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Significant emergency water and sanitation work was undertaken in 2017/18 for the Rohingya response to address life-saving needs of over 909,774 refugees who fled violence in Myanmar. The activities of Bangladesh authorities, UNHCR and its partners, and other international agencies helped avert a public health crisis. A large number of agencies are delivering services in the camps, including across one of the largest refugee settlements in the world. Harmonized standards for WASH are in place. A major challenge is the lack of space to build facilities in particular for safe desludging. Another challenge is a recurrent water shortage in Teknaf during the dry season.

UNHCR is strengthening the response to better meet the needs of women, children, and persons with specific needs, including ensuring safe and well-lit and segregated facilities for use by all women and girls.

### Progress

UNHCR and partners developed safe and dignified facilities as far as possible while dealing with a very challenging topography and the acute emergency needs of the response. Improvements made over 2018 include upgraded latrines with larger volume pits to last longer. Fecal sludge treatment remains an urgent priority. A mega fecal waste treatment plant was installed in Kutupalong settlement, in partnership with Oxfam, to serve a 150,000 people. Water supply in the camps to date was largely supplied by pumping water from ground supplies. Water is at risk of contamination in the camps. As a result, UNHCR has moved towards supplying a safer water supply through a chlorinated water network to support both refugees and the host community. 9 networks are now completed with others under construction. Water purification tablets and containers for collection and storage of water were distributed to refugees. UNHCR is continuing to closely monitor groundwater resources to ensure their sustainable use. UNHCR is playing key role in the WASH sector by leading a technical working group on water and sanitation.

In 2018, UNHCR promoted training for WASH field teams including partner organisations and refugee volunteers, who assisted rapid WASH assessments and repair works. The agency helped repair drainage systems and latrines for schools and also built a waste water treatment plant for host community use as part of its Quick Impact Projects.

Hygiene kits, including menstrual hygiene kits, continued to be distributed to girls and women, alongside hygiene promotion activities.

**370,427** refugees in 14 settlements reached with UNHCR-supported WASH activities.

**>20 liters** of water per person each day achieved (not including camps in Teknaf)

**>21 persons per latrine** (little above the minimum standard 20)

#### UNHCR WASH objectives:

- 1 Ensure adequate, acceptable, safe and dignified **life-saving water supply and sanitation services**
- 2 Ensure refugees have the **means and access to information promoting hygiene** in their communities
- 3 Ensure WASH assistance **is sustainable and cost-effective, and incorporates environmental protection approach**




6,767 latrines constructed, benefiting >150,000 refugees

679 tube wells installed serving over 169,750 refugees

56,203 hygiene kits distributed

677 field staff and volunteers trained in WASH emergency response

## Challenges

-  Need for long-term planning for WASH interventions, requiring commitments for multi-year funding, greater involvement of development actors, and agreement of authorities
-  Sanitation management challenges for Kutupalong settlement due to large population size, congestion, topography, and unavailability of land
-  Lack of easily reachable groundwater in Teknaf area and brackish quality of water in river requires alternative approaches, including introduction of catchment reservoirs

## Way Forward

To address acute water needs in Nayapara, Teknaf, an upgrade of surface and groundwater resources serving both refugees and host communities is planned with the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) and the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE). Piped treatment systems are being introduced to carry/treat human waste as part of an ongoing pilot in Kutupalong and Choukali. The lack of sanitation treatment and de-sludging capacity poses a significant public health risk.

## Working in Partnership

UNHCR co-chairs the **Strategic Executive Group** together with the UN Resident Coordinator and IOM. The Refugee Agency leads the protection response for all refugees, and heads a **Protection Working Group** in Cox's Bazar. UNHCR welcomes its valuable partnerships with a number of UN agencies and coordinates the delivery of its assistance with humanitarian partners through various working groups under the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG). UNHCR is also supporting the WASH sector with dedicated human resources to co-chair the water and sanitation sub-sectors. UNHCR's main government counterpart is the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and its Cox's Bazar-based RRRC. UNHCR works 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 27 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** | **Sesame Workshop** | **Solidarites International** | **Terre des Hommes** | **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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