



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

Country: Bangladesh

Planning Year: 2004

2004 COUNTRY OPERATION PLAN: BANGLADESH

Executive Committee Summary

Context and Beneficiary Population(s):

The UNHCR's operation in Bangladesh has been part of a response by the international community to the presence of refugees who fled the Northern Rakhine State of Myanmar in 1991-92 due to political and socio-economic reasons. Over 250,000 refugees fled into Bangladesh, requiring international protection and assistance. While the majority of the refugees (235,000) have repatriated, 20,000 refugees still remain in two camps. In Bangladesh, UNHCR's in country's work started in 1992 and a full care and maintenance programme has been maintained since then. UNHCR has sought durable solutions for the caseload. In 2002 and 2003, an additional 2,800 refugees opted for repatriation.

In view of the protracted nature of this refugee situation, UNHCR has proposed to the Government of Bangladesh a shift from basic humanitarian assistance to a programme of self-reliance for the refugees pending their return.

An urban caseload of 124 UNHCR recognised refugees remains in Dhaka and continued to receive protection. On a needs basis, they have been assisted with monthly allowances and the building of income generating activities. In 2004, urban refugees will benefit from similar assistance, while UNHCR pursues durable solutions for these persons.

Security Situation

Law and order issues in the camps are the responsibility of the Government of Bangladesh. UNHCR works closely with the Government to ensure security in Cox's Bazaar. The situation has been generally calm with sporadic incidents of violence. The overall security situation in the country remains relatively stable.

UNHCR will continue to request that the Government ensure the security of the refugee population. Information will be given to local law enforcement agencies to underline the importance of their continuing role in providing security for the refugees.

Protection Issues

UNHCR's involvement in voluntary repatriation will continue and efforts will be pursued to sustain the Government's commitment to voluntary repatriation and to monitor the process closely.

In 2004, various UNHCR programme activities will aim at promoting refugee self-reliance pending their eventual voluntary repatriation. In parallel, UNHCR will provide international protection to the remaining refugees. UNHCR will also focus on ensuring respect for human rights for these persons. UNHCR interventions will take the form of advocacy against violations and allegations of physical and psychological harassment, gender-based violence, detention and forced repatriation. UNHCR protection will also include monitoring of the security situation and timely intervention with authorities and refugees. UNHCR will make arrangements for refugees to have access to basic services. To this end, UNHCR will contribute to the strengthening of infrastructure, health and education sectors of local communities.

Despite the fact that Bangladesh has twice experienced mass influxes from Myanmar, it has not developed a national framework for the protection of refugees or asylum seekers. Furthermore, it is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. UNHCR will carry on discharging its responsibility while encouraging the Government to establish a national legal

framework for dealing with refugee and asylum issues. Furthermore, UNHCR will continue to promote accession to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

Training of Government officials and members of civil society in refugee law will be pursued to expand the support base for refugees and related issues.

UNHCR's role

For camp refugees, UNHCR will continue protection activities and ensure the voluntary nature of repatriation movements.

In close collaboration with other UN agencies, national and international NGOs, UNHCR will endeavour to implement various projects to allow refugees to generate income. Negotiations will continue with UN agencies to include the refugees in their assistance activities in 2004 and beyond. UNHCR through its partners will upgrade communal facilities (schools, clinics, etc.) in refugee hosting areas to enhance their capacity to accommodate refugee needs and to encourage local residents to coexist with refugees. UNHCR will play a co-ordinating and monitoring role to ensure the smooth delivery of programme assistance together with various Government ministries, NGOs and UN agencies.

Overview of each beneficiary population

Refugees from Myanmar's Northern Rakhine State (NRS)

At the start of 2003, a total of 21,902 refugees (3,320 families) from NRS remained in two camps in the Cox's Bazaar district of Bangladesh. Among this residual caseload, 51% are women. Of the refugee population, 58% are under the age of eighteen. Their language and culture are similar to that of the local population. Prior to their flight into Bangladesh, the majority were farmers, others were day labourers. Most of them are Muslim but there are also a few Hindu families. The literacy rate is 12%. Of this residual caseload, 4.5% of households are headed by females. These women are particularly vulnerable as their role in society is traditionally limited.

Urban Refugees and Promotional Activities

Recognised refugees comprise the urban refugee population of 124 persons. The Government tolerates their presence in Bangladesh. Needy refugees benefit from UNHCR assistance.

Policy issues

UNHCR will continue to monitor and ensure the voluntary nature of repatriation.

In planning the self-reliance programme, UNHCR will pay special attention to vulnerable groups, namely women and children. Specific projects will be implemented to respond to their needs, especially with regard to education, health and community services. A reforestation project will continue for environmental regeneration purposes, benefiting not only refugees but also local communities.

Efforts will be made to ensure that refugees are not seen as a burden and are tolerated by host communities. Local law enforcement authorities will be made aware of the evolving situation affecting refugees. The absorption capacity of local communities and communal services will be enhanced so that refugees have assured access to these.

Linkages to other countries

UNHCR Bangladesh will maintain close links with UNHCR Myanmar for co-ordination purposes, information sharing on repatriation and the general situation in the two countries.

The office will liaise with other offices in the region regarding the urban refugee caseload, the promotion of international legal instruments, regional issues and capacity building for UNHCR staff and that of operational partners.

Role of NGOs and UN Agencies

UNHCR will work closely with other UN agencies such as WFP, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, FAO and ILO. The objective is to link UNHCR operations with development oriented programmes as well as to benefit from the expertise of the various agencies. WFP, which has been UNHCR's main partner agency in providing basic food rations to the refugees, will no longer play the same role once refugees achieve self-reliance. Once self-reliance is implemented, the refugee population will be incorporated into the country development programme of other agencies.

National NGOs will be identified to implement some sectors of the self-reliance projects. These organisations will be funded by UNHCR in 2004. However, beyond that time frame, the agencies will be expected to diversify their funding sources.

A national NGO will continue to be UNHCR's partner in providing assistance to urban refugees in Bangladesh. Partnership with two other local NGOs will be pursued to promote the adoption of international legal instruments on refugees.

Selected Programme Goals and Objectives

Name of Beneficiary Population: Refugees from Northern Rakhine State, Myanmar	
Main Goal(s): Self-sufficiency pending return	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
Protection is provided to the refugees.	Refugees' basic rights are respected.
Refugees are supported to become self-reliant pending their return.	Refugees able to sustain themselves.
Absorption capacity of local communities is enhanced.	Refugees accepted by the local communities.
Smooth phase-in of other agencies is ensured.	Refugees included in operations of other agencies.

Name of Beneficiary Population: Urban Refugees	
Main Goal(s): International protection and normative framework for refugee protection	
Principal objectives	Related outputs
Refugees receive international protection and assistance.	RSD for asylum seekers conducted by UNHCR. Refugees recognised and provided with ID and assistance on need basis.
Durable solutions are sought for refugees.	Refugees repatriated or resettled. Refugees became self-reliant.
The Government initiates setting up a national legal framework for asylum and refugee issues, and accedes to international legal instruments.	Initiatives taken by Government officials in enacting national refugee law and acceding to the Convention.

A pool of human resources is expanded to deal with the legal aspects of refugee issues.	Lawyers and relevant Government officials trained in refugee law.
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