



CHILDREN ON THE EDGE - ROHINGYA REFUGEE CRISIS

FIELD REPORT - JUNE 2018

BACKGROUND

There were already an estimated 400,000 Rohingya in Bangladesh before the brutal, coordinated military campaign of August 2017 forced an additional 700,000 refugees into the border camps, where we have been working for eight years.


In the few months following this huge influx, we invested considerable time in researching the greatest needs and the most effective way to respond to them. In addition to a survey of 30,000 households in the camps, we discussed the situation with Rohingya community leaders (Majis) identifying eight blocks of the Kutupalong Balukhali camp with the highest population density and a low prevalence of health and education services.

Following these consultations, throughout November to January we delivered a considered humanitarian response.

Having observed problems of rushed, uncoordinated and poorly delivered services from other agencies, we took time to ensure quality and sustainability in what we provided.

This took the form of 34 deep tube wells, 200 deep latrines, 5,840 food parcels and 5,250 solar lights. To create temporary safe spaces for newly arrived children we also doubled up our 45 classrooms in the original Kutupalong makeshift camp.

In our last report, we highlighted this process and some initial feedback from the Rohingya community who had begun to use these services. The following pages will reflect how the use of these services has been progressing in the last few months, and detail the establishment and development of our new Learning Centres.



“Before we just drank the brown coloured water. We did not have a big enough bucket to carry the clean water from far away. Now we can get clean water right where we live. It’s much better”.

WATER AND SANITATION

Our original research revealed how numerous shallow wells built by other agencies were drying out and prone to contamination from waste leakage. Latrines were situated near water sources, not dug to an adequate depth and were at capacity.

Focusing on areas with limited access to water points, we constructed 34 two-chamber wells to a depth of approximately 700 feet each and 200 10-ring latrines.

Within a few weeks of construction, we were receiving feedback that the wells provided the clearest water in the area, with families from other sections of the camp walking over half an hour to use them.

People told us how “everyone from the block uses our wells to be clean for Friday prayers because the water is the purest”.

They described it as having a better taste and appreciated having the two chambers for separate washing and drinking. Many had been walking a long way to get water or use a latrine, so were happy to finally have facilities close to where they live.

Around 100 families use each of our 34 wells, making an approximate reach of 23,800 individuals. Our 200 latrine blocks currently serve an estimated 35,000 people.

Five months on, these facilities are all working perfectly, in stark contrast to those installed by many other agencies who have built inadequate services and walked away.

After a visit this month, our Asia Regional Manager commented “It’s really striking how many of the tube wells and latrines are out of order in the camp. Just walking around, you see site after site that is just out of use”.

This month we conducted another round of interviews to assess how well our tube wells and latrines are working and being maintained.



In January, five members of each community had been selected to form ‘WASH Committees’. They were trained on utilising and maintaining the wells and latrines and are responsible for reporting any problems or suggestions to our local partners.

When asked if the services are kept clean and well-functioning, committee member Mohammed (pictured left) said “Yes, it is our job to care for them, our responsibility. This is the only well with clean water in our section of the camp. If there is a problem, people come and talk to us and if we cannot fix it, we call Reza. Many people come from other blocks to use this water, it doesn’t taste like metal like so many other wells”.

One request from the committees was for locks for the latrines, so that women would have some privacy and feel safer. This has been working well, with women coming to the committee to use the key, although they still feel nervous using them unaccompanied at night.

Hussein is another committee member, he says,

“We keep them very clean. The roof was damaged during a storm, but I was able to fix it. Everyone here is happy, we have the best water in the block. When it rains, many of the wells have a brown colour water, but ours is clean, it never changes colour”.



SOLAR LIGHTING AND GAS STOVES

The Kutupalong-Balukhali expansion site is vast and remains mostly unlit. This heightens risks for everyone, but especially for girls and women who have often reported feeling unsafe going out after dark.

We sourced 5,250 portable, durable solar lights to be distributed throughout the camp. We saw that most lamps being provided in the early stages of the crisis were cheap lights, sourced locally. We had heard in our time working here over the years that these lights were unreliable, with short battery lives, and we decided to take the extra time to ensure high quality units from overseas.

This was a lengthier, more complicated process, but we were able to get humanitarian discount from the provider (Sun King) and lamps were distributed in February.

Initial feedback was very positive, and recently we have been able to interview some of the families using the lights.



Lamps can be carried around or fixed to rooftops to provide light at night and charge during the day

Rashuda (top left) lost her husband in the August attacks and fled to Bangladesh with her four children. It is very dark in her part of the camp and she says she cannot walk around at night without the lamp as she has no husband to go with her, and feels it is dangerous. She describes how

“This light helps me feel safe, I can collect water and go to the toilet and the battery lasts a long time. The lights they sell in the market only last one or two hours, but this will last until midnight if I charge it during the day”.

Mohammed (top right) and his family used to build a fire to try and create some light in the evenings, but the wood was too expensive and smoke poured into the shelter.

He says “It’s better for my family. Now we can cook and clean in the evening, it gives light to the whole room. It’s also much easier with a portable light, because if we used a solar panel, it’s easy for it to get stolen and we cannot watch it all the time”.

As the government identified the tackling of deforestation as one of their highest priorities, providing gas stoves and training became part of the process of obtaining permission to provide education in the camp. Consequently, 3,500 people have benefitted from stoves delivered to 500 households and the new Learning Centres are being used as a base for gas stove training.

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TEMPORARY SAFE SPACES

Throughout the early part of the refugee crisis, we continued to run our 45 schools within the makeshift Kutupalong camp and doubled up the classrooms as safe spaces for up to 2,250 newly arrived Rohingya children each day.

The children spoke of playing, drawing and skipping rather than the trauma they had been through, and the teachers were pleased to use their training to create a safe and welcoming environment.

Amira (pictured below) is 12 and attended one of the safe spaces. She described how her family had to leave Myanmar, saying “The army came. I was out in the field, but my



father came and found me and said we had to leave. We had no time and we left with only the things in our hands”.

After hiding in the day and walking at night for an entire week, she arrived at the camps and was shocked and frightened by the chaos.

She said “I had never seen so many people before. It was very crazy. People running everywhere. We did not know where to go. We did not know if we could eat. We were very hungry. My younger brother cried all day, every day. It took us a few days before we found a home and food”.

Once she started attending the safe space, Amira found that the Centre was a haven, saying “I liked to draw pictures, then I take them home to put on my wall. I can’t read or do maths yet as the teachers were never there at home. I want to have my own shop one day, so now I’m going to learn so I can take care of myself and my family”.

As part of an agreement made prior to the crisis, our previously enrolled students who arrived prior to the August influx transitioned into UNICEF schools in January. Through this month the Centres kept their doors open to operate exclusively as safe spaces, until the children’s transition to our newly built Learning Centres.



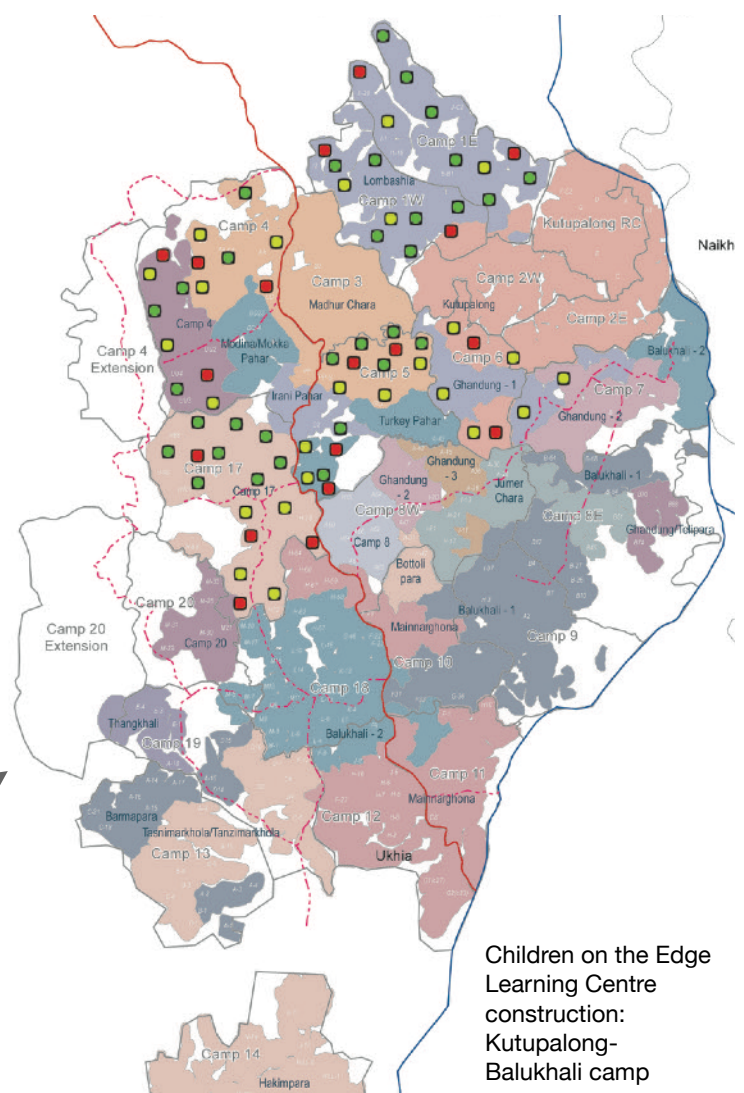
EDUCATION IN KUTUPALONG

Children arriving in the camps are traumatised, cut off from services, and vulnerable to exploitation and disease. After generations of being marginalised, they have no expectation of the rights they deserve, no education for the future and are ill equipped to survive the daily challenges of their environment.

To ensure consistent support for children, we are now using our proven education model for newly arrived Rohingya children.

We have spent the last few months training **150 Rohingya and Bangladeshi teachers** and opened **114 classrooms** in the Kutupalong Balukhali camp. The classrooms operate five days a week within **57 newly built Learning Centres**, providing education for **5,700 children**.

Building is continuing and more Centres are being opened every few days.



- 32 Centres opened and running in May
- 25 Centres opened and running in June
- 18 Centres under construction

Children on the Edge Learning Centre construction: Kutupalong-Balukhali camp

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES: RESTRICTIONS AND THE BUILDING PROCESS

One of the major successes of the programme so far is that Children on the Edge was one of the first organisations to gain permission from the authorities to open Learning Centres. There is a labyrinth of approvals needed (from a myriad of different bureaus and officials) to simply open the doors of a classroom. Permission was granted in April, and we have moved rapidly since this time in establishing our education provision.

Bureaucracy and corruption among those overseeing the camps is a stumbling block for everyone working in this field. We are fortunate to have long-established relationships with most of those with whom we negotiate approval, but with the surge of new agencies also seeking permission, this has not been an expedient process.

Finding the physical space to build the Centres has also been an enormous undertaking, given the huge number of people crammed into the camps. Negotiating these areas is a delicate and time-consuming process, but most camp blocks are eager for education, so we have been largely successful in finding places to build so far. With only a couple of access roads into the camps, the logistics of getting the materials into the blocks where we are working are also a challenge; mainly solved by simply carrying them by hand to the construction sites.

THE CENTRES

Since 2011, our work with Rohingya refugee and slum communities has created access to education for 11,000 children. In the final monitoring of our original programme, we saw a 97% pass rate on government standard exams and a marked increase in the confidence and wellbeing of the children we serve.

The project was selected for the 2017 Save the Children, Pearson and UNHCR 'Promising Practices in Refugee Education' initiative, highlighting models of good practice to improve global refugee education.

A SAFE PLACE

The Centres are bright, colourful, child-friendly environments and we have planted flowers and shrubs outside each one, to begin to grow a garden area which, once in bloom, will give the feeling of an oasis that is separate from the arid landscape of the camp.

Teachers have focussed on creating a safe, welcoming space, with consistent care and kindness. Minura has been teaching with us for a few months, and tutored in Myanmar before the August attacks forced her to flee. She says "I make the Centre fun by being like a mother to these children. Sometimes they are homesick or sad and I try to comfort them. I have also lost so much when I came to Bangladesh. I know they just need a place to play and be kids".

The teachers have noticed that the children often draw pictures of home, or sad events that have happened. Nurthza is a newly trained teacher, arriving nine months ago having lost her husband. She says "Everyone has a sad story, but we cannot change the past. I try to treat the kids like my own. That way they feel safe here and when they are safe, they are happy and have fun".



This exceptional care is already making a difference to the children. Saleha has also come from Myanmar and is a newly trained teacher. She says, “The children smile a lot more than they did one month ago. I learned that attitude is very important in teaching. I must have a good mood so the children will also. One of my students made me a ‘thank you card’. That made me very happy”.

Parents and teachers have often expressed how busy and chaotic the camps are, they feel there are so many children it would be easy to lose their own child. For this reason, before the Centres were built, many children were kept indoors, with nothing to do. Roshida has a six-year-old daughter who attends the Centres, she says “Before she was bored, as we would not let her go far from the house. Now she has a place that belongs to her, she is smiling every day she goes there”.

HIGH QUALITY CURRICULUM

We are using a bespoke, effective curriculum, approved by the Bangladesh Government, covering literacy, writing, maths and science. Children will be taking standardised exams to prepare them for entry into the mainstream system, should national policy allow this in the future. In the last few months as permissions have been negotiated, teachers have focused on basic letters and numbers in Burmese and English.

Mohammed has a daughter at one of our Centres, he says about her “If she can get an education, she can choose life outside of the camp. I don’t want her to live the rest of her life here, but if she does not study, she will have no choice”.

To get the greatest reach, we currently ensure a place for one child per household, and encourage the children to share what they

learn with friends and family. Abdus arrived nine months ago with 22 family members. His daughter goes to the Centre. He says “She is very smart and she has already learned to write the numbers in English and Bangla. Now she is teaching my other children. We are happy about that, no one in my family ever went to school in Myanmar, she is the first.”

The standard curriculum has been augmented by Children on the Edge to include elements of creativity, child rights knowledge and learning about basic health and sanitation. It equips children with the relevant skills to survive the challenges of life in the camps and prepares them for better job opportunities in the future.

In the last few months the children have had specific lessons on washing hands, using the toilet, brushing teeth, and posters on the wall illustrate basic health and hygiene tips. One of our Rohingya teachers, Minura says “The children are cleaner and healthier now that they come to the Centre. We take time to wash our faces, hands and feet and we talk a lot about the importance of good hygiene”.

Marginalised for decades, Rohingya children we speak to have little expectation of the rights they deserve. They are being encouraged to express themselves through song, dance and drama and given plenty of opportunity to play. Kushi, a teacher from the local community says “I try to make everything we do a game. If I only talk to the students they don’t listen, so all our activities are made into games. They enjoy drawing, singing and dancing”.

They are also invited to learn about their rights and share their views through ‘Child Councils’ attached to each Centre. These councils will be producing their own newsletter to represent the children’s experiences, talents and views to the community.



TEACHERS

Over the years, we have seen how much committed, well-trained teachers play a positive role in a child's development, so emphasis is placed on investing in and retaining teachers.

All 150 teachers were identified through a thorough recruitment process that identified the skills and characteristics we needed. Over 60% of these teachers are from the refugee community and the majority are newly arrived. We also train a number of teachers from the host community to provide local income, promote joint working and develop social cohesion.

All 150 teachers have received an initial week-long induction training which has included:

- How to communicate with children, with a focus on listening first.
- Child rights and how to include those in teaching methods.
- Health & hygiene: how to encourage the children to keep healthy.
- Classroom management: how to keep children's attention and make lessons engaging.

Feedback about the training was overwhelmingly positive with teachers saying "I learned so many things about teaching that I didn't know" and "It helped me understand how children think".

Already the newly trained teachers have seen a difference to their lives through starting the role. They mention being able to support older members of the family and pay for medicine, buy fans for their home and soap for washing.

Many of the teachers are widows, having lost their husbands in the violence last year. Nurthza who arrived seven months ago says,

"I have two children and no husband now, so this job allows us to live. If I did not have this job, I don't know what we would do, I really don't know. In nine months, my life has changed so much. I have left everything behind. We all have. To be here and to help children is a great success after we have lost everything".

CHILDREN'S FEEDBACK



"I like to learn Burmese. I want to go home, and if I can speak Burmese I can get a job there. Our teacher is nice and she smiles at us every day. If I can finish school like she did, I can go home and find a good job".

Rama, aged 10



"Our teacher is very nice to us and is from our village at home. We have games but I like to study the most, especially Burmese. I want to learn all the subjects, go to University and become an engineer".

Aziz, aged 10



"We do everything at the Learning Centre! Dances, games, lessons, but I like the songs best. My teacher says I have a beautiful singing voice. She is very kind and I call her 'auntie'".

Azara, aged 10



We draw there, play Ludo and learn Burmese, English and maths. My favourite is the drawing, I like to draw places I've never been to, places I see in magazines. I draw places I want to go".

Hamid, aged 12



"When we first arrived, my parents did not let me leave the house, so I was very bored just sitting with my Grandpa all day. Now there is a school I can go every morning and I am very happy to be here".

Shofika, aged 11



FUTURE PLANS

The next stage for us is to complete the building and running of all 75 Centres. Following recent feedback, at each Centre we will be installing full water filtration, ensuring availability of segregated latrine and working towards the provision of solar powered fans.

After their initial induction training, teachers will receive further input in July which will cover identifying health concerns and using the First Aid kit, how to be sensitive to children with trauma and how to best teach the newly approved curriculum.

The model we are using has been designed, adapted and maintained by the Rohingya community over the years in the original makeshift camp. The new Learning Centres will run using the same approach and currently they are in the process of forming School Management Committees (SMCs) and Child Councils.

SMCs meet quarterly to discuss the challenges and successes associated with the Centres, as well as issues that are relevant to the local communities. Like the WASH Committees, the SMCs are also charged with the protection and upkeep of the Centres.

Child Councils are attached to each Centre and enable students to have a voice and to represent the views and experiences of their

friends. They are encouraged to express themselves within this forum, in the wider community and through the regular creation of their own newsletter.

The recent escalation of the refugee crisis has also placed an enormous burden on host communities. The gaps in education facing slum dwelling children puts them at increasing risk of being left behind by the mainstream school system. We will be continuing our support for **18 Classrooms** in Cox's Bazar, which already cater for a high proportion of Rohingya children.

We anticipate these may host many more newly arrived Rohingya refugee children as they move on from the camps and further into Bangladesh. Consequently, we have also identified two Rohingya enclave communities near Chittagong where children are cut off from education. Here, either side of the river, we will be establishing **10 classrooms** using the same model as in Kutupalong and Cox's Bazar.

Over the years we have observed a pattern of refugees moving inland from the border areas. To cater for this eventuality, the Centres in the camp have been built as semi-permanent structures to enable flexibility, with strong concrete foundations to ensure durability against the rains.