

Bangladesh - Rohingya Crisis

Emergency Telecommunications Sector (ETS) – Concept of Operation (CONOPS)

20 December 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 621,000 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 Information Technology (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 a situational analysis for Bangladesh and a framework that would lead to an effective coordination of the ETS partners, operations and support to humanitarians' efforts, to deliver aid to the affected populations. It also aims to give an overview of needs of people affected by this crisis to implement effective response in terms of information, connectivity and communication for affected population. This document will highlight the Concept of Operation (CONOPS) 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 more than 624,000 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 the already compromised resources in the existing makeshift settlements and refugee camps at Kutupalong and thirteen other locations in the upazilas (administrative unit in Bangladesh) of Ukhia and Teknaf. As more UMN's cross the border, the camps are rapidly expanding.

The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) is supporting international organizations that are already present in Cox's Bazar, such as International Organization 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, as new 500-1,000 UMN's arrive every day.

Moreover, the GOB has agreed to grant permissions to the Non-Government Organizations (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 the 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 from May to November.

In terms of Services for Communities (S4C), 77% of the affected population report they do not have enough information to make decisions for them and their families. Moreover, 62% report they are unable to speak with aid providers. 73% of the affected population are illiterate, in any language. 79% indicate that they do not currently listen to any radio, while 81% report that they never use the internet. 64% of the newly arrived Rohingya households have at least one mobile phone set, although the use is restricted to making and receiving phone calls, due to lack of identification card, which is necessary to purchase a SIM card in Bangladesh, unaffordability to buy credit, inability to charge phones, but also insufficient signal coverage in the area where they are staying.

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 four Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) in the country: Teletalk, Robi, Grameenphone and Banglalink. 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 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). There are multiple ISPs available for the operational areas delivering fast internet services. Because of the quantity of providers and the stretched humanitarian operational areas it is difficult to know which provider can supply connectivity in certain locations. The Kutupalong camps, where the biggest concentration of refugees is located, is 1-hour away by road from the WFP Sub office and 5 kilometres away from the WFP Field Logistics Base (FLB). Furthermore, several humanitarian organizations report that mobile network coverage is patchy in the settlement areas and areas closer to the border. The MNOs had to reduce their coverage near the border due to government restrictions.

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

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. There are no estimated figures known for the remaining part of 2018, but this CONOPS is accounting for ETS activities and needs until 31 December 2018. To assist those number of people, the emergency response will require a scale-up of resource, which might further intensify constraints and create new ones. The potential bottlenecks include:

- Increased demand for telecommunication services resulting in congested mobile network and Internet connectivity provision;
- Lack of information and communication services for affected population to access humanitarians and life-saving information;
- Lack of funding;
- Delayed imports of telecommunications equipment;
- Additional security related threats like cyclones, crime or terrorist incidents.

As operational areas are expanding due to new camp settlements being deployed or daytime activities take place outside the camps. United Nations staff members could end up working without being able to contact the UNDSS Cox's Bazaar radio room via the existing VHF security telecommunications network due to lack of coverage. The security telecommunication radio network is a part of the formerly known Bangladesh Country Minimum Operational Security Standards (CMOSS) and still mentioned in the Cox's bazaar Security Risk Management (SRM) document. It is imperative to make sure the VHF radio network is expanded and upgraded to cover all operational areas in accordance with the SRM. The radio network is a part of the Emergency Preparedness Response (EPR) plan for the cyclone and monsoon seasons.



There are no restrictions for importing equipment like desktop/laptop computers, servers, printers, scanners, and voucher cards. However, some ICT items like 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 a prior approval from the BTRC. The process can be very lengthy slowing down the emergency response.

Response Plan

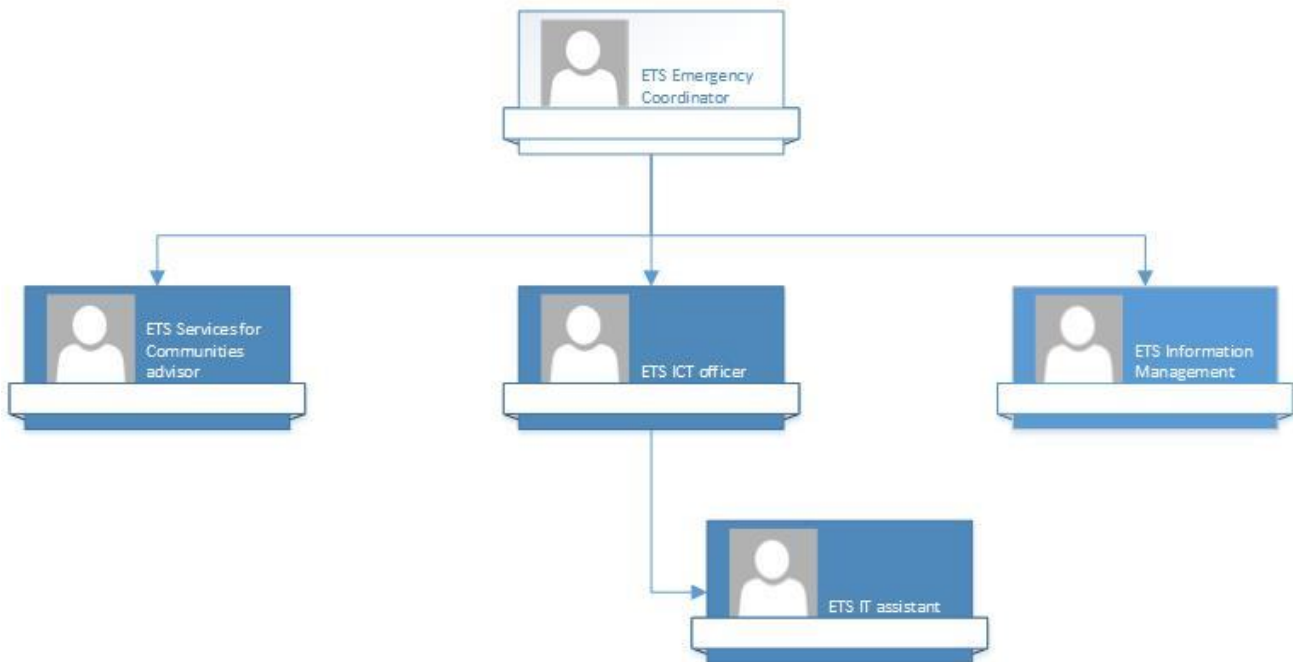
To ensure that inter-agency emergency telecommunication services are in existence in all common operational areas, WFP, as global lead of the ETC and lead of the local ETS WG, will support the GOB and the humanitarian community through deployment of staff for coordination and Information Management (IM). 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 through its Services for Communities (S4C) is engaging with Communication with Communities (CwC) WG, and other UN and NGO agencies. The ETS is collaborating to identify potential areas of technical support to mainstream accountability to affected population through provision of ICT services, such as two way communication to access life-saving information and to connect to effective feedback and complaint mechanisms (CFM). The ETS will establish a direct point of contact with the Government counterpart from the Ministry of Telecommunications.

Proposed staffing support structure

The ETS team will be composed of an ETS Emergency Coordinator, ETS S4C advisor IM Officer (IMO) and an ETS ICT specialist to train local dedicated ETS ICT staff. A local dedicated ETS IT staff will be hired.

Organigram Emergency Telecommunications Sector
Bangladesh

Updated as per 11-12-17



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 (May - November).

Respective mitigating plans:

1. Keep remaining staff and equipment resources in place and monitor the situation;
2. Revise the ETS budget to meet the expected extension of the emergency and ETS provided services;

-
3. Revise the ETS budget for additional recourses to implement the relocation of ETS services;
 4. Continue being involved with ISCG, CWC WG and other relevant partners to be able to act on the common communications services for the communities;
 5. ETS preparedness for having recourses on stand-by to quickly scale up in case of fast onset emergencies.

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	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Prepare contingency plan for staff and equipment</i>
2	Delayed procurement of equipment negatively affecting the timely IT response	<i>Most likely</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Assess local market and create local LTA's with suppliers</i>
3	Government or federal regulations restrictions resulting in delayed or denied radio frequency licensing	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Capitalize on Interagency framework and leverage other UN agencies' Long-Term Agreements (LTAs)</i>
5	Customs clearance / transit delays in Dhaka	<i>Likely</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Prepare and send all requested documents to customs before actual shipment</i>
6	Delays in staff mobilization or recruitment	<i>Unlikely</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Possibility of bringing in WFP's Fast Information Technology and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team (FITTEST)</i>
7	Deteriorating security situation limiting staff movement leading to a delayed completion of project and an increased budget	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Keep close contact with UNDSS and keep an up-to-date security telecommunication network</i>
8	Project not fully funded	<i>Unlikely</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Capitalize on</i>

					<i>interagency/ ETS frameworks</i>
9	Regulatory authorities and government increase control over affected populations, curbing their right to access information and ICT services	<i>very likely</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>moderate</i>	<i>ICT solutions and services for the communities are cognizant to “do no digital harm” approach.</i>

Budget

The ETS in Cox’s Bazar is appealing for **US\$104,235** to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Provide vital IT services to the humanitarian response community and affected communities;
 - a. ETC CONNECT application supporting complaint and feedback mechanisms (CFM);
 - b. Supporting information-sharing initiatives within the camps for the affected population by means of adding connectivity to community centres, assisting with local broadcasting media;
 - c. Improving the existing security telecommunications system in the Teknaf and Ukhiya operational areas.
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.

Six weeks before the ending date of 31 December 2018, an assessment will take place amongst the partners to identify if there is a need for ETS to continue. Otherwise the surge capacity will progressively disengage from the country by December 2018 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
CFM	Complaint and Feedback Mechanism
CMOSS	Country Minimum Operational Security Standards
CwC	Communication with Communities
ETS	Emergency Telecommunications Sector
FITTEST	Fast Information Technology and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team
FLB	Forward Logistics Base
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IM	Information Management
IMO	Information Management Officer
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LTA	Long-Term Agreements
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGO	Non-Government Organizations
R&R	Rest and Recuperation
S4C	Services for Communities
SRM	Security Risk Management
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