## Cox's Bazar – Refugee Crisis

## Emergency Telecommunications Sector (ETS) – Concept of Operation (ConOps)

## 26 October 2017

### Background

Ongoing violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State has led to widespread movement of the Rohingya population both within Myanmar and across the border into Bangladesh. Since 25 August 2017, more than 600,000 people have fled from Myanmar into Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar. Following the increased needs to support the humanitarian efforts in response to this emergency, World Food Programme (WFP), in its capacity as global lead of the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC), is supporting the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) by addressing common Information and Communication Technology (ICT) needs for humanitarians and affected communities. Through the establishment of the Emergency Telecommunications Sector (ETS) Working Group (WG), WFP and partners will ensure a coordinated ICT response, an effective delivery of IT operations and support to those working on the provision of assistance to the affected populations. Further it aims to coordinate efforts to support an enabling environment for affected population to have access to vital and life-saving information and communication services.

### Objectives

The objective of this document is to provide an overview of the situation in Bangladesh and a framework that would lead to an effective delivery of ETS operations and support of humanitarians working to deliver aid to the Rohingya communities, but also support the affected communities themselves. This document will highlight the concept of operation for the ETS WG in Cox's Bazar in response to this escalating crisis.

### Context

The recent escalation of violence against the Rohingya population in Myanmar has led to the new influx of Undocumented Myanmar Nationals (UMN) into Bangladesh. Since August 2017 approximately 600,000 people have crossed the border from Myanmar to Bangladesh – this is in addition to 130,000 refugees who arrived before August 2016. This has eroded already compromised resources in the existing makeshift settlements and refugee camps at Kutupalong and Balukhali. Three spontaneous settlements are rapidly expanding in

Bangladesh – Unchiprang in Teknaf, as well as Balukhali 02 and Thangkhali in Ukhia District, close to the existing Balukhali settlement. Additional people are scattered in host communities, mainly in Teknaf.

The Government of Bangladesh's (GOB) National Strategy on UMNs and Refugees is providing basic aid, which is further complemented and supported by assistance from the humanitarian community. The immediate life-saving emergency response is provided across all sectors: food assistance, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), health, shelter, nutrition, protection, education, child-centered care, as well as safety, dignity and respect for individual rights. GOB-led initiatives include plans for two additional makeshift settlements and a mechanism for receiving and allocating private cash donations launched by the District Authority. The district health complex continues to provide essential support for people requiring urgent medical attention, receiving referrals from the humanitarian primary health facilities, and extending vaccination campaigns to cover the newly-arrived.

The local communities continue to be the first responders, providing humanitarian support in form of food assistance, basic non-food items, shelter and triage medical assistance for new arrivals. The GOB has made 2,000 hectares of land available to the new UMN, and will start setting up a camp soon. Additionally, the GOB started the bio-metric registration of all newly arrived refugees.

The GOB is supporting international organisations that are already present in Cox's Bazar, such as International Organisation for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WFP. However, the size of this emergency operation requires a much more integrated inter-agency response, with new UMNs coming every day.

Moreover, the GOB has agreed to grant permissions to the Non-Government Organisations (NGO) to increase their presence and role in supporting this large influx of people. The security situation remains stable, allowing the non-governmental sector to work without disturbances. Minor crime incidents such as snatching, mugging and burglary is possible. Road traffic accidents are a high risk. These stable security conditions are expected to last, with possible degradation in case of reduced assistance (possible riots and minor security incidents). Furthermore, in August there were some attacks by Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) inside Myanmar. It is possible that similar groups exist in Cox's Bazar region.

Currently radio is not widely-used for security telecommunications, but this is recommended to increase its use in case of congestion of mobile network and possible disruptions in services due to extreme weather conditions, especially with cyclones season approaching.

## Connectivity & ICT Infrastructure

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a fast developing industry in Bangladesh. With Government of Bangladesh's commitment to Vision 21, also known as "Digital Bangladesh", the country is committed to development of modern ICT infrastructure. Moreover, Bangladesh is one of the fast growing markets in South / South-Eastern Asia, including telecommunications sector, with above 80% rate for mobile phone subscribers. There are six Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) in the country. Since December 2015, an identification card has to be presented at the purchase of SIM cards. Mobile connectivity (3G / 4G) is still not widely spread with only approximately 13% of Bengali mobile subscribers accessing Internet connectivity via their phones (Source: Logistics Cluster, 20 October 2017)

Several United Nations (UN) agencies have presence in Cox's Bazar with established offices, including IOM, WFP (hosting the ETS Cox's Bazar team) and UNHCR among many – all of them have Internet connectivity supplied by a local Internet Service Provider (ISP). The Kutupalong Makeshift camp, where the biggest concentration of refugees is located, is 1-hour away by road from the WFP / ETS office.

In terms of security telecommunications equipment in Cox's Bazar, all UN agencies are using the analog radio room and radio network operated by United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS). UNHCR also has separate analogue radio network installed. There are gaps in term of security telecommunications coverage in the operational areas for this response. Although, the Ukhia region in Cox's Bazar has radio coverage, areas such as Leda, Nyapara, Shamlapur, Roikhong are still not completely covered by the security telecommunications.

Since the law requires people to show an identification document (ID) when purchasing a SIM card, the refugees are unable to buy them. Another issue, as reported by various humanitarian organizations – mobile network coverage is patchy in the settlement areas and areas closer to the border.

## Constraints

As per the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP, September 2017) 1,200,000 people are in need of humanitarian assistance as predicted for the period September 2017 – February 2018, with humanitarian community targeting the majority of those in need. To assist those number of people, the emergency response will require a significant scale-up of resource, which might further intensify constrains and create new ones. The potential bottlenecks include:

1. Lack of and / or decrease in quality of access (no road to the new camp, increased traffic on poor quality roads located in a heavily congested areas);

2. Insufficient capacity of partners to perform continuous distribution of life-saving assistance;

3. Increased demand for telecommunication services resulting in congested mobile network and Internet connectivity provision;

4. Delayed imports of telecommunications equipment;

5. Disease outbreak (risk of acute watery diarrhea and others);

6. Lack of information and communication services for affected population to access humanitarians and life-saving information

There are no restrictions for importing equipment like desktop/laptop computers, servers, printers, scanners, and voucher cards. However, some ICT items like Very High Frequency (VHF) radios require a permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) as well as the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC). Also any device that includes a SIM slot (it does not have to be used as a phone for calls) as well as all broadcasting equipment must have prior approval from the BTRC. The process can be very lengthy slowing down the emergency response.

## Response Plan

To ensure that inter-agency emergency telecommunication services are in existence in all common operational areas, WFP, as global lead of the ETC and lead of the local ETS WG, will support the GOB and the humanitarian community through deployment of staff for coordination and Information Management (IM). The ETS WG will support the response by augmenting the current in-country telecommunication services (Internet connectivity and security telecommunications) by providing technical staff and telecommunications equipment for the current response. Moreover, the ETS WG will engage with the Communication with Communities (CwC) WG to identify potential areas of technical support, which in turn will enable environment for provision of services and coordination for access to life-saving information for communities.

**Proposed staffing support structure**

The ETS team will be composed of an ETS Coordinator, ETC Services for Communities (S4C), Information Management Officer (IMO), four technical staff members (two ETC solution deployment experts and two security telecommunications specialists), which will be reduced to two staff for system supports in long-term.

## Scenarios

1. Short emergency with the current status or slight improvement / deterioration;

2. Prolonged emergency due to basic needs not met and more refugees arriving;

3. Possibility of Rohingya population migrating to another location/district in the country;

4. Lack of understanding of needs of affected populations caused by lack of common communications services for the communities;

5. High possibility of weather adversities – cyclone season (October-November).

## Risks Analysis and ranking matrix

The risks matrix below describes key risk areas including their likelihood and impact that could affect the IT response. The risk matrix also proposes mitigation measures to minimize, avoid or manage the risks.

| # | Risk | Likelihood | Impact | Category | Response Measures |
|---|------|-----------|--------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | Further escalation of the emergency response leading to change of requirements and increased budget | *Moderate* | *Major* | *High* | *Prepare contingency plan for staff and equipment* |
| 2 | Delayed procurement of equipment negatively affecting the timely IT response | *Most likely* | *Medium* | *High* | *Assess local market/Identify local suppliers.* |
| 3 | Government or federal regulations restrictions resulting in delayed or denied radio frequency licensing | *Moderate* | *Medium* | *Moderate* | *Capitalize on Interagency framework and leverage other UN agencies' Long-Term Agreements (LTAs)* |
| 5 | Customs clearance / transit delays in Dhaka | *Most likely* | *Major* | *High.* | *Assess alternative route(s) as a back-up plan* |

| 6 | Delays in staff mobilisation or recruitment | *Unlikely* | *Major* | *Moderate* | *Possibility of bringing in WFP's Fast Information Technology and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team (FITTEST)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | Deteriorating security situation limiting staff movement leading to a delayed completion of project and an increased budget | *Likely* | *Major* | *High* | *Activate TDY roster/ FITTEST* |
| 9 | Project not fully funded | *Unlikely* | *Major* | *Moderate* | *Capitalize on interagency/ ETC frameworks* |
| 10 | Rest and Recuperation (R & R) regime in Cox's Bazar affecting continuity of business | *Most likely* | *Major* | *Major* | *Develop staff rotational plan* |

## Budget

The ETS in Cox's Bazar is appealing for **US$650,000** to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Provide vital IT services to the response community, and

2. Coordinate the emergency telecommunications response as well as share the vital information amongst partners and communities.

## Exit strategy

Under the current planning assumptions and dynamic of situations, the ETS WG's exit strategy should focus on completing the capacity building of the stakeholders and the training of local IT staff to ensure continuity of all ICT systems as well as in the area of coordination. Regular meetings established at the onset of the response are to be maintained to share/ transfer knowledge and to update the key partners on the progress.

Surge capacity will progressively disengage from the country within six months (by February 2017) and a handover to the local team is envisaged. As part of the exit strategy, the WFP's Regional IT Emergency Preparedness and Response Officer has been involved in this operation from the onset of the emergency and will be able to ensure business continuity during the disengagement process remotely. The handover document should be produced and all the information / supporting documents transferred to a previously agreed asset management system to ensure a proper handover at the end of operation.

## Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| ARSA | Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army |
| BTRC | Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission |
| CwC | Communication with Communities |
| ETS | Emergency Telecommunications Sector |
| FITTEST | Fast Information Technology and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team |
| GOB | Government of Bangladesh |
| HRP | Humanitarian Response Plan |
| ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| IM | Information Management |
| IMO | Information Management Officer |
| IOM | International Organisation for Migration |
| LTA | Long-Term Agreements |
| MoFA | Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| NGO | Non-Government Organisations |
| R&R | Rest and Recuperation |
| S4C | Services for Communities |
| UNDSS | United Nations Department for Safety and Security |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| VHF | Very High Frequency |
| WG | Working Group |

*The ETC is a global network of organizations that work together to provide shared communications services in humanitarian emergencies.*