

# Supporting the Rohingya Refugee Response

Monitoring Report — Phase 1  
March 2018



As a member of the UN Standby Partnership, **RedR Australia** would like to acknowledge our United Nations partners:

**RedR Australia's** support to the Rohingya crisis is funded by the Australian Government through the *Australia Assists* program.



Australian Government  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



## Contents

1.	<b>Introduction</b>	3
1.1	Summary of findings to date	3
2.	<b>Current humanitarian situation</b>	4
3.	<b>RedR Australia in Bangladesh</b>	5
4.	<b>Critical gaps for the overall response</b>	7
5.	<b>Critical gaps for RedR's existing partners</b>	8
6.	<b>Critical gaps for RedR's prospective partners</b>	10
7.	<b>Significant RedR deployment outcomes</b>	12
7.1	Strengthening coordination	12
7.2	Engineering life-saving solutions	13
7.3	Prioritising protection	14
8.	<b>Evidence of localisation in action</b>	16
9.	<b>The value of RedR through Australia Assists</b>	18
10.	<b>Deployment and partnership challenges</b>	20
11.	<b>RedR's management and support</b>	22
Annex 1:	<b>Interview list</b>	23

### Support to the Rohingya Refugee Response in Bangladesh



**14 Deployments**  
since September 2017



**To 7 UN**  
Agency Partners



**Representing 63 months**  
of expert humanitarian support

## 1. Introduction

This monitoring report is a point-in-time reflection of **RedR Australia's** contribution to the first phase of the Rohingya refugee response in Bangladesh, through the Australian Government-funded **Australia Assists** program. This work is part of RedR's ongoing efforts to understand the impact of our humanitarian deployments (including barriers to impact), to be accountable for the resources expended to support these deployments, and to learn from the challenges and opportunities they present. The report also outlines identifies training and capacity building opportunities.

Given the large-scale nature of the humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh and the harsh weather conditions forecasted for the coming months, this monitoring has been timely and has enabled RedR to understand how the crisis is likely to unfold so that we can best support our partners on the ground.

### 1.1 Summary of findings to date

Monitoring undertaken in January and February 2018 found that **RedR Australia** deployees made an important contribution to the capacity of our UN partners to respond to the Rohingya refugee crisis in the initial months. For some weeks during this period, RedR deployees were the only staff member with technical capacity in their field within the agency, which points to the critical nature of their roles. The contribution of RedR deployees has extended beyond the UN agencies themselves though, with many instances of deployees' mentoring national and local responders in the course of their work and consistently modelling good humanitarian practice.

RedR staff conducted 46 interviews in Bangladesh to determine our contribution and lessons learned to date; diverse voices captured include those of the deployees themselves, government representatives, UN partners and a range of international, national and local NGOs. These voices collectively revealed that **RedR deployees have strengthened coordination, provided life-saving engineering solutions for the physical camp environment and improved protection mechanisms and practice.** Interviews also routinely revealed many instances of deployees pushing for **greater inclusion and participation (and in some cases increased leadership)** of the affected population in general, and of extremely vulnerable groups or individuals.

In terms of RedR's approach, monitoring participants **commended RedR's decision to deploy experts for longer than the traditional three month surge period;** more than half of RedR's deployments to Bangladesh have lasted six months. This was repeatedly cited as a strength of the program, particularly when compared to other agencies that have deployed international staff for weeks at a time and with regular turnover. Significant operational restrictions placed on NGOs by the national government have also increased pressure on the UN system to provide life-saving assistance, meaning that RedR's ability to rapidly deploy to the UN has been highly sought after.

The monitoring visit identified **challenges related to the sheer scale of the crisis in those first months and the pressure on both national and international systems to adequately respond,** resulting in exhaustive days for all involved in the response. Other challenges included lack of access to UN agency resources and systems for some deployees which limited their ability to be effective, and a need to **improve UN staff and RedR deployee understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all parties** for both the UN Standby Partnership and the newly launched *Australia Assists* program. For the latter, RedR Australia is currently developing a communications resource for all program parties to immediately address this finding.

Given **RedR Australia's** well-regarded capacity for humanitarian training across the disaster cycle and a range of technical sectors, this initial monitoring was also critical to identify overall capacity gaps for the response so that tailored, context-specific training can be developed and co-delivered with partners throughout 2018. Interviews with representatives working at all levels of the response indicated a **widespread need for training in many sectors and thematic areas, but most commonly in early warning, disaster preparedness, humanitarian principles and standards, cash programming, WASH and protection.** RedR training for the Rohingya refugee response will be at the request of local, national and international actors on the ground and will be designed with the principles of *localisation of humanitarian action* firmly in mind.



## 2. Current humanitarian situation

The Rohingya refugee response is one of the most complex and fast-growing crises in the region. Violence in Rakhine State in Myanmar has driven an estimated 688,000 Rohingya refugees<sup>1</sup> into the region near the coastal city of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, since 25 August 2017, adding to the more than 200,000 Rohingya already residing in that area. The speed and scale of the influx has overwhelmed services in existing camps, creating a major humanitarian emergency.<sup>2</sup> As of February 2017, government and aid agencies estimate that **almost one million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance.**

The Rohingya in Cox's Bazar are extremely vulnerable, with many having experienced severe trauma and all living in over-crowded camp conditions. The surrounding host community are often highly vulnerable too, and tensions between the Rohingya and Bangladeshi communities are increasing. The upcoming cyclone and monsoon season will see settlement conditions deteriorate, with the situation constantly moving between *emergency response* and *disaster preparedness within a response*.

All participants in RedR's monitoring expressed deep concern for the wellbeing and protection of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh over the coming months.



## 3. RedR Australia in Bangladesh

RedR Australia has rapidly deployed 14 technical experts to seven UN agency partners through the *Australia Assists* program<sup>3</sup> to support the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh. With more than half of these deployments lasting for six months, this will equate to 63 months of expert humanitarian support to the Rohingya refugee response between September 2017 and April 2018.

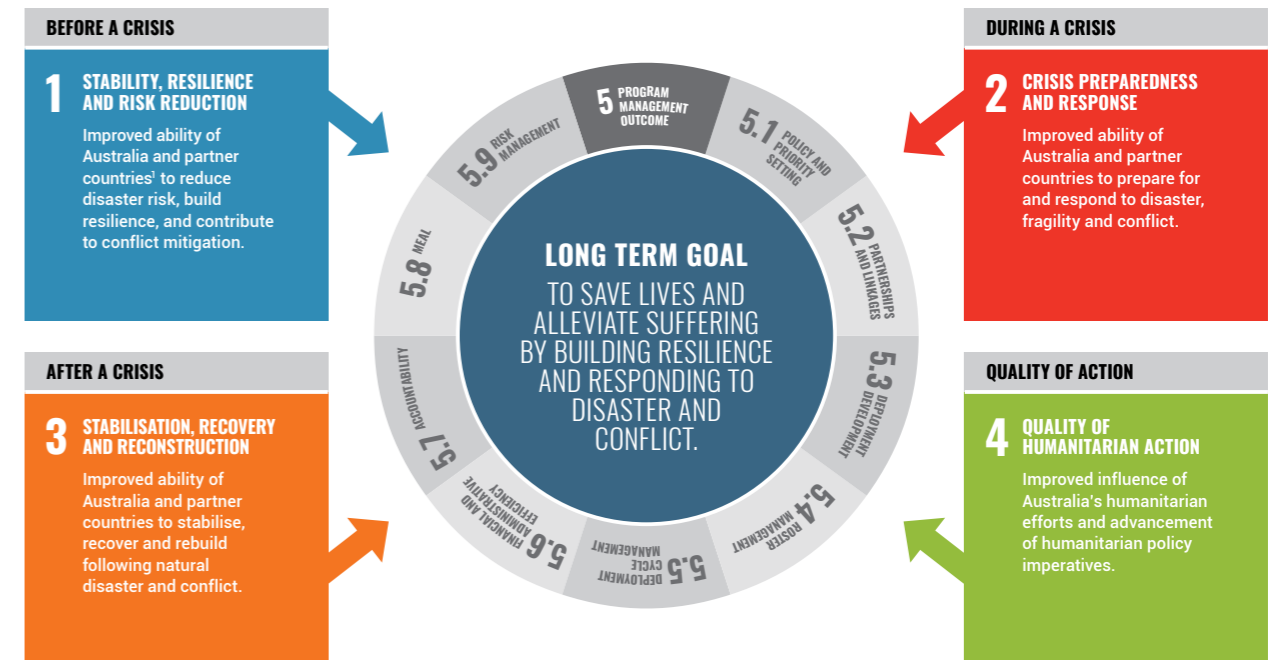
RedR deployments to Bangladesh since September 2017 have been broadly but not exclusively focused in three areas; **coordination, shelter and protection**. RedR's support to these sectors will remain important but our support is likely to evolve and expand over the coming months as the humanitarian situation likewise evolves.

Table 1: Program Overview for *Australia Assists*, funded by the Australian Government and implemented by RedR Australia. RedR deployments to Bangladesh since September 2017 have contributed to End of Program Outcome Areas 2 (Crisis Preparedness and Response) and 4 (Quality of Humanitarian Action), however this will likely expand to other outcome areas as the crisis evolves.

### AUSTRALIA ASSISTS



AUSTRALIA ASSISTS IS AUSTRALIA'S FLAGSHIP CIVILIAN DEPLOYMENT PROGRAM WITH A ROSTER OF 750+ HIGHLY SKILLED PROFESSIONALS WHO WORK WITH OVERSEAS PARTNERS TO BUILD RESILIENCE AND PROVIDE EMERGENCY RELIEF - BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER HUMANITARIAN CRISES.



<sup>1</sup> The reference to 'the ability of Australia' includes acting through partners e.g. through the UN Standby Partnership. 'Partner countries' includes governments, national organisations and communities.





1. UNHCR Bangladesh Operational Update, 5 February 2018: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/61917.pdf>  
 2. When the Rubber Hits the Road: Local Leadership in the First 100 Days of the Rohingya Crisis Response, Humanitarian Advisory Group and NIRAPAD: <http://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/When-the-Rubber-Hits-the-Road-Localisation-Final-Electronic-1.pdf>  
 3. See Table 1 in this report for an overview of the *Australia Assists* program goal and expected end of program outcomes.

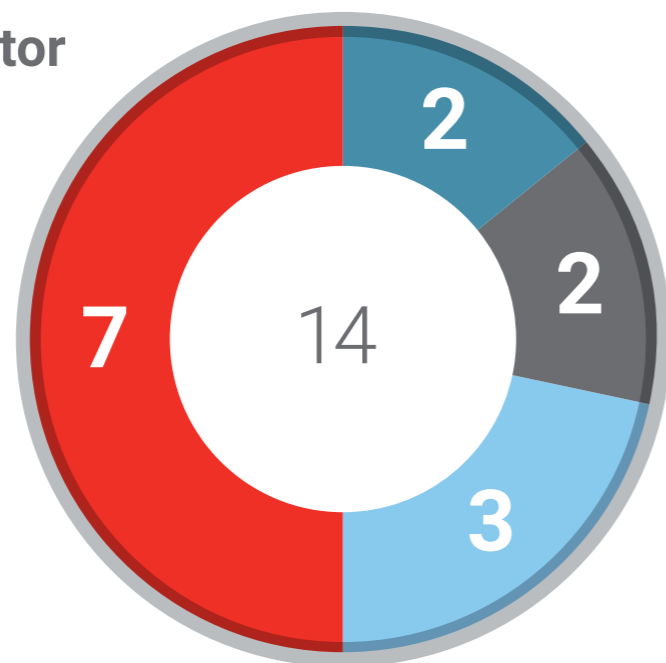
### 3. RedR Australia in Bangladesh

Table 2: RedR Deployments to Bangladesh (Rohingya Refugee Response) from September 2017 to February 2018; sorted by UN agency.

Agency	Position	Sector	Start date	End date	Months
IOM	Site Manager	Coordination	22/10/17	21/01/18	3
IOM	Capacity Building Officer	Coordination	9/02/18	11/08/18	6
OCHA	Humanitarian Affairs Officer	Coordination	25/10/17	25/04/18	6
UNDP	Early Recovery Information Management Officer	Coordination	11/02/18	13/08/18	6
UNHCR	Physical Site Planner	Shelter/Engineering	18/11/17	17/02/18	3
UNHCR	Supply Officer	Logistics	10/10/17	9/01/18	3
UNICEF	Child Protection in Emergencies National Sub Cluster Coordinator	Protection	30/10/17	30/04/18	6
UNICEF	Child Protection in Emergencies Specialist	Protection	13/11/17	14/05/18	6
UNICEF	Humanitarian Performance Monitoring Officer	Coordination	18/12/17	18/06/18	6
WFP	Site Engineer	Shelter/Engineering	4/10/17	3/01/18	3
WFP	Protection Advisor	Protection	29/09/17	4/01/18	3
WFP	Registration Team Leader	Coordination	22/01/18	24/04/18	3
WFP	Food Security Cluster Information Management Officer	Coordination	8/02/18	11/05/18	3
WHO	Health Logistics Officer	Logistics	26/02/18	26/08/18	6

#### Deployments by Sector

-  Coordination
-  Shelter/Engineering
-  Logistics
-  Protection



### 4. Critical gaps for the overall response

Though agencies widely recognise there are significant gaps in terms of the overall quality of the humanitarian response to date, the following points were routinely identified as critical:

#### Lack of available land and a stable physical environment

Though generously offering a parcel of land to the affected population at the onset of the emergency, the land allocated by the Government of Bangladesh is in one of the poorest regions of the country and on land generally not suitable for habitation. Located on very hilly terrain and bordering a local elephant reserve, there is limited usable space for the affected population and for agencies that are trying to reach them with adequate services and resources.

#### Sustainability and international standards

Due to the sudden influx of arrivals from August 2017 and the rapid scale-up of the response, local and international agencies involved in the emergency were forced to put in place stop-gap measures that were suitable only for the initial phase. Due to this and a lack of humanitarian (and in particular, refugee response) experience by many actors on the ground, quality programming, sustainability for the medium to long-term, and adherence to humanitarian principles and international standards has been limited to date.

#### Capacity development and mentoring

Bangladesh has impressive technical capacity for both preparedness and response during natural disasters. Whilst there have been positive steps with regard to the recruitment of local emergency responders for the Rohingya crisis, perhaps more than in many other refugee response contexts, the experience and knowledge of these responders does not always closely align with the nature of the current crisis. As such, greater emphasis should be placed on building the capacity of local actors to enable them to work in a complex emergency whereby the political, humanitarian, refugee, conflict and other dimensions are vastly different to a traditional disaster response.

#### Engagement with the affected population

With both national and international agencies struggling to deliver a comprehensive response due to gaps in their human resourcing, the affected population has largely been excluded from participating in matters that directly relate to their survival and livelihoods. Communication with the Rohingya population has also been limited by cultural factors and by the extent to which they have been denied access to quality education in Myanmar. A rapid assessment conducted by Translators Without Borders<sup>4</sup> in November 2017 provides important context on the language, cultural factors and practices by national and international responders that act as barriers to meaningful engagement with the Rohingya community.



4. Rohingya Zuban: A Translators without Borders Rapid Assessment of Language Barriers in the Cox's Bazar Refugee Response, November 2017, <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/rohingya-zuban-translators-without-borders-rapid-assessment-language-barriers-coxs>

## 5. Critical gaps for RedR's existing partners

There is widespread concern from government, UN agencies and NGOs regarding the monsoon season which will commence in April. Responders predict that even with minimal rains, flooding and landslides will occur in the camps due to the hilly terrain and poor soil quality and many current shelters will not be able to sustain the impact of these weather conditions. Partners often used the phrase 'emergency within an emergency' or 'disaster within a disaster' to describe the upcoming period in the Rohingya refugee settlements.

At the time of writing, agencies and partners have limited human resources to fill all the necessary roles to adequately respond to this crisis. With the approaching weather likely to wash away some parts of the camps, taking with it dwellings, schools, sanitation facilities and other essential services, both human and financial resourcing gaps in the following areas need to be addressed:

### Engineering

Stabilisation of roads, slopes, key infrastructure sites (schools, child friendly spaces, distribution points, storage facilities) and sanitation facilities. According to one RedR deployee, 20% of the topsoil is predicted to erode with the onset of the early rains in April, leaving much of the current infrastructure extremely vulnerable to landslides.

### WASH

Immediate measures are needed for multiple WASH infrastructure sites around the settlements following anticipated heavy rainfalls. The overwhelming majority of latrines are shallow pit latrines and their locations in addition to being at maximum capacity will result in overflowing. Additionally, monitoring interviews revealed that there is currently no effective faecal sludge management (FSM) in place throughout most of the settlements.



Water scarcity is a serious concern as 80% of the camp population currently relies on shallow hand pumps, of which some 30% are predicted to run dry in the coming months.<sup>5</sup> During and after the rainy season it will be vital to have accessible fresh water to counter disease outbreaks that will occur as a result of flooding and general lack of sanitation in the camp.

Water sources and contamination are a significant issue as the majority of pumps are shallow and in close proximity to latrine sites. At the time of writing there were numerous reports of cross-contamination having already occurred.

Other vital gaps to be addressed in the coming months:

**Protection and SGBV** - the current crisis highlights the need for additional protection specialists, capacity development and mentoring for responders, as already vulnerable people are at increased risk due to compounding issues such as camp density, lack of safe spaces, isolation, and limited access to referral mechanisms or support services. Peacebuilding and conflict resolution will be a priority from April onwards, as tensions increase during the monsoon period. Monitoring interviews also revealed that there are currently more than 48,000 pregnant women in the camps, a situation which is likely to have a number of protection-related implications.

**Coordination** - due to the complex coordination structure for this response, more streamlined coordination is required at the sector/cluster level to ensure gaps are addressed, duplication is avoided and the nationally led nature of the response is maintained.

**Support for Extremely Vulnerable Individuals** - whilst some efforts have been made to document and support extremely vulnerable individuals affected in this crisis, the scale of the need has not been met. Lack of effective needs assessment capacity, case management systems and general protection structures are impeding this aspect of the response.

### Key Recommendations For RedR Australia

- Position roster members in key site engineering and WASH roles **across** leading agencies (UNHCR, WFP, IOM, UNICEF) to prepare for and respond to the rain and cyclone season.
  - Through providing support *across* agencies, information sharing and collaboration among partners will be enhanced across the humanitarian operation.
  - Explore partnering with corporate sector partners to come up with engineering solutions.
- Pre-position roster members for key operational protection specialist roles with agencies in frontline protection programming and response.
- Provide ongoing support to IOM and the ISCG in promoting inter-sectoral coordination throughout the response, particularly in enhancing coordination and mapping capacity gaps.
- Maintaining neutrality of coordination and capacity development roles is essential to ensuring effectiveness in what has been deemed a complex and sometimes 'combative' coordination environment. **RedR Australia** deployees have an exceptional reputation in the field and also enjoy a somewhat impartial status as UN Standby Partner deployees, meaning they tend to be less impacted by agency allegiances or traditional mandate battles.
- Support partner agencies with case management and assessment capacity to enable national and local responders in Bangladesh to undertake comprehensive mapping and analysis of the needs of Extremely Vulnerable Individuals, as they relate to a range of sectors.
- Support partner agencies with contingency planning for the movement of refugees, whether by environmental or political circumstances.

<sup>5</sup> Source: RedR monitoring interview with representatives from UNICEF Bangladesh, January 2018.

## 6. Critical gaps for RedR's prospective partners

**RedR Australia** has traditionally supported UN agencies with humanitarian deployments through the UN Standby Partnership but is already broadening that support to other civil society actors. Operational restrictions placed on NGOs by the Government of Bangladesh (as part of a push to lead and maintain control of the response) have, to an extent, limited their ability to both utilise and increase their technical capability, and RedR is well placed to support NGOs with both technical and general humanitarian capacity going forward.

The national government, military and NGOs in the country already have extensive technical capacity and experience that has been developed over decades of responding to natural disasters. Nonetheless, the current Rohingya refugee crisis presents a complex operational context. Factors such as dealing with conflict and displacement, unprecedented refugee flows, multi-agency coordination with international agencies, and the rapid scale-up of programming in a difficult physical environment has challenged both national and international systems.

Through discussions with prospective NGO and UN partners, it was clear that despite the stated position of the government, planning is in place to ensure that humanitarian aid can be provided in the medium to long-term in Bangladesh. With a population of some one million Rohingya in the country and minimal steps being taken to enable the possibility of safe, voluntary repatriation to Myanmar, the crisis will conceivably stretch for many years to come. As such, all response measures thereby require the full engagement of local ministries and NGO actors, whose presence will provide the required sustainability and continuity for what is now widely acknowledged to be a long-term humanitarian crisis.



Critical gaps preventing prospective partners from fully supporting the response include:

### Technical training

Widespread need for minimum standards technical training in WASH, Protection and GBV sectors/clusters.

### Rapid assessments

While able to conduct needs assessment in terms of their human resources capacity, local actors have had limited capacity to carry out rapid assessments for the broader response context.

### Donor relations, and monitoring and evaluation

Being mostly self-reliant and having limited exposure to the wider humanitarian system, local agencies have limited capacity in donor relations, proposal writing, monitoring and evaluation and advocacy for international donors.

### Humanitarian principles and standards

Though well experienced in responding to environmental emergencies and managing other development issues, local bodies have limited understanding and exposure to the humanitarian system and other fundamentals, such as the principle of 'do no harm'.

### Key Recommendations For RedR Australia

- Provide capacity development training in technical sectors such as WASH, protection, GBV and humanitarian standards.
  - Primary focus should be with national and local NGOs who have capacity to maintain response in the medium to long-term. This drive to build capacity of local staff will enhance sustainability for the coming years.
  - Training will ideally be co-designed and delivered by both RedR trainers and Bengali-speaking trainers.

- Provide ToT training to senior technical staff in key national and local NGOs, in order to build their capacity to continue training their staff following the emergency response phase.
- Explore ways to provide mentoring and on-the-job training for local and national NGO staff, whereby their confidence and understanding to perform their roles is maximised by deployees who rotate in and out of agencies/organisations on a flexible basis, and in some cases provide ongoing remote support.
  - Particular focus on mentoring and capacity building for technical areas (WASH, cash programming, child protection, SGBV) and general roles such as donor relations, monitoring and evaluation and accountability to affected populations.



## 7. Significant RedR deployment outcomes

### This monitoring visit should be seen as a point-in-time reflection of the achievements and lessons learned to date for RedR deployments to the Rohingya emergency through Australia Assists.

At the time of monitoring, most deployees were midway through their deployments or had recently extended from three months to six months; two deployees completed a three month deployment and the remaining deployees will complete six months. This is a strength of the current program and demonstrates responsiveness, following requests from our UN partners for longer-term deployments.

As a result of this approach, further monitoring will be required to determine deployment outcomes and impact in Bangladesh, as the current cohort of RedR deployees conclude their work mid-2018 and the second rotation of deployees is in place.

Despite the relatively early phase of this monitoring visit to evidence significant deployment outcomes, there are already compelling examples to share.

**Some deployees have provided life-saving support in the acute 'scale-up' phase of the emergency, while others have established systems and processes and forged strong links between key actors to enable the emergency response to be more effective over time.** Of note, there are multiple examples of deployees being the only technical resource in place for their agency in a particular sector at a given time, which underscores the critical nature of their roles. There is also evidence of deployees making efforts to 'localise' their work despite the operational, time and resource constraints involved with doing this. These examples are outlined in section 8 of this report.

Across the deployments, there are currently **three broad areas** in which RedR deployees are making a vital contribution to the Rohingya response; coordination, shelter and protection.

### 7.1 Strengthening coordination

Coordination is the cornerstone of humanitarian effectiveness and RedR deployees in Bangladesh have demonstrated a unique ability to 'see things others don't see... to use their agency-neutral positions [as Standby Partners] to identify gaps, forge links, connect sectors, push for more

information and encourage good practice', as described by UN colleagues. Interviews with UN agency representatives revealed that deployees have often been dogged in their approach to improving coordination and yet remained sensitive to the cultural and operational context, which can be a difficult balance to strike. Deployees have also demonstrated an impressive ability to be adaptable, consistent and show initiative. Some comments from their UN colleagues capture this theme:

*'[RedR deployee] pays attention to local culture, she understands their perception of us and how this emergency affects locals as well. Her approach is quite soft, she doesn't talk down to people... she's consistent and she listens, so people listen to her.'*

– on RedR's Humanitarian Affairs Officer with OCHA

*'She integrated very well - I didn't see any difference between her and IOM staff and she was able to start working very quickly. Her support has been instrumental. She has had to work very independently, there is constant staff turnover, she had to adjust to our internal systems and she was very proactive in seeking information - she didn't wait to be told what to do. She made the best out of the resources she was given and did more than what was expected. She's always trying to make things happen. She's been great at building networks with the government and partners, which builds our credibility.'*

– on RedR's Site Manager with IOM

In terms of tangible outcomes, one deployee described acting as 'the focal person in the southern settlements and doing advocacy in meetings for the south... because that's kind of the forgotten corner'. She pro-actively developed community engagement initiatives in the camps and pushed for broader participation, particularly from Rohingya women. Another deployee cited an example of having raised a number of concerning issues regarding food distributions, which were actioned soon after by the food security sector and the implementing partner. Deployees in coordination roles also strengthened inter-sectoral service provision and coordination of service providers at field level, much of which was not in place when deployees arrived.

### RedR Deployee's Quality of Life Study - What Does Shelter Actually Mean to People?

Shelter is about so much more than safe physical structures. This is the personal belief of **RedR's Site Planner with UNHCR** and the premise for a Quality of Life Study that he is leading across the largest of the Rohingya refugee settlements, the Kutupalong Makeshift Camp.

The study group has so far interviewed 1300 people using a standard procedure, the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Survey (DASS 42), which is a self-reporting instrument designed to measure these three related negative states of emotion. A follow-up survey will be conducted to determine any change. According to our deployee 'I don't expect that the quality of life of the Rohingya population will have changed much but it will reveal many other important things about their particular relationship to shelter and more broadly the impact of shelter'.

To identify those with a higher quality of life compared to low quality of life, the research group will interview the affected population about the role of shelter. The result of all of this work will be a 'wellness map' for Kutupalong camp, which will be useful for all partners in this response. A similar study was piloted by the deployee in Aceh following the Indian Ocean tsunami and was among the first qualitative studies that revealed women are significantly more affected by disasters than men.

**"This study will show that shelter does a lot more than just protect people. Shelter is so much more than a roof over heads - it's about identity, family, a sense of place, contact with something real during a crisis. Incoming shelter and protection teams will have a quantitative and qualitative basis to go on and I expect we'll see that wellness is related to stability and social connection, among other factors. My hope is that we'll be able to plan future shelters here around the findings".**

– RedR Site Planner with UNHCR

**"We rarely measure the impact of the shelter we produce – why is one better over another? And is it really better for this particular community? Your deployee's study will do this for us".**

– UNHCR Shelter Team representative

### 7.2 Engineering life-saving solutions

The physical environment in which almost one million displaced Rohingya are currently living in Bangladesh can be described as precarious at best, with broad consensus among those we interviewed that the shelter and WASH situation will deteriorate significantly over the coming months as weather conditions worsen. This will coincide with the point at which the refugee population's natural coping mechanisms following months of trauma and displacement are likely to be exhausted. 'The situation here is going to get worse before it gets better' was a common refrain during monitoring interviews. Sufficient land is not available to accommodate such a large and sudden influx of people, nor is the allocated land itself stable, a situation which has been exacerbated by the widespread terracing of shelters and inadequate

drainage systems. RedR deployees, UN and NGO actors agree this is likely to cause 'a disaster within a disaster' from April 2018 onwards.

As a result of the extensive environmental challenges within the camps, RedR deployees have been instrumental in providing time-critical, practical and innovative solutions in engineering and site planning, in some cases facilitating life-saving humanitarian assistance to thousands of people. As is always the case with the most effective deployments, it is the mix of high-level technical capacity, diverse emergency experience and a committed, collaborative approach that has enabled RedR deployees to generate compelling examples of their work making a real difference to the physical camp environment. Some examples of both outcomes and approach are outlined here:





In addition to his technical skills, **RedR's Physical Site Planner with UNHCR** brought vital resources with him on deployment, including a drone, soil sampling equipment, a 360-degree camera and innovative software. As a result, he was able to produce and share mapping that would not otherwise have been available. For example, he undertook comprehensive soil sampling across all the Rohingya population sites which no other sector had completed. This soil testing revealed that the majority of land is not suitable for habitation. These results, in addition to other mapping he produced, have been an invaluable resource and shared with the health, security, WASH, protection and camp management sectors. According to his supervisor, *'The innovation and new ideas he brings is something we haven't been able to do for years. He is a great structural and geotechnical engineer and a serious addition to the team. He's leading UNHCR's thinking on landslides. People take him seriously - when he presents, people listen. He acts as our principal engineer and he's got a reputation for being a heavy lifter here.'*

A **RedR Site Engineer with WFP** supervised the construction of a 28 metre low-water bridge over the Bakkhali River to enable WFP to open new food distribution points and to enable humanitarian access to a population that had ostensibly been cut off. While intended as a short-term emergency measure, the bridge provided life-saving assistance to thousands of families on the other side of the river. Women and children had previously been forced to walk several kilometres carrying 25 kilograms of rice, oil and lentils. RedR's deployee stated: *"The food alone is half their body weight. Sometimes it might be a 10 year old child trying to carry this back to the family."* There were considerable protection gains as a result of the bridge too, as food collectors had previously needed to leave vulnerable young children at their makeshift shelter and the trek for food was placing women and girls at risk of gender-based violence.

The deployee's supervisor and colleagues commented on the critical nature of his role and the particular strengths of his approach:

*'He was the sole engineering person in WFP for months. Without him we would have struggled time*

*and time again, and we wouldn't have had access to the other part of the camp. His network is very good and that's something you don't always see in engineers. He's committed and encourages good spirit - you need someone like that in an emergency. He's collaborative and always looking for opportunities and synergies between agencies.'*

- WFP supervisor

*'He's very technically capable. At the moment he's the only one at his level in the field. He's super practical and committed - he's here [in the camp] all day, every day. He makes it easy to coordinate and co-operate across our agencies.'*

- UNHCR representative

### 7.3 Prioritising protection

The overall situation in the camps was variously described by RedR's partners as a 'major protection crisis'. Protection is a key objective of the *Australia Assists* program and an important priority for RedR. As such, RedR has prioritised requests from our UN partners to strengthen protection with as many of our partner agencies as possible. This approach has seen valuable gains not only at the level of individual agencies, but across agencies and sectors as well. Our protection deployees described the value of having other RedR protection deployees working in different UN agencies; this reduced the traditional information and coordination 'silos' that exist between agencies, particularly in sudden-onset emergencies. The monitoring also revealed the added value of having RedR Protection Specialists in place for deployees from other sectors to draw on. To strengthen our approach, RedR is looking to extend our protection support to NGO and government actors where possible, to ensure we are doing our best to promote good, inclusive practice and a nationally led response.

Below are illustrative examples of significant protection outcomes of the first rotation of RedR deployments to the Rohingya refugee response in Bangladesh:

A **RedR Protection Advisor with WFP** has been instrumental in **streamlining protection in all operational and functional areas of WFP's operation**. She built staff capacity, particularly of

#### Pushing for Inclusion and Local Leadership

*She has been extremely gender-sensitive in the course of her work and has made sure it is mainstreamed in all of IOM's site planning. She played a meaningful role in focus group discussions by really pushing for female representation and actively trying to build female leadership in those discussions. She has done the same for people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, inviting them to bring their issues and challenges to the table.*

- IOM representative on a RedR Site Manager, deployed to IOM Bangladesh for three months.

WFP's gender and protection focal point at Dhaka level and made concerted efforts to communicate with partners and the affected population. Among a raft of other outcomes, she improved WFP's Complaints and Feedback Mechanism (CFM) and according to her supervisor *'the sheer number of calls now received daily [through the CFM] is indicative of an effective system'.*

*'I have personally observed the protection measures being adopted by our cooperating partners at food distribution points as a result of her efforts. Without a doubt, WFP has been one of the frontrunners in this life-saving humanitarian response and without her sufficiently addressing protection concerns we would have encountered significant bottlenecks in our operation'.*

- WFP supervisor

In terms of our deployee's approach, WFP's Emergency Coordinator said:

*"We need that protection lens. She knows what should be happening, she knows WFP well and she will keep on and on to me, in the nicest possible way, to make things work. She doesn't let go and that is commendable. And her training is where she's so strong - she is training staff all the time, bringing people with her."*

- The World Food Programme's Emergency Coordinator in Bangladesh, on a RedR Protection Specialist, deployed for six months

On two occasions, deployees were requested to **step up into team leader positions to fill emergency management and coordination gaps**. Whilst this is unusual for Standby Personnel (UN staff should generally occupy these positions), as a short-term measure it does point to the trust that

UN management staff have in RedR deployees and their ability to lead a diverse, often highly stressed team. This gave deployees an opportunity to challenge themselves and extend their professional capabilities; one deployee described this as the most personally rewarding aspect of her deployment to date. UN representatives for both deployees commended the expertise, commitment and stability they brought to these positions.

A **RedR Child Protection Cluster Coordinator** based in Dhaka **strengthened coordination at the national level**, creating essential 4W<sup>6</sup> mapping for child protection to inform national planning. She then co-developed the 2018 National Child Protection Cluster Emergency Preparedness and Response Workplan, which required ongoing engagement with government, GBV Cluster and Child Protection Cluster partners to develop joint plans for capacity building and coordination in the most disaster prone areas of Bangladesh. To ensure sustainability of her work as a Standby Partner deployee, she developed ToT for Child Protection in Emergencies (delivery of trainings in disaster affected areas) and developed a concept note for Child Protection Cluster planning and funding, which included a two-year National Coordinator position to replace the deployee. This work has brought coherence and stability to national systems and processes and enhanced visibility of critical child protection issues, both across Bangladesh and for the Rohingya response.

6. Knowing Who is doing What, Where and When (developing a '4W') for clusters or sectors is a critical element to help coordination of relief efforts during any humanitarian crisis. Such information can help to alleviate duplication, identify gaps, better inform decision-makers and allow everyone to ask better questions for the response. Source: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/nepal/article/whos-doing-what-where-and-when-4w>

## 8. Evidence of localisation in action

**RedR deployees are well trained to look for opportunities to mentor, build local capacity, push for more inclusive participation and create sustainable solutions in their work, even in a major humanitarian crisis. And yet, this is often inherently difficult.**

The Rohingya response is being led by the Government of Bangladesh, which is globally renowned for its capacity to prepare for and respond to natural disasters. As a result, the country has impressive technical expertise available. Monitoring interviews routinely revealed, however, that significant gaps exist at the national and local level in humanitarian action across the sectors (principles, practice and standards), and in refugee response. This strengths-based context has provided fertile ground for experience sharing and capacity building, enabling RedR to contribute to a more sustainable (and somewhat more localised) response.

RedR's monitoring revealed that **deployees have made concerted efforts to engage meaningfully with the Bangladesh government and army, for example, and gone to great lengths to share good practice with their colleagues and other local responders.** Alongside government and national actors, the engagement of the affected population and host community in humanitarian activities is key to localisation. RedR deployees have pushed initiatives that involve both, for example engaging Rohingya and Bangladeshi community members in earthworks preparations and market-generation activities in the settlements. Another deployee described stepping in to chair a coordination meeting and realising that local NGO representatives were not given the opportunity to speak at these meetings. She prioritised a round-the-table reflection from each participant from each participant that enabled them to share their activities and challenges, which generated their activities and challenges, which generated applause following the meeting. A small but illustrative gesture.



The following interview excerpts exemplify other RedR deployees' efforts to contribute to localisation:

*'For IOM staff, she contributed by mentoring them on a daily basis. She has also been very open and proactive in seeking information on what training is available for her team and gone out of her way to link them to that training.'*

*'She hasn't built government capacity as such, but has contributed by advocating on matters to mitigate and prevent harm. She has really played a role in mitigating negative practice and she's done that with the selection of community leaders too. She is working directly with the army and with the District Commissioner, constantly engaging with them, attending their meetings and bringing issues to their attention.'*

- IOM representative on RedR's Site Planner, deployed to Cox's Bazar for three months.

Following this, the deployee herself expands on both her work and her approach:

*'With the government I've reached out to them and make myself available to them and really keep the communication lines open. So they feel comfortable to come to me with their concerns. Building up that relationship, even despite the constant changeover with the army, has been really important. Once, I was very happy to hear a military representative say of his own accord 'I think we need more female community leaders'.*

*'With my national colleagues, I've spent a lot of time sitting with them, explaining structure, processes, developing work plans, giving them clear direction and responsibilities and mentoring. I've been slowly giving them more responsibility and more space to take on roles as focal points with the army, for instance.'*

- RedR Site Planner with IOM Bangladesh

*'Having [RedR deployee] dedicated to protection here made a platform for us to work from. In a sense, she built all the roads and gave us access so that we can walk them ourselves - that's been of enormous value.'*

*From working with her I have learned two things. Firstly, her approach is to say at every level, things need to be perfect, we need to do things properly and not miss things. She's very thorough. Secondly, I learned how to make my work more sustainable. And I may not always do things exactly as she does but I have learned so much.'*

- WFP's Gender and Protection Focal Point, on RedR's Protection Advisor with WFP, deployed for six months.



## 9. The value of RedR through Australia Assists

### Adding value to the Australian response

The monitoring visit revealed that RedR deployees are enhancing the overall Australian response to the Rohingya emergency by sharing information with Australian Government representatives and other Australian humanitarian actors; this has been critical given the constantly evolving nature of the crisis. DFAT staff also commented on the value of the RedR Regional Coordinator's presence in Bangladesh, which was extremely helpful via the delivery of timely updates on the work deployees were doing on the ground and the overall operational context.

There was also consensus among deployees, UN agency representatives and DFAT staff that having multiple RedR deployees embedded in different UN agencies and working across different sectors has enhanced collaboration and information sharing. This was often cited as a unique strength of

*Australia Assists* in Bangladesh and is bringing increased visibility to Australia's response. One deployee explained: *'We listen to each other more instinctively and find ways to be more supportive because they're another RedR deployee and we have that connection already. This [RedR team deployment] approach mitigates the tensions that inherently exist between UN agencies, which makes for a more collaborative response.'*

The early success of this cross-agency, cross-sector approach will continue to be monitored by RedR as the response progresses throughout 2018.

### Adding value to the UN response

Through *Australia Assists*, RedR deployees are supporting the UN to bring life-saving assistance and protection to almost one million displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh. They are also making a substantial contribution to humanitarian coordination, which is the cornerstone of an effective emergency response and undoubtedly saves lives.



Clear themes emerged during interviews regarding the unique value that deployees bring to this emergency and the strengths of the UN Standby Partnership more broadly. One IOM representative bluntly stated: *'We had no alternative expertise available for this response - it's very hard to have that high level capacity to plug immediate gaps. We need Standby Partners.'*

Of note, interviews revealed that RedR deployees generally occupy a neutral space within agencies and are largely unencumbered by head office reporting lines, agency politics and 'mandate battles'. The value of this cannot be overstated; it is a significant enabling factor for deployments across all sectors but is perhaps most obviously seen in coordination, which relies heavily on information gathering, sharing and collaboration.

Deployees bring a wealth of experience from a range of humanitarian contexts and offer an external perspective on their agency's response efforts. When this is combined with existing local knowledge and expertise, the result can be greater than the sum of its parts. A UNHCR representative supports this idea:

*'Bringing together people with experience from a range of contexts... it really adds value. It's good to have people from outside of UNHCR and it's really important for us to have partners that promote sharing of innovation and good practice - this all has a very positive effect on the emergency response.'*

### Adding value through RedR's approach

UN agency representatives commented that **RedR Australia** enjoys an excellent reputation, largely on account of our people: technically sound, highly experienced, personally committed, deployed at speed and well supported in the field. Some particular aspects of RedR's approach were emphasised and appreciated during interviews, including the recent move to more six-month deployments, which *'really changes how RedR is viewed in terms of responsiveness and dedication'*. RedR's close monitoring of deployments in Bangladesh - both of deployees themselves and the UN receiving agency - was also a consistent theme during interviews, with a number of agency representatives citing this as practice to encourage for all Standby Partners and *'an investment that actually makes a big difference'*.

Our UN partners also remarked that RedR deployees often have previous experience working in specific agencies; requesting UN agencies look for this as it takes considerable time to learn the nuances of each agency's operations, approach and systems. A WFP representative commented: *'Your deployees are high quality - they've been through the training and they're skilled. Most of all, what I want is someone who is practical and who knows WFP... the RedR deployees we have now have got this.'*



## 10. Deployment and partnership challenges

### Lack of physical and human resources

As with all major humanitarian crises, a critical lack of resources can define the early phase of the response. Some deployees felt that they have had sufficient physical resources to undertake their work, while others have not, pointing to a lack of access to vehicles, working spaces, laptops, electricity and internet – the latter of which has significant implications for data management, communication and coordination across all of the sectors. Lack of agency resources during the day has meant that some deployees are often undertaking many hours of work at night, in addition to regularly working seven-day weeks without respite.

Deployees agreed that lack of consistent management supervision and UN agency staff constantly changing without handover has a detrimental effect on their work and the emergency response overall. Change of management staff in particular results in operational inconsistencies and constantly shifting priorities. According to one RedR deployee:

***‘Everyone has a different idea of what’s important right now, but it’s hard when everything is really important. Our priorities are not defined in terms of strategy and we don’t have time to do it. We’re working non-stop.’***

### Failure to fully integrate deployees into UN systems

A number of UN agency representatives pointed to the UN system’s tendency to over-rely on Standby Partners for emergencies of this scale, citing one WASH sector team comprised entirely of SBP deployees, all of whom will leave the response by March. This is problematic in itself and requires requesting agencies to understand that Standby support is time-bound and temporary. However, it becomes more problematic when deployees are not quickly and fully integrated into UN systems during the response, with one agency representative stating: *‘It’s a failing on the UN side when Standby Partners aren’t fully integrated into our systems... they should be treated as staff’*. A UNHCR representative outlined the significant everyday challenges this can cause:

**“You always say amen to [capacity building of national staff] but it’s really hard to do it in a fast-paced response. Communication is an issue - what we mean is not what they mean. Often they can’t make decisions and there’s no time to train them to do it. I would love to spend time on training here. None of this is a cultural thing either, it’s inherent in people in general. Internationals don’t want to learn in this environment so it’s not just the national staff - it’s all of us.”**

- RedR Australia Shelter Expert, deployed to UNHCR Bangladesh for six months

*‘From a supply perspective, the major limitation is that [deployees] don’t have access to the warehouse database system. This would make a big difference. How do they monitor something they don’t have access to? We’re discussing this with the Supply Section in our HQ. It’s something we’re working on and it will happen but it will take time.’*

### Lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities under the UN Standby Partnership

UN agency staff also pointed to some misunderstanding of the UN Standby Partnership, particularly with regard to the roles and responsibilities of deployees and hosting agencies, suggesting that both UN HQs and Standby Partners *‘need to be more proactive about giving information on the rights and obligations of SBP deployees... it’s time consuming to figure it out in-country, no one has time, and it can sour the relationship between the deployee and the agency.’*

### RedR deployee perspective: the challenges of building capacity during a large-scale emergency response

As the global imperative to localise humanitarian action increases, the role of international humanitarian actors will continue to shift - with a core task being capacity building of national actors. Whilst this monitoring visit found considerable evidence of RedR deployees taking a proactive approach to ‘localising’ their work and ensuring it is as sustainable as possible (see section 8 of this report), deployees also reported that the large-scale nature of the crisis has meant that there is simply not enough time, resources or people to do it well. One RedR deployee commented:

*‘You always say amen to [capacity building of national staff] but it’s really hard to do it in a fast-paced response. Communication is an issue - what we mean is not what they mean. Often they can’t make decisions and there’s no time to train them to do it. I would love to spend time on training here. None of this is a cultural thing either, it’s inherent in people in general. Internationals don’t want to learn in this environment so it’s not just the national staff - it’s all of us.’*

### National staff perspective: the challenges of working with internationals

During this monitoring visit, RedR sought comment from local humanitarian actors regarding their experience of working with both RedR deployees and international staff more generally for this emergency response. One member of staff from a UN agency articulated the practical challenges that she and her fellow Bangladeshi colleagues are encountering in their daily work. She cited the fact that her agency has increased from 30 to 142 staff members within a matter of months, all of whom represent a diverse range of nationalities and speak many languages. She commented that this requires her to constantly adapt to the different communication styles, working styles and expectations of many cultures, which can be exhausting in what are already very difficult working circumstances. She says:

*‘We’re adapting in this way every day, multiple times a day, and that can be very difficult - it’s hard for us to know what to do for a particular culture. This emergency is now very large and nobody knows anybody at [UN agency]. I have a good relationship with [RedR deployee] but the dynamic has changed with this emergency... we’re just trying to keep up.’*

The UN staff member keenly pointed out that this need for constant adaptation and understanding is not, however, one-sided. She advised international staff to show sensitivity and open-mindedness towards Bangladeshi and Rohingya culture, particularly with regard to gender and protection issues. She outlines a practical example here:

*‘Gender and protection can be considered women’s issues in some areas and this is a male-dominated community, even among humanitarian workers in [UN agency] and there are daily challenges with this. For example, with food distributions, people are very hungry and they want to do things quickly, so protection can sometimes be seen as slowing the emergency operation down. That’s a big challenge and we need to be sensitive to these issues. For us here in Bangladesh, sometimes the international staff say ‘this is what needs to happen’ but what is the cultural context first? What do the beneficiaries want? We also need to ask that question, which can slow things down even more.’*

## 11. RedR's management and support

### General support

On the whole, deployees reported feeling well supported by RedR [*I feel that I can raise or escalate issues if and when I need to, with both my agency and RedR*] however they also felt that at times during the initial days of the emergency response, RedR and DFAT expectations were unclear and demands on deployee time were excessive. Most deployees reported feeling self-reliant on deployment with little need for enhanced support from RedR although they appreciated the consistency and availability of support.

### Piloted Regional Coordinator position

There was a lack of clarity regarding the RedR Regional Coordinator's role in Bangladesh; most deployees questioned whether it was intended to be an outward-looking strategic position for RedR or an additional layer of deployee management and supervision. Overall, this ambiguity caused frustration although some deployees reported that RedR's in-country presence added value in terms of general support and RedR's understanding of the fast-moving humanitarian context. Two deployees suggested that the Terms of Reference for the Regional Coordinator could have been circulated among deployees as this position was an unusual in-country set-up for RedR.

### The commencement of the Australia Assists program

Deployees also reported a lack of understanding regarding *Australia Assists* and requested further explanation of the implications and expectations of the new program. To clarify the way forward, deployees suggested RedR could provide a resource to deployees and program partners to outline the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved.

### Knowledge sharing on deployment

One deployee commented that she would like to see more real-time knowledge and insights shared among RedR deployees working on the Rohingya refugee response and queried how RedR may be able to better facilitate this in the second phase of the response.



This report was produced by Kylie Harrington, with assistance from Maria Beltran; RedR Australia.

## Annex 1: Interview list

Interviews conducted by RedR Australia in Dhaka and Cox's Bazar; January and February 2018.

Organisation/Agency	Representative	Position
Australian High Commission	Romena Parven Sifat Reza Jane Hardy Sally Anne Vincent	Program Manager, Development Cooperation Program Officer Second Secretary Deputy Head of Mission
BRAC International	Shashanka Saadi Hasibul Mannan Asif Kashem Sharhriar Islam	Head of Emergency Response Programme Senior Programme Specialist, Emergency Response Programme Head Partnerships and Donor Liaison Senior Programme Manager, Development Cooperation Australian High Commission
CARE Bangladesh	Zia Chowdhury Kaiser Revje Israt Shaila A K M Fazlul Hoque Md. Mahbubur Rahman	Country Director Director HR Manager Grants & Contracts Coordinator Senior Team Leader (Cox's Bazar Field Office)
CBM Bangladesh	Mohamed Shahnawaz Qureshi Ashutosh Dey	Country Director Regional Emergency and Disaster Risk Management Coordinator, South Asia
COAST	Rezaul Karim Chowdhury	Executive Director
Danish Refugee Council	Tess Elias	Emergency Team Leader
Handicap International / Humanity and Inclusion	Sharmin Khan Reiza Dejito	Deputy Country Director Country Director
Inter-Sector Coordination Group	Margo Barrs Sumbul Rizvi	ISCG Coordinator Senior Coordinator
IOM	David Preux Rafael Abis Ishita Shruti Abdusattor Esoev Pierre Alexandre Michaud Md. Mashrur Mostofa Tusar	Sr. Emergency Preparedness and Response Officer Camp Coordinator Programme Officer Deputy Chief of Mission Regional Field Security Officer (Bangkok-based) Security Officer
NGO Forum	SMA Rashid Rizwan Ahmed	Executive Director Head of National Resource Centre
OCHA	Julie Belanger Masaki Watabe	Senior Coordinator HAO
Oxfam Bangladesh	Enamul Hoque Zulfiqar Ali Haider M B Akhter Ashish Barua Dr Khalid Hossain	Emergency WASH Coordinator Humanitarian Support Personnel Programme Director Program Coordinator WASH Economic Justice Resilience Program Manager
UNDP	Jan-Jiles van der Hoeven Cathrine Haarsaker	Head of Sub-Office Consultant – DRR and Recovery
UNDSS	Dmitry Snarskiy	Deputy Security Advisor
UNHCR	Richard Evans Kevin Allen Zsuzsanna Novak Elisabeth Pelster Didier Boissavi Joao Sobral Silva Alkebeh Matthew Brook Chloe Coves	Senior Shelter Officer Head of Operations and Sub-Office Human Resources Officer Senior Operations Officer WASH Officer Site Planner Head of Unit - Emergency Supply Senior Field / Technical Coordinator Programme Officer (Donor Relations)
UNICEF	Viviane van Steirteghem Gaziul Hassan Mahmood Fiona Ward Jean Lieby	Chief Field Office, CXB Planning and Monitoring Officer WASH Specialist Chief of Child Protection
WFP	Christa Rader Peter Guest Foyzun Nahar Shelley Thakral Massimo Marghinotti Dipayan Bhattacharyya	Country Director Emergency Coordinator Programme Officer - Protection, Gender, Disability and Inclusion Communications Officer Ukhiya Hub Warehouse Manager Deputy Country Director - Strategy & Programme



  
**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



  
**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



***“In a sense, she has built the roads and given us access so that we can walk them ourselves”***

National Gender and Protection Focal Point, World Food Programme Bangladesh,  
on a **RedR Australia Protection Specialist**, January 2018

**redr**  
australia

55-61 Barry Street, Carlton

**T** +61 3 8341 2666

**F** +61 3 8341 2699

**[www.redr.org.au](http://www.redr.org.au)**

All photos are the property  
of RedR Australia.

**Contact:**

**Kylie Harrington**

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability  
and Learning Advisor

**[kharrington@redr.org.au](mailto:kharrington@redr.org.au)**

**RedR Australia**