

Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh: Save the Children Preparing for Dire Impact of Monsoon Rains in Camps; Continuing Nonstop Aid to Children May 15, 2018

“These first rains signal even harder times ahead for Rohingya families who fled brutal violence in Myanmar. Not only are they facing grim conditions in overcrowded camps, but now they have to worry about dangerous storms, heavy rains and the risk of flooding and landslides, as well as an increased likelihood of outbreaks of disease.”

--Daphnee Cook, Save the Children's media and communications manager in Cox's Bazar District

The Emergency

The fears of aid agencies like Save the Children and others providing lifesaving relief to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh may soon be reality. The region's intense monsoon rains are starting in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar District, where some 905,000 refugee children and adults live in crude bamboo and plastic shelters in overcrowded and unsanitary camps built on highly unstable, deforested hillsides and bare ground.

Across the camps, pounding rains and floods are expected to collapse shelters and spread contamination and diseases from overflowing latrines. Water and mud will hamper aid deliveries on which refugees depend for food and other essentials. Children risk being separated from their families when they move about in search of safer places and shelters. What was already a children's emergency is now growing worse, as children's survival is a day-to-day proposition.

The United Nations is predicting that up to one-third of the Kutapalong Camp, the main refugee camp for some 623,000 Rohingya, could be under water.



A young girl stands outside her family's shelter in a camp in Cox's Bazar. She is among the many Rohingya refugee children who will be at increased risk when the monsoon season begins in Bangladesh.

Photo: GMB Akash/Panos Pictures/Save the Children

The annual six-month monsoon season is expected to dump up to 9 feet of water on Cox's Bazar District and the overcrowded camps that have been carved out of the jungle. There is also a one-in-four chance of a strong cyclone striking the district. The odds of a tropical storm, which would also wreak havoc, are greater than one in three.

Save the Children is preparing for the chaos that the monsoon season is likely to bring, even as we continue working nonstop to help meet Rohingya children and families' urgent needs for food, clean water, shelter, medical care and basic hygiene.

Your flexible funding will help us address urgent needs across the camps now and as conditions

deteriorate, which will lead to even greater suffering and risks to children. Our teams are closely monitoring conditions in camps in Cox's Bazar and are prepared to react immediately using your support.

Our Humanitarian Mission

We are working around the clock in Cox's Bazar to alleviate urgent needs. Since our expanded relief mission began in late August 2017, we have reached 661,400 children and adults.

Given the expected dire consequences of the monsoon and cyclone seasons, our focus today is two-fold: preparing for the "disaster within a disaster" that will leave children in danger, while continuing to deliver humanitarian relief throughout the camps and informal settlements.

Monsoon Preparations

We recognized the dangers that the monsoon poses to refugees months ago, and have worked alongside the Government of Bangladesh and our partners to ramp up emergency preparedness.

We pre-positioned shelter and hygiene kits, medical supplies, food and materials for our child protection and education work. We upgraded and strengthened our health posts and child friendly spaces. We improved critical infrastructure like drains and bridges, reinforced landslide-prone hillsides with sandbags and helped communities develop cyclone preparedness plans to make sure people can react effectively once a cyclone warning is given.

We also distributed messages to children and families to better prepare them for the monsoon season.

Lastly, our national staff developed an action plan to identify the key actions they will take within the first 72 hours when conditions in camps rapidly deteriorate.

Our top priority now is to save lives, protect shelters and vital infrastructure and limit interruptions to vital programs and services.



One of our staff carries a carton of ready-to-use therapeutic food. We provide packets of fortified, high-energy food to malnourished Rohingya children.
Photo: Joan Marie del Mundo/Save the Children

Ongoing Relief for Children Emergency Health

Many refugees are in poor health. Crowded conditions in camps and poor water and sanitation create ideal conditions for disease outbreaks.

Our 9 health posts provide primary health care services. The posts together see around 1,000 people daily. Each has 12 highly trained staff, including a doctor, paramedics and a midwife. We are also nearing completion of a 20-bed primary care center to provide 24/7 in-patient care.

Food Aid

Virtually all Rohingya refugees depend on food aid.

We are a lead partner of the World Food Program and distribute food to almost 600,000 Rohingya on a regular basis, providing families with items like rice, lentils and oils.

Nutrition

Malnutrition levels remain extremely worrying, especially for young children. Assessments continue to show that nearly one in six children under age 5 suffers from acute malnutrition.

We have outpatient nutrition services integrated into our health clinics to screen and treat malnourished children and pregnant and lactating women. Our

nutrition team also runs “mother-baby” areas to educate mothers on safe and appropriate feeding practices for their youngest children. We also provide nutritious food to the most vulnerable children and mothers.

Shelter and other Non-food Aid

Most Rohingya families live under plastic sheets and bamboo poles.

Over 30,000 families have received our shelter kits. As the monsoon seasons bears down, we have also provided 4,100 shelter upgrade kits to those whose shelters are most in danger of collapse.

Water and Sanitation

Water and sanitary services cannot keep up with demand. A recent World Health Organization survey found that that over 75 percent of water sources and household containers tested positive for E.coli bacteria.

In the initial phase of our response, we provided 27,300 hygiene kits to families. We have constructed over 550 latrines and over 50 wells. We organized and trained 16 water and sanitary committees.

Protecting Children from Harm

Many children are traumatized and saw things that no child should ever see. Parents have told us their children are afraid that they will be attacked again. Children who are unaccompanied are at grave risk of exploitation.

Our trained team identifies children who are alone, supports family tracing and reunification and arranges for foster care for unaccompanied children. We have safe spaces in the camps where unaccompanied children can receive 24-hour protection while attempts are made to find family members. We run over 80 child-friendly spaces and 10 “girl-friendly” spaces, where children can play, receive emotional support and feel a sense of normalcy. To date, 45,500 children have benefited.

Emergency Education

While the Bangladesh government does not support formal education for Rohingya children, it does allow nonformal learning activities.

Over 11,000 children attend activities at our 111 temporary learning centers. These centers run three

shifts per day to accommodate all children who are eager to learn. Aid agencies agree, however, that all sturdy spaces like these in camps will be re-purposed as emergency shelters as needed, which will disrupt children’s education.

Why Save the Children?

Save the Children has worked in Bangladesh since 1970. We are a leading humanitarian organization for children there, with expertly trained staff and proven programs to respond to emergencies. We now have over 1,600 staff and volunteers supporting our programs in child protection, access to education, health and nutrition, water and sanitation services, as well as distributions of shelter and food items.

Here are some of the other ways that differentiate Save the Children from others responding to this crisis:

- We integrate activities across programs to maximize results. For example, our response to a recent diphtheria outbreak included activities built into our health, nutrition, education and child protection programs.
- Save the Children and UNICEF co-lead the education “cluster” of responding agencies, which ensures that all agencies are providing the same level of services to children and there is no duplication of work.
- We are viewed by others as a leader in addressing malnutrition among very young children. This included launching our first-ever pilot project in an emergency to address malnutrition among infants.
- Our infrastructure team is seen as leading in the design and construction of facilities such as temporary learning centers to ensure they are built as well as possible within government restrictions on the permanency of construction.

Ten percent of your generous gift goes to helping our emergency teams prepare for and provide critical assistance when and where children need us the most.