, roads and drainage, protection, disaster preparedness, food assistance, livelihoods and community engagement. The successive Joint Response Plans reflect this evolution from immediate life-saving assistance towards protection, resilience,

host-community support and preparation for sustainable solutions.

This progress has been possible through close cooperation among the Government of Bangladesh, the RRRC and Camp-in-Charge offices, district administration, UN agencies, international and national NGOs, donors, local organizations, law enforcement agencies, Rohingya volunteers, and host communities and their leaders. The RRRC continues to provide government leadership, coordination and oversight at the field level, ensuring that humanitarian assistance is delivered in an organized, accountable and effective manner.

The response has also generated important innovations. More durable water networks, large-scale faecal sludge treatment, solid-waste management, solar lighting, disaster-risk reduction and community-based approaches have strengthened the delivery and resilience of essential services. These efforts demonstrate how humanitarian assistance can be delivered with greater efficiency while safeguarding public health, the environment and human dignity.

The past nine years have demonstrated what strong coordination and collective commitment can achieve. The next phase will require the same spirit of cooperation in the face of constrained resources, growing humanitarian needs, disaster risks and the continuing political situation in Myanmar.



However, the response is now entering its tenth year under increasingly complex circumstances. The camps remain densely populated, infrastructure requires continuous maintenance and upgrading, protection needs are evolving, and instability across the border continues to create uncertainty. More than 150,000 Rohingya have arrived in Bangladesh since 2024, placing additional pressure on humanitarian services and resources. The camps are also located in an area highly exposed to cyclones, monsoon flooding, landslides and fires.

At the same time, declining humanitarian financing is placing increasing pressure on the delivery of essential services. While needs remain substantial, available resources have become more constrained. Sustaining adequate support for sanitation, health, nutrition, education, protection, shelter and livelihoods is therefore essential to maintaining stability and preserving the gains achieved over the past nine years.

Around half of the approximately 1.2 million Rohingya people in Bangladesh are children. Their future deserves particular attention. Education and skills development are essential not only for dignity during displacement but also for preparing individuals and communities for their eventual return. A well-educated and skilled Rohingya

generation today can contribute to a peaceful, self-reliant and sustainable future in their place of origin.

Sustainability in the humanitarian response should therefore mean protecting and maintaining the investments already made, improving efficiency, strengthening institutional capacity, and ensuring the responsible participation of communities in the delivery and maintenance of essential services. Rohingya volunteers already make valuable contributions to WASH, shelter, education, emergency preparedness, environmental rehabilitation and support to vulnerable people. Strengthening appropriate community participation, alongside government leadership and accountable coordination, can further improve the effectiveness of the response.

Host communities must remain an integral part of this effort. The people of Ukhiya and Teknaf responded generously during the 2017 influx and have continued to accommodate the additional pressures associated with the refugee presence. Continued support for host-community livelihoods, public services, infrastructure and environmental resilience is therefore essential. The Government of Bangladesh remains committed to ensuring that humanitarian interventions take into account the

legitimate needs and interests of both the Rohingya population and the host communities.

The ultimate objective of Bangladesh's policy remains clear: early, voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of the Rohingya to Myanmar. Humanitarian assistance in Bangladesh is intended to protect lives and preserve dignity until conditions conducive to return are established. Creating those conditions requires sustained international diplomatic engagement, constructive dialogue and concerted efforts to address the root causes of displacement and ensure the rights and security of returnees.

Until voluntary and sustainable repatriation becomes possible, RRRC is committed to providing humanitarian support in cooperation with the international community. At the same time, education, skills development and community capacity should be strengthened so that the Rohingya are better prepared to rebuild their lives and communities upon return.

The past nine years have demonstrated what strong coordination and collective commitment can achieve.

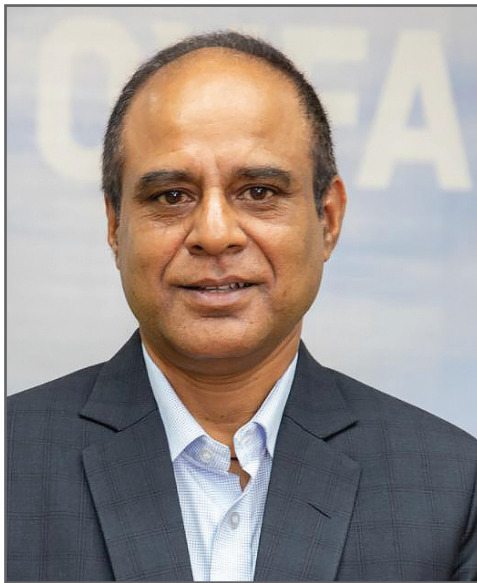
The next phase will require the same spirit of cooperation in the face of constrained resources, growing humanitarian needs, disaster risks and the continuing political situation in Myanmar.

Bangladesh has demonstrated extraordinary humanitarian commitment by providing shelter and protection to a very large refugee population for nearly a decade. Continued international support, predictable humanitarian financing, effective responsibility-sharing and sustained diplomatic engagement are essential to maintaining this response and advancing the conditions necessary for sustainable repatriation.

The objective is to protect human dignity today while preparing for a safe, voluntary, dignified, and sustainable repatriation tomorrow.

Around half of the approximately 1.2 million Rohingya people in Bangladesh are children. Their future deserves particular attention. Education and skills development are essential not only for dignity during displacement but also for preparing individuals and communities for their eventual return.





A DECADE ON, WE MUST NOT ALLOW THE ROHINGYA CRISIS TO BECOME NORMAL

Anil Pant

Interim Country Director, Oxfam in Bangladesh

Nearly a decade after the large-scale Rohingya influx of 2017, one of the greatest risks is not that the world has forgotten the crisis entirely. It is that we have become accustomed to it.

A sprawling camp can begin to look permanent. A water network becomes infrastructure rather than a lifeline. A food ration becomes a monthly statistic. A child growing up without a clear future becomes part of the background of a protracted emergency. But there is nothing normal about more than a million people living for years in displacement or about 600,000 people in host communities directly carrying the social, economic and environmental weight of a crisis they did not create. The earlier Oxfam publication *Stateless for 30 Years* reminds us that for some Rohingya families, displacement stretches across generations, not merely since 2017.

Oxfam has worked alongside Rohingya and host communities since the major influx, with local partners, government institutions, UN agencies and donors. Much of that work is in areas that rarely make headlines but determine whether people live safely and with dignity: clean water, sanitation, protection, livelihoods, women's transformative leadership, community engagement and disaster

preparedness. Oxfam's response has included WASH, protection, food security and livelihoods, GBV prevention and community-driven approaches across both Rohingya and host communities.

The evolution of WASH tells an important story. Emergency provision has developed into water networks, surface-water treatment, fecal sludge treatment, solid-waste systems and renewable-

energy solutions. Oxfam-supported initiatives documented through *Plumbers of the World* show how technical infrastructure and human capability can reinforce each other. Large fecal-sludge treatment systems now protect the health and environment of densely populated communities associated with lost and degraded reserved forests, while trained Rohingya volunteers help maintain services and become technical resources within their communities.

The response has shown extraordinary ingenuity and partnership. Bangladesh and Cox's Bazar communities have carried exceptional responsibility.

These are not simply project participants receiving assistance. They are people with knowledge, skills and agency. Yet many of the gains made since 2017 are now at risk. Funding pressure is forcing difficult reductions across WASH, health, nutrition, education, protection, shelter and livelihoods. For WASH alone, the 2026 plan requires about USD 61.2 million, while reductions

mean hygiene supplies falling below standards, no new latrine construction, and sharply reduced hygiene-promotion activities. The danger is that we begin dismantling the very systems that years of humanitarian investment created.

A latrine that cannot be maintained is not only an infrastructure problem; it can become a public-health and protection problem. A dark pathway is not only an energy problem; for a woman or girl it can become a question of safety. Reduced livelihoods are not merely an economic problem; they can deepen dependency and negative coping strategies. When assistance to host communities declines, pressures on services, land and livelihoods can become sources of tension. The 2026 JRP itself warns that reduced assistance can contribute to hunger, malnutrition, trafficking, child marriage, gender-based violence, dangerous onward movement and deterioration of social cohesion.

We therefore need to move beyond a false choice between emergency assistance and longer-term solutions. We must do both.

Life-saving support must continue, but it should increasingly protect resilience, local capacity and the investments already made. Local and national organizations should have greater leadership and access to resources. Rohingya people must be engaged as rights-holders, knowledge-holders, and contributors to decisions affecting their lives. Host communities must see tangible and sustained benefits from international support. The JRP must

be meaningfully linked to the broader Cox's Bazar District Development Plan. Aligning humanitarian priorities with longer-term district development is essential to addressing the pressures faced by host communities, strengthening social cohesion, and preventing further social tensions.

For Oxfam, as the Rohingya crisis enters its tenth year is therefore not an anniversary to commemorate. It is an opportunity to ask harder questions. How do we protect essential services when global humanitarian resources are shrinking? How do we connect humanitarian action, development and peacebuilding more intelligently? How do we invest in people rather than perpetuate dependency? And how do we ensure that Rohingya and host communities help shape decisions about their future?

The response has shown extraordinary ingenuity and partnership. Bangladesh and Cox's Bazar communities have carried exceptional responsibility. Humanitarian actors and donors have helped save lives and build systems that matter every day. We must not allow that collective investment to erode through fatigue.

Ten years into this chapter, the message would be: sustain what saves lives, strengthen what builds resilience, share responsibility more fairly, and intensify the political effort required for a durable solution. The cost of inaction will be measured not only in budgets but also in lost dignity, lost opportunity and a generation left waiting.





ROHINGYA RESPONSE: ANTICIPATE TOMORROW, ACT TODAY

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury
Executive Director, COAST Foundation

Cox's Bazar is the district with the second-highest poverty rate in Bangladesh, with around 1,133 people living per square kilometer. On the other hand, 50,855 Rohingya people live per square kilometer in Rohingya camps, and 800 acres of precious forest land are being used for Rohingya shelters, which has created extraordinary pressure on land, agriculture, and natural resources, including water and forests, while intensifying challenges for both the refugee and host communities.

Annually, a significant number of Rohingya people assimilate into the Bangladeshi population locally and in other parts of the country. There is little indication of a political solution that would enable the Rohingya population to be repatriated with their rights and dignity. So, in all likelihood, this Rohingya population will stay longer, and the country and the district will have to bear the brunt. I anticipate seven dimensions in this regard, on which we need to act today and immediately.

Localization is a fundamental need, and now almost all actors recognize this need. According to a COAST study, 88% of the funding

is held by UN agencies, international NGOs have an 8% share, national NGOs 4%, and local NGOs almost 0%. If we go by approved projects, INGOs account for 44%, national NGOs 51%, and local NGOs 5%. The biggest challenge is whether we can make local NGOs ready to manage a larger portion of funding, and capacity development is a key issue.

Please note that such localization discourse took place from 2018 to 2022. A localization task force was formed, a Grand Bargain field mission came and submitted a report, a localization scoping study was conducted, and finally, a localization roadmap

was prepared and approved by the Strategic Executive Group (SEG), led by the UNRC (United Nations Resident Coordinator). Now, the current RCT has prepared a transformation track heading toward the localization of the response. There is a further reduction in aid, of around 40%. Now is the time to achieve greater outcomes while investing less. Local actors can operate with lower management costs; above all, they can help reduce aid dependency and promote sustainability.

But along with these developments, several priority issues have emerged: (i) how the response will address the environmental recovery

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of the locality, including reclaiming cultivable land through improved waste management. A preliminary estimate suggests that, with proper waste management, around 300 acres of cultivable land could be reclaimed, which could contribute to the district's food security; (ii) water security is fundamental. In fact, around 20% of tube wells in Ukhiya hardly function, while there are no tube wells in Teknaf. There are around 300 to 400 deep tube wells operating in the refugee camps. Ideally, water from the Naf River should be treated and supplied to the camps, and all deep tube wells should be banned to help ensure water security in Ukhiya and Cox's Bazar; otherwise, there is a risk of desertification.

Along with this, surface water preservation must be increased in Ukhiya and Teknaf through the re-

excavation of ponds, so that rainwater harvesting and storage can be improved. (iii) There are good examples of waste management in the camps, including producing fertilizer, sorting waste, restoring land, and recycling plastic. These practices have to be continued and, if possible, further investment should be made in this area. (iv) Peacebuilding and social cohesion are fundamental. Around 52% of the camp population is made up of youth. They should be organized and engaged in meaningful work, for example, through technical training and education. (v) Women and adolescent girls are among the most vulnerable groups in the camps. They should also be engaged in meaningful work, especially by developing their skills as primary health workers and birth attendants.





HOLDING THE GAINS: TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE WASH IN COX'S BAZAR

Enamul Hoque

Public Health Engineer, Oxfam International

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Public Health Engineer, Oxfam International

Over nearly a decade, the Rohingya refugee response in Cox's Bazar has built one of the world's largest humanitarian WASH service platforms. Across 33 camps, extensive water networks, production boreholes, reservoirs and thousands of tap stands now serve densely populated communities. Tens of thousands of latrines and bathing facilities have been constructed, supported by largest faecal sludge treatment systems ever built in camp settings anywhere in the world, sludge transfer pipe-network, integrated waste management includes plasma assisted OMNI processor, waste collection services, material recovery facilities, hygiene promotion networks and disease-surveillance mechanisms. These investments have prevented large-scale public-health deterioration, supported dignity and helped interrupt recent cholera transmission. Government

institutions, the WASH Sector, UN agencies, national and international organizations, local partners, volunteers and Rohingya communities have all contributed to keeping these services functioning under extremely difficult conditions.

Yet the reality today is more complex than the number of facilities constructed. The response has moved from an emergency infrastructure challenge to a long-term systems-management challenge. Water availability remains uneven, and many families cope by changing sources, queuing for longer periods or using secondary supplies. Chlorination, water discharge metering and water-production monitoring are not consistently reliable. Sanitation facilities may remain functional, while the downstream faecal sludge treatment chain struggles with treatment performance, repeated desludging and increasing operating costs. Waste

collection and drainage clearance are also uneven, contributing to blocked drains, stagnant water, flooding and environmental-health risks.

For women and girls, older people, persons with disabilities and caregivers, access is not only about whether a facility exists. Lighting, privacy, distance, safe pathways, locks, menstrual hygiene materials and the ability to make complaint and receive feedback determine whether services are genuinely usable. Reports also show that hygiene behavior cannot be sustained through messaging alone when soap, water and functional handwashing facilities are inadequate or missing at the point of use.

The next phase must therefore protect what has been achieved while changing how WASH is financed and managed. Funding reductions should not silently remove the basic controls that prevent service failure: safe water quantities, chlorination, desludging, treatment monitoring, waste collection, drainage clearance, soap, menstrual hygiene support and safe communal access.

The call to action is clear. Government, donors and humanitarian partners must commit to sustained operations and maintenance, not only new construction. Systems should be evaluated facility by facility, with transparent performance and

Tens of thousands of latrines and bathing facilities have been constructed, supported by largest faecal sludge treatment systems ever built in camp settings anywhere in the world, sludge transfer pipe-network, integrated waste management includes plasma assisted OMNI processor, waste collection services, material recovery facilities, hygiene promotion networks and disease-surveillance mechanisms.

cost records. Weak or expensive models should be improved or rationalized only after technical and protection risks are understood. Communities and local partners must have meaningful roles in monitoring, decision-making and accountability, while authorities and sector structures progressively strengthen oversight.



Oxfam's contribution should be to convene evidence, amplify community priorities, strengthen local humanitarian leadership and advocate for financing that connects emergency services with climate resilience and longer-term public services. The future of WASH in Cox's Bazar depends on treating the camps and neighboring host communities as one connected public-health and environmental system and ensuring that no one is left to carry the cost of an unfinished transition.



A SAFER FUTURE, LED BY THE ROHINGYA COMMUNITY: RETHINKING PROTECTION IN PROTRACTED CRISES

Hafizur Rahman

Programme Coordinator, Oxfam in Bangladesh

Fouzia Yesmin

Senior Programme Officer, Oxfam in Bangladesh

Looking Back to 2017

In August 2017, thousands of Rohingya families began arriving in Bangladesh through muddy roads, hills and border crossing points, carrying whatever they could. Many had left everything behind. What started as an emergency quickly became a prolonged crisis. Nearly a decade later, families remain in crowded camps, still living with uncertainty about what the future will bring.

Overtime, the nature of protection risks in the camps and host communities has changed rapidly. Early protection concerns were mainly linked to basic survival needs and access to essential services. Today, protection risks are more complex and interlinked, driven by insecurity, fear, lack of future pathways, and reduced humanitarian assistance

due to funding cuts. Moreover, limited access to higher education and livelihood opportunities, especially for young men and women, together with a sense of a bleak future, further exacerbate protection risks. These contributing factors create frustration, hopelessness, and increased exposure to exploitation and harmful coping mechanisms. Deaths and disappearances during risky sea journeys increased by approximately 116% between 2023 and 2025¹, while youth vulnerability to recruitment by armed groups persists, with 28 recruitment incidents reported in Q3 2024 and 30 in Q2 2025². Protection concerns are further compounded by gender-based violence, with 60%³ of GBV survivors declining legal aid services due to fear of retaliation and social stigma, while humanitarian funding reductions continue to

1 [reliefweb.int], [unhcr.org]

2 [rohingyaresponse.org], [rohingyaresponse.org]

3 <https://rohingyaresponse.org/project/2026-jrp/>

undermine protection outcomes and access to essential services. Declining assistance risks increasing hunger, trafficking, child marriage, gender-based violence and social tensions.

The causes are rooted not only in Bangladesh but also in Myanmar; the lack of national identity and citizenship, along with intermittent new arrivals due to continued insecurity and violence in Rakhine State, also contribute to these factors.

Reality and the Future

The Rohingya response, in its 10th year, is no longer an emergency; now it is a long-term humanitarian reality for displaced Rohingya people, affected host communities and Bangladesh as the host country.

Oxfam's protection interventions invest in and support both Rohingya and host communities. Oxfam engages women, youth, and community leaders to ensure that their perspectives and priorities inform the design and implementation of a Rohingya-led response within the broader humanitarian response mechanism.

It demands a move beyond short-term, crisis-focused interventions to long-term community resilience and locally led solutions. For years, Oxfam has facilitated and piloted specific actions to support the local economy and community cohesion of Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts of Cox's Bazar, which are directly affected by and bearing the cost of the crisis.

Now, in alignment with the Joint Response Plan (JRP) objectives and lessons from global protracted displacement crises, Oxfam's protection interventions invest in and support both Rohingya

and host communities. Oxfam engages women, youth, and community leaders to ensure that their perspectives and priorities inform the design and implementation of a Rohingya-led response within

the broader humanitarian response mechanism. Oxfam acknowledges the Protection Sector and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Cox's Bazar Office, for their support in this effort.

It is both timely and imperative to acknowledge this reality, recognize the strategic needs of the response, and re-strategize the approach to protection, placing Rohingya leadership, agency, and locally led solutions at the heart of the response.





FROM SURVIVAL TO SELF-RELIANCE:

LIVELIHOODS, SKILLS AND HOPE IN A DECADE OF THE ROHINGYA RESPONSE

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Md. Mostofa Ali

Programme Coordinator, Oxfam in Bangladesh

A decade ago, families fleeing violence arrived in Cox's Bazar carrying little more than memories of the lives they had left behind. Farmers were separated from their land, small business owners lost their markets, and skilled workers found themselves without opportunities to practice their trades. Ten years later, despite the uncertainty of displacement, a different story is also unfolding. Across the camps and host communities, people are cultivating vegetables in tiny spaces, learning new skills, establishing small enterprises, and finding ways to support their families with dignity. The journey remains unfinished, but it offers an important lesson: even in protracted crises, resilience can grow when people are given opportunities to learn, work, and contribute.

Over the past decade, the livelihoods response has evolved from emergency-focused activities into a more structured effort to build resilience, skills, and economic opportunities. Yet the need remains immense. According to the 2025 ISNA¹, 65% of refugee households have at least one source of income, while 35% remain fully dependent on humanitarian assistance. Among those earning an income, most rely on casual or daily labor inside or outside the camps, cash-for-work activities, or

small informal businesses. These income sources are often irregular, low-paid, and insufficient to meet household needs, leaving families vulnerable to economic shocks and protection risks.

Growing Food, Building Resilience

One of the most promising developments in the response has been the expansion of climate-smart and household-based livelihood opportunities. Across the camps and host communities, families are finding innovative ways to produce food despite severe land constraints and climate challenges.

Oxfam's climate-smart homestead gardening initiatives demonstrate this transformation. Oxfam along with its partner Mukti Cox's Bazar has been supporting approximately 5,000 households through techniques such as sack gardening, vertical cultivation, raised-bed farming, mushroom production and small-scale poultry rearing, households are using even the smallest spaces to grow nutritious vegetables. These gardens not only improve dietary diversity and reduce food expenditures but also strengthen resilience to climate-related shocks, helping families retain productive skills while increasing their sense of agency and self-reliance.

¹ *Inter-Sector Needs Assessment (ISNA) is a comprehensive multi-sector research tool used in humanitarian crises—such as the Rohingya refugee response in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh—to evaluate living conditions, gaps, and priority needs across areas like food security, shelter, health, and protection.*

10 YEARS OF LIVELIHOOD TRANSFORMATION

- Livelihood programming has evolved from emergency cash-for-work (2017) to resilience and skills-focused approaches today.
- 65% of refugee households have at least one source of income, 35% of refugee households remain fully dependent on humanitarian assistance.
- Only 19,415 refugees received livelihood support in 2025 against a need of 40,951 people.
- Livelihood insecurity increases risks of child labour, GBV, debt, and youth exclusion.
- The sector is increasingly aligned with the Bangladesh-UN Skills Development Framework.
- Expanding skills, entrepreneurship, market access, and financial inclusion is critical for the journey ahead.

Investing in Skills for an Uncertain Future

As displacement becomes increasingly protracted, skills have become one of the most valuable assets refugees can carry into the future. Across the sector, programming has progressively shifted from short-term activities to vocational training, entrepreneurship development, and transferable skills aligned with future livelihood opportunities.

Oxfam has contributed to this effort through skills development programmes focused on handicraft training, entrepreneurship, solar light repair and other market-oriented trades for both refugees and host communities. These interventions help participants strengthen technical skills, confidence, and preparedness for future opportunities.

However, demand continues to exceed available support. In 2025, approximately 19,415 refugees accessed livelihood and skills-development opportunities, falling far short of the more than 40,000 identified as requiring support. Access to tools, productive assets, finance, and market linkages remains limited. While recent discussions around Mobile Financial Services and SIM card access signal encouraging progress, broader

private-sector engagement and more diversified entrepreneurship opportunities are needed to unlock meaningful economic inclusion.

Soap Production: Turning Humanitarian Need into Livelihood Opportunity

The evolution of community-led soap and Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) kit production offers a powerful example of how humanitarian interventions can generate longer-term benefits. Initially designed to address essential hygiene needs, soap production has become an income-generating activity that combines skills development, community-led enterprise creation, and community resilience.

Through Oxfam-Protyashi supported initiatives, trained participants produce thousands of soap bars each month, supporting public health while creating livelihood opportunities for vulnerable households. Targeting the Humanitarian – Development – Peace (HDP) nexus, the model connects an immediate humanitarian need with economic empowerment and local enterprise development. It also creates opportunities for engagement between refugee and host communities, demonstrating how practical solutions can contribute to both resilience and social cohesion.

The Road Ahead

The next decade of the Rohingya response must focus on expanding sustainable livelihood opportunities beyond casual labor and temporary cash-for-work schemes. Greater investment is needed in skills training, market linkages, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, digital access, and private-sector partnerships. These efforts are not only economic priorities; they are essential for reducing protection risks, including child labor, gender-based violence, debt dependency, and youth exclusion.

Ten years on, the story of the Rohingya response is no longer only about humanitarian assistance. It is also a story of resilience, innovation, and human potential. From homestead gardens to vocational skills and community enterprises, livelihoods initiatives are helping create pathways toward dignity and self-reliance. Sustaining and expanding these opportunities will be critical to ensuring that both Rohingya refugees and host communities can look to the future with greater confidence, resilience, and hope.



WALKING TOWARD INDEPENDENCE

“When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions.” The famous line from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* could hardly be more fitting for Mohammad Islam, a young Rohingya man whose life changed after an accident.

Islam, 26, lives with his four-member family in Camp 19 in Ukhiya, Cox’s Bazar, southeastern Bangladesh. Before his injury, he worked as a daily labourer.

In 2017, he came to Bangladesh empty-handed. Recently, he had an accident that has made his life more vulnerable. He received emergency medical treatment and spent more than two months in hospital, where he underwent several surgeries. Eventually,

part of his right leg had to be amputated. The accident damaged one of his eyes, significantly affecting his vision.

Islam estimates that treatment and related expenses have cost his family around BDT 200,000. Relatives and neighbours helped cover much of the cost, but he still needs further treatment for his eyes to improve his vision and regain his normal life.

The injury has profoundly changed his daily life. Islam can no longer independently access humanitarian assistance, including collecting his food ration. His elderly father is also unable to support him. As a result, the family sometimes sells part of its food assistance

For Islam, a prosthetic leg means more than mobility. It could mean moving through the camp with less dependence on others—and reclaiming a measure of independence after a life-changing injury.

to pay someone to bring the remaining ration home.

Even simple tasks have become difficult. Getting to the latrine means navigating steep and narrow paths. His wife used to help him move around, but she is now pregnant and can no longer do so.

To help make his life easier, with financial support from DFAT under AHP IV, Oxfam is providing support through its Emergency Assistance for Protection (EAP). With the support of local partner Mukti Cox's Bazar, Oxfam plans to help Islam receive an artificial leg—a long-held dream that could restore some mobility and independence. He is now waiting to receive it.

EAP is a crucial part of Oxfam's protection work. It provides flexible, case-by-case support to people facing urgent protection risks, helping them meet immediate needs, reduce



further vulnerability and access essential services when support from other organisations is unavailable or has ended.

Since April 2026, Oxfam in Bangladesh has provided EAP support to 136 people, including cancer patients, persons with disabilities and survivors of gender-based violence, as well as people needing urgent non-food items

and critical medical assistance.

Many people across the camps have developed health conditions as a result of prolonged displacement and difficult living conditions. Shrinking humanitarian resources are putting lives at greater risk, while the Joint Response Plan (JRP) continues to receive significantly less funding than required to meet growing humanitarian needs.

For Islam, an artificial leg means more than mobility. It could mean moving through the camp with less dependence on others—and reclaiming a measure of independence after a life-changing injury. Like Islam, many people in the camps are seeking sustainable pathways for their future—both through greater resilience and self-reliance in the present and through the hope of eventually returning home to Myanmar safely and with dignity.





GROWING MORE THAN VEGETABLES

Finding enough space to grow food in the crowded Rohingya camps of Cox's Bazar in southeastern Bangladesh is difficult. Yet small patches of green are beginning to appear beside shelters, in narrow corners and even on tin rooftops.

For many Rohingya families, these gardens offer a way to access fresh vegetables and improve nutrition. They can also provide opportunities to generate income.

More than 4,100 refugee families across five camps have established climate-resilient vegetable gardens with support from Oxfam Australia, Oxfam in Bangladesh, and its local partner Mukti Cox's Bazar.

Priority is given to pregnant women, female-headed

households, breastfeeding mothers, older people and persons with disabilities—groups that can face greater challenges in accessing nutritious food and livelihood opportunities.

The gardens are designed to work within the physical limitations of the camps, where open land is scarce. Families with space beside their shelters use small plots, while others grow vegetables in sacks, including on tin roofs and other available surfaces. This flexible approach allows households to produce food even where conventional gardening space is unavailable.

Participants receive practical guidance on preparing growing spaces, sowing seeds and caring for plants, along with basic inputs such as seeds,

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Before, I did not have a garden, and we could not eat vegetables properly.

compost-filled sacks and other materials. The approach also promotes safer and more sustainable cultivation practices, reducing dependence on harmful chemical pesticides and encouraging environmentally friendly methods of pest management.

For many families, the immediate benefit is improved access to fresh vegetables. Growing food close to home can reduce dependence on markets and help households include vegetables in their meals more regularly.

Noor Bahar, 58, from Camp 19, is one of the Rohingya refugees who has established a garden.

"Before, I did not have a garden, and we could not eat vegetables properly," she says. "I did not always have enough money to buy them from the market. Now I can grow vegetables beside my shelter and feed them to my children."

The gardens, however, face challenges. Heavy rainfall can damage plants and wash away



soil, while intense heat and dry conditions can reduce production during hotter periods. Poor soil quality is another major constraint, making compost, shade, fencing and regular maintenance particularly important.

The climate-resilient gardening approach is therefore about more than producing vegetables. It also helps households adapt food production to difficult environmental conditions and limited space.

Alongside vegetable gardening, compost and mushroom production are emerging as valuable climate-smart practices in the camps. Households produce organic compost, including vermicompost, from biodegradable waste, improving soil fertility and reducing pollution.

This initiative shows how small-scale, climate-resilient food production can contribute to a more sustainable response in the camps. By helping families grow nutritious food close to home, the approach can strengthen household food security, reduce pressure on limited income and build practical skills and resilience.

However, the initiative remains relatively small compared with the scale of need. Shrinking humanitarian funding is limiting opportunities to expand and sustain such approaches, while heavy rainfall, extreme heat, poor soil conditions and other climate and disaster risks continue to threaten production.





STEERING YOUTH AWAY FROM HARM

“When young people have very few meaningful things to do, it becomes easier for them to get involved in harmful activities,” says Mohammad Amin, a resident of Rohingya Camp 3 and a member of Rohingya Student Welfare (RSW).

That concern inspired an initiative to create a space where young Rohingya people can spend their time learning, reading and exploring their future.

Nineteen-year-old Amin arrived in Bangladesh during the major influx of Rohingya refugees in 2017, when he was in eighth grade. Growing up in the camp, he has seen how frustration and uncertainty about the future have placed additional pressure on the community.

For many Rohingya youth, formal education opportunities end after Grade Nine, creating a significant gap at a critical stage of their lives.

“I always wanted to read books beyond my textbooks, but buying them was expensive,” Amin says.

Many Rohingya adolescents and young people want to continue their education, but opportunities remain limited. Without meaningful learning and engagement, frustration and uncertainty can increase young people’s vulnerability to harmful activities, unsafe migration and other protection risks.

In response, RSW established a community book station in June 2026, offering young people a space to read, study

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If they learn more about themselves, their community and their future, they can make better choices.



together and learn about Rohingya history, culture and heritage.

With support from Oxfam Hong Kong, Oxfam in Bangladesh, together with its partner NGO PROTTYASHI and Rohingya-led organisations, is providing additional books to community book stations in Camps 3 and 4.

The study circle has become a space for peer learning. Amin and around 10 other young people visit regularly, study together and encourage one another to continue learning.

Amin particularly enjoys books on Rohingya history and heritage, motivational writing and future planning. Advanced English grammar books have also helped him build on the basic lessons he received earlier.

Today, Amin can spend hours there reading different books and expanding his knowledge—an opportunity he once struggled to access.

Oxfam's protection approach supports Rohingya-led organisations through mentoring, networking and community-led initiatives that strengthen leadership and self-reliance.

Amin hopes the study circle will eventually include books on health, computer skills, responsible social media use, scholarships and further education. His ambition is to work in the health sector and, one day, provide free services to his community.

"For young people, books can give direction," Amin says. "If they learn more about themselves, their community and their future, they can make better choices."

In a protracted crisis, education, safe recreation and meaningful youth engagement are essential for protection. They can reduce frustration and the risk of harmful coping mechanisms while building confidence, leadership and resilience. Yet such initiatives remain limited, and shrinking humanitarian funding threatens their continuity. Greater investment is needed in youth-led learning, skills development, mentoring and safe opportunities that help young Rohingya people build purpose, knowledge and hope for the future.





STITCHING HOPE, BUILDING INDEPENDENCE

"I never imagined that I could earn money with my own hands."

Senowara Begum, a resident of Rohingya Camp 3 in Cox's Bazar who fled Myanmar to escape violence, says this with a smile.

"When I sold my first handmade product in my community, I bought something for my children and saved part of the money to continue my work."

Senowara lives with her three sons and a daughter. The family once depended entirely on her husband's limited income. After finishing her household work, she often had little to do beyond staying at home.

Financial uncertainty weighed heavily on her, particularly when she thought about her children's future.

"I couldn't even afford small things for myself, and sometimes we could not manage balanced meals," she says.

She recalls that financial hardship often brought frustration, arguments and tension at home.

Then came the turning point. Senowara joined a 30-day, demand-driven, portable skills development training on Nakshi Kantha, a traditional embroidered quilt from Bangladesh.

The training changed her life, along with those of 27 other Rohingya women who took part.

Each year, Oxfam in Bangladesh, with local partner NGOs Mukti Cox's Bazar and PROTTYASHI, provides demand-driven skills development training to 200

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When I sold my first handmade product, I bought something for my children and saved part of the money to continue my work.



When Senowara was forcibly displaced from Myanmar, she had no assets or specialised skills. Now, she has both.

But she has another dream that matters just as much.

"I cannot read or write. When someone gives me an official document, I feel helpless," she says. "If literacy classes could be arranged, it would change my life."

For Senowara, sewing has opened a path towards income and greater confidence. Learning to read and write, she believes, would help her take another important step towards independence.

Rohingya women. Over the past nine years, more than 1,500 women have received the training. The programme has been supported by DFAT-AHP phases III and IV, UN Women, and Oxfam Hong Kong under different projects.

Through the programme, women develop practical skills in Nakshi Kantha, jute bags, macramé, candles and other handicrafts. The training strengthens confidence, employability and social participation while connecting participants with available market opportunities within the camps.

Over 450 women have also been supported to establish market linkages within the camps. The approach promotes dignity, productive engagement and the practical use of newly acquired skills, allowing women to contribute meaningfully to their households and communities.

Recalling the early days of the training, Senowara says: "I looked forward to going every morning. We learned together, became close to one another and built friendships."

After completing the training, she began making and selling handmade products. With the income, she bought gifts for her children and a few necessities for herself, while saving the rest to purchase raw materials for future work.

She now plays a more important role in family decision-making.

"I finally feel that my voice is respected," she says.

In the rohingya crisis, these skills can strengthen women's confidence, dignity, decision-making and self-reliance. If Rohingya people can return safely home, these skills can also support livelihoods and rebuilding. Yet shrinking humanitarian funding limits training, materials and market opportunities. Continued support in skills and literacy is essential for resilience today and a greater future.





TURNING SUNLIGHT INTO WATER SECURITY

Collecting water once meant walking nearly a couple of kilometers to reach the nearest tubewell for 50-year-old Mohammad Shaker and his seven-member family in Whykong, Teknaf, Bangladesh.

Even after making the journey, water was not always guaranteed. Many families could not afford to install their own deep tubewells, while challenging geological conditions made installation difficult. During the dry season, the situation became even more severe as existing water sources sometimes dried up.

Water scarcity is a widespread challenge across Teknaf sub-district, one of the most water-stressed areas of Cox's Bazar. In host communities such as Whykong, pressure on limited

water resources has increased as both local residents and the Rohingya population depend heavily on the same groundwater and surface-water sources.

During the dry season, from November to April, declining water availability places significant pressure on Rohingya refugees and surrounding host communities.

With support from Oxfam GB, Oxfam in Bangladesh's sustainable WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) initiative is helping address these challenges through climate-resilient and community-managed solutions, including solar-powered water distribution networks.

For Shaker's community, the solar-powered system has

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I want other families who are still struggling for water to have the same opportunity.

transformed the daily experience of collecting water. Water is pumped into an elevated storage tank and distributed through nearby tap stands, bringing safe water within easy reach of households.

“Before, bringing water was very difficult. In summer, we often had less water. Now the tap is beside our homes, and this year we have been getting enough water,” Shaker says.

The system is particularly valuable in Teknaf, where load-shedding and extreme weather can disrupt electricity for hours. Solar power helps maintain water supply while reducing operating costs and carbon emissions, and nearby tap stands significantly reduce the time families spend walking and waiting for water.

The system is connected to the electricity grid as a backup. Community members proposed this arrangement to ensure that water can still be pumped during prolonged cloudy weather or when solar energy is insufficient. When grid electricity is required, participating households collectively contribute to the electricity bill.

Community ownership is central to the network’s operation. Residents manage the system, while a local committee oversees routine maintenance, including cleaning the storage tank and addressing minor problems with pipes and tap stands. When additional technical assistance is required, the committee contacts WASH facilitators for support.

This climate-resilient model brings together solar energy, backup power and community

management to make water access more reliable while strengthening local ownership. But many communities still do not have access to such solutions, and shrinking humanitarian funding



is making it harder to maintain and expand them. Continued resources, technical support and skills transfer are essential to keep these systems working and reach more Rohingya and host communities.

For Shaker, the difference is clear. His community now has more reliable and convenient access to water, although he knows that many families in neighboring areas continue to struggle.

“We have received this benefit, and our water problem has reduced,” he says. “I want other families who are still struggling for water to have the same opportunity.”











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