

P R E S S E M E L D U N G

Fears of new health emergency facing Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh this monsoon season

New UN appeal launches calling for US\$950m to meet needs of Rohingya and host community

Genf, 16th of March 2018. Save the Children is warning that conditions are ripe for a devastating new health crisis in the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh this coming monsoon season, which is expected to dump more than three metres of rain on the overcrowded and fragile settlements.

The warning comes as the UN and international NGOs today launch a new Joint Response Plan, appealing for US\$950 million to meet the needs of almost one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh over the next ten months, as well as 336,000 members of the host community who are also heavily affected by the crisis.

“The potential for a new and deadly health emergency is very real. A quarter of all toilets in the camps are expected to be damaged by the monsoon rains and half of all wells, with the mixture of overflowing human waste and floodwater a recipe for disaster,” said Save the Children’s Health Adviser in Cox’s Bazar, Myriam Burger.

“We’ve already had outbreaks of measles and diphtheria and now, with extreme overcrowding, alarming levels of malnutrition among children under five and the monsoon on our doorstep, another health emergency is waiting in the wings.”

The Joint Response Plan warns that “any outbreak of disease would quickly claim the lives of thousands of malnourished children” given current malnutrition levels, which exceed global emergency thresholds. The plan also states that 50,000 quality latrines and at least 30 facilities are needed to process human waste.

In Cox’s Bazar district, the majority of monsoon rains – about 2.7 metres – usually fall between June and August, however heavy rains are common from April onwards. Cyclones are also a risk from mid-April to mid-June.

“Unless there is an urgent scaling up of preparation work, including strengthening of key infrastructure and the relocation of the most vulnerable families to safer areas, the upcoming weather is guaranteed to wreak havoc. We are going to see a large number of homes destroyed, roads and low-lying settlements flooded and bridges smashed as well as the likelihood of deadly landslides. It will create a disaster within a disaster, threatening the lives of thousands of children,” Ms Burger said.

There is also an increased risk of disease during the rainy season, with the Joint Response Plan including funding to increase monsoon preparation works, as well as ensuring the ongoing distribution of food to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, improved access to life-saving health services and the strengthening of basic shelters.

“It is absolutely critical that donors step up and fully fund the Joint Response Plan, particularly with the rainy season just around the corner,” Ms Burger said. “Several countries gave generously before however such is the scale of need that we must dig deep once again.”

The plan would also significantly increase support for host communities in Cox’s Bazar, which have been heavily impacted by the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, including through increased labour competition, deforestation and inflation. This support includes the strengthening of

government health and education services, livelihood and small business development as well as the planting of tree nurseries and seedling production.

The new response plan also calls for US\$47 million to support access to education for over half a million Rohingya and host community children in Cox's Bazar. At least 5,000 equipped classrooms with skilled teachers and facilitators are needed, according to the plan. In situations like the monsoon, classrooms provide a vital forum for disaster prevention.

"In the context of the camps, not only is education an important way to safeguard children's futures, but learning centres themselves are a vital avenue to speak to children about how to stay safe and healthy and how to prepare and respond to the monsoon threat, including preventing family separation," Save the Children Education Adviser, Heather Carroll said.

"Only about a quarter of Rohingya children in Bangladesh are currently able to access any form of education, while nearly half of host community children in Cox's Bazar don't make it to the end of primary school."

Save the Children is currently operating more than 100 centres where children have access to learning opportunities in Rohingya, their mother tongue, as well as another 86 child friendly spaces, which support children's psychosocial wellbeing and recovery.

"These centres also provide children with a safe space where they are protected from harms like abuse, early or forced marriage, child labor, exploitation and trafficking. And they give our staff an opportunity to identify children who might need extra support because they are at some kind of child protection risk, sick, or suffering distress or trauma," Ms Carroll said.

Of the 1102 learning centres running across the camps, 226 are at risk of flooding and another 30 are at risk of landslides.

For media inquiries contact Daphnee Cook in Cox's Bazar on +880 170 121 2608 or Evan Schuurman in Bangkok on +66 989 725 908.

Notes to editor:

- More than 671,000 Rohingya have arrived in Cox's Bazar since August 25, 2017, including about 370,000 children, after a brutal military crackdown following attacks on Myanmar police border posts.
- Acute malnutrition rates among Rohingya in Bangladesh exceed global emergency thresholds at 24% in the Kutupalong refugee camp and 19.3% in makeshift settlements, while Rakhine State has one of the highest malnutrition rates in Myanmar, with 14% Global Acute Malnutrition, according to the JRP.
- The Joint Response Plan runs from March to December 2018.

Bitte beachten Sie die Fotos, das Schnittmaterial und die Erlebnisberichte:

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