SUMMARY REPORT
Evaluation of UNICEF’s Response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh
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SUMMARY REPORT

Evaluation of UNICEF’s Response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh
SUMMARY

The magnitude and extreme speed of the latest influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh, which began on 25 August 2017, is reminiscent of the Rwandans in Tanzania and (then) Zaire in 1994 and the Kosovars in Albania and Macedonia in 1999. At an average of 20,000 refugees per day in September 2017, the 700,000 Rohingya fled to one small stretch of land and created the world’s largest and most densely populated refugee camp. Against this backdrop, local, national and international responders provided relief to the Rohingya, who had been victims of the most egregious human rights abuses in their native country, Myanmar. UNICEF responded to the newly arrived refugees with vital services, helping children and their families to survive.

This evaluation, which was commissioned and managed by the UNICEF Evaluation Office in New York, was conducted between March and October 2017. Its primary purpose was to generate lessons to improve the ongoing response. The secondary purposes were to strengthen UNICEF’s accountability and to assist UNICEF and the broader international humanitarian community to better understand how to respond in situations of rapid mass and forced displacement and settlement. The team used Real-Time Evaluation Plus, a new approach that the Evaluation Office is developing that combines elements of retrospective and formative evaluations with those of a real-time evaluation in order to deliver well-evidenced findings and conclusions in a short timeframe.

Overall, the evaluation team found that, despite the enormous challenges posed by this crisis, UNICEF rose to the challenge. The organization’s services reached many Rohingya children and their families, which, undoubtedly, addressed their plight. The evaluation notes a range of impressive achievements in areas such as scaling up, advocacy, sector leadership, and, of course, service delivery. However, the evaluation also found critical challenges and identified several areas in need of improvement. Much work remains to be done for the international community to uphold the rights of the Rohingya refugees.

Recommended actions for improving the response include investing in collecting better political, social and economic intelligence to inform preparedness actions; clarifying lines of accountability and relationships among involved stakeholders; documenting the specific ways in which the congestion has impacted the ability to deliver; strengthening efforts to protect rights and address gender and gender-based violence; fostering innovation in the response; strengthening integrated programming and working arrangements; and further investing in knowledge management.
INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Cox’s Bazar District, one of the poorest areas of Bangladesh, has been the scene of several mass influxes of the Rohingya Muslim minority from Myanmar, including in the late 1970s and early 1990s. Since mid-August 2017, a record number of more than 700,000 refugees have arrived. Adding this number to those Rohingya who arrived before August 2017, it is estimated that there are approximately 900,000 refugees in camps and settlements.\(^1\) As the presence of these refugees have put the environment and local residents under huge strain, the United Nations has estimated that 1.3 million people are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, including critical life-saving interventions.\(^2\) Some 703,000 of them are under 18 years old.\(^3\)

The massive influx of refugees into Bangladesh followed a brutal crackdown on ethnic Rohingya villages and areas in northern Rakhine State, Myanmar. This crackdown reportedly came in retaliation for a number of attacks by Rohingya militants on several military and police stations. According to United Nations human rights experts, the retaliation amounts to “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing” and “bears the hallmarks of genocide.”\(^4\) Examples of the documented atrocities that have taken place in northern Rakhine State since August 2017 include systematic torture and intentional killing; the burning of homes, religious buildings, businesses and crops; widespread rape of women and girls; and the targeting of children.\(^5\)

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1 Inter Sector Coordination Group, ‘ISCG Situation Report: Rohingya refugee crisis, Cox’s Bazar’, ISCG, 24 May 2018. The United Nations estimate stands at more than 905,000 refugees, while the Government of Bangladesh has counted 878,596 refugees.
The sudden-onset influx happened when many staff of international and national organizations were preparing to start their holidays for Eid al-Adha the following week. In the days after 25 August 2017, thousands of Rohingya assembled or were stranded near the border with Bangladesh. International media outlets showed images of long lines of destitute, highly traumatized people, many with fear fresh in their eyes and a number of them with bullet wounds. Several interviewees with long-standing experience in Bangladesh noted that they initially thought that the events of late August would be similar to those of October 2016, when violence in Rakhine caused 74,000 Rohingya to flee. But this time, the pace and scale were much different. In the three weeks between 25 August and 15 September, nearly 410,000 new arrivals were recorded, including 240,000 children. Globally, in the last two decades, few sudden-onset refugee flows have generated an average daily rate of 20,000 new arrivals in a rural area with very few facilities to support them.

In this context, much of the initial (overall) response to the refugee influx – including many of the efforts of Bangladeshi civil society and the refugees themselves – was improvised and spontaneous. With thousands stuck alongside the main roads for days, the military directed many of the refugees to the existing camps of Kutupalong and Nayapara. Others were directed to the makeshift settlements of Leda or Balukhali or erected bamboo shelters in new, spontaneous sites. These camps were effectively spontaneous self-settlements with refugees jostling to find space and cutting their own terraces into hillsides. These efforts were supported by well-meaning but ad hoc interventions from various actors who installed poor-quality wells and latrines and provided low-quality plastic sheeting in an uncontrolled and uncoordinated manner. By early October, when around 510,000 new arrivals had been recorded, refugees were scattered across a dozen sites with some staying with host communities in Cox’s Bazar, Ukha and Teknaf.

Between 25 August 2017 and 10 May 2018, the number of refugees in camps and settlements grew to more than 900,000. The majority of these refugees are staying in what is now generally referred to as the ‘mega camp’ – a merged site that includes Kutupalong camp and Balukhali settlement, plus extensions, where 623,000 refugees are located. This camp is now Bangladesh’s fifth largest city. Due to the limits that the Government has put on available land, camp population density is extreme. While 45 square metres is the emergency standard for the average camp area recommended for each person in a situation of a temporary, planned or self-settled camp setting, in the densest parts of the camps the area per person is 8 square metres. As a result of this extreme congestion, many of the standards and indicators that have been carefully crafted since the late 1990s to ensure a minimum level of quality in humanitarian responses, have not been followed or met.

At the request of the Government of Bangladesh, several United Nations agencies, together with their government counterparts, international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local civil society groups and others, began to respond to the urgent needs of the Rohingya and their host communities. UNICEF reacted to the influx immediately, announcing that it would scale up its response, and assumed responsibilities in nutrition, health, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), child protection and education. The organization formally activated a Level 3 emergency response on 20 September 2017. It also published a Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appeal and a revised response plan in October 2017 to address the immediate and urgent needs of affected Rohingya children, women and adolescents. The HAC appeal outlined how UNICEF would reach 716,000 people with interventions in nutrition, health, WASH, child protection, education and Communication for Development (C4D)/community engagement and accountability.

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7 Inter Sector Coordination Group, ‘Situation Report: Rohingya refugee crisis’, ISCG, 10 May 2018.
10 This applies in particular to the Sphere Minimum Humanitarian Standards in the sectors such as shelter and WASH.
PART TWO

EVALUATION SCOPE, PURPOSE AND APPROACH

Purpose and objectives
Per UNICEF’s revised Evaluation Policy, the UNICEF Evaluation Office in New York is responsible for undertaking an evaluation of UNICEF’s responses to all Level 3 emergencies. Commissioned in March 2018, this evaluation takes stock of UNICEF’s achievements from the end of August 2017 to April 2018 – the first eight months of the response – and identifies actions to enhance the effectiveness and quality of its response. It contains and combines elements of a retrospective programme evaluation and a formative evaluation, and also has characteristics of a real-time evaluation.

The primary purpose of this evaluation is to generate lessons to improve the ongoing response. The secondary purposes of this evaluation are to strengthen UNICEF’s accountability and to assist UNICEF and the broader international humanitarian community to better understand how to respond in situations of rapid mass and forced displacement and settlement. In line with these overall objectives, the evaluation has worked towards three more specific objectives:

i. To assess the adequacy of the UNICEF response in providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable
people who reside in camp settings and are integrated within Bangladeshi communities and in host communities;

ii. To determine how well UNICEF is working with implementing partners, other agencies and the Government, for both the near- and medium/long-term; and

iii. To identify actions to improve the response.

The terms of reference further breaks down these objectives into 10 overarching evaluation questions that were slightly modified during the inception phase. This report is organized around the evaluation questions (see Annex 1).

Scope
The evaluation covers UNICEF’s preparedness, scale-up, advocacy, strategy and leadership of the sectors it is responsible for: nutrition, health, WASH, child protection, education and C4D. The evaluation also covers cross-cutting issues, such as gender and inter-sectorality, as well as the quality and use of information to guide the response, and operations, including supply, funding and human resources. The geographic focus of the evaluation is Cox’s Bazar, particularly the makeshift camps and host communities located in Leda, Kutupalong, Shamlapur, Balukhali, Ukhia and Teknaf. This includes Rohingya who have arrived since 2016, those who reside in camp settings, those integrated within Bangladeshi communities and vulnerable host communities in identified locations. UNICEF’s response to the Rohingya crisis also extends beyond the borders of Bangladesh to Rakhine State in Myanmar. However, as per the terms of reference, the focus of this evaluation was limited to evaluating the Level 3 emergency response that was declared only in Bangladesh.  

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH
The team used Real-Time Evaluation Plus, a new approach to evaluation that combines elements of a retrospective and formative evaluation with those of a real-time evaluation, with the intention of delivering findings and conclusions in a short timeframe. The basis of this approach, which is new for UNICEF, is informed by some of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee criteria (i.e., relevance, appropriateness, connectedness, coherence, coverage, effectiveness, efficiency and impact), and also borrows from other types of exercises and data collection tools. This new type of evaluation looks at the past to understand the course of events and the history of a response. At the same time, it involves direct observation and consideration of future scenarios and planning.

DATA SOURCES
The team collected documentary evidence, including response plans, guidance, needs assessments, planning documents, terms of reference, relevant emails, meeting minutes, funding data, partnership agreements, human resources data, press releases, advocacy material and supply data, among others. The team also used a timeline to understand the course of events and the actions that UNICEF took in anticipation or in response.

11 To get a sense of some issues, however, such as the information exchange at the time of the influx, the evaluation team held Skype calls with UNICEF Myanmar.
The evaluation team also conducted semi-structured key informant interviews with UNICEF staff at Headquarters, the Regional Office and country and field offices, including staff who played key roles in the first months of the response. Interviews were also conducted with UNICEF partners, including staff from the Government, other United Nations actors and agencies, NGOs and donors. The team used purposive sampling strategy to identify key informants (both expert sampling and snowball sampling). In total, the team interviewed approximately 200 key informants. In several instances, the team noticed that the issues they raised were already under discussion or the programme or sector was already developing plans to address the issue. This is a key feature of a real-time evaluation.

The evaluation team collected data through 13 focus group discussions with affected populations and community volunteers. The focus group discussions were not meant to be representative. Purposive sampling was used in an effort to collect data from different areas of the camps.

Finally, the team conducted two online surveys with UNICEF’s sector and implementing partners. The surveys were sent to all sector and implementing partners working in nutrition, health, WASH, child protection and education.

**OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS**

As mentioned above, a distinct characteristic of the Real-Time Evaluation Plus is the combination of two types of evaluations: a traditional programme evaluation and a real-time evaluation, with the emphasis on the latter. Such a combination has the benefit of assessing the response in the first months, which has helped the evaluation team understand the level of progress that has been made against planned results. In addition, the real-time approach, in which the data collection is done rapidly based on direct observation and key informant interviews, provides instant input on current issues and priorities for an ongoing operation. Changes or course corrections in the response may be triggered or accelerated by the dialogues and exchanges that occur during the evaluation. A Real-Time Evaluation Plus is about process, progress against targets and, to a certain extent, results; and less about proving attribution, causality or impact analysis.

It should be noted that the Real-Time Evaluation Plus approach carries a certain number of challenges, the most significant of which is the need to consider past, present and future issues and activities in parallel and in a relatively short timeframe. The very wide scope also means that the evaluation team has had to balance a number of different types of expectations, ranging from the desire, on behalf of operational line management, to see adequate top-line recommendations, to the need for detailed considerations and advice at the specific programme or sector level. To ensure that the evaluation manages to go both ‘wide’ and ‘deep’ in its findings, in addition to this report, the evaluation team also shared their sector-specific internal notes with UNICEF. These provide more detailed findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The team also encountered a few practical challenges. First, while UNICEF Bangladesh has gone to great lengths to provide the evaluation team with all relevant documents, for some programme areas, the materials came late despite multiple requests from the start of the evaluation. Second, as in every humanitarian emergency, staff turnover has been significant. There was also turnover of staff working in organizations that are partners of UNICEF. To mitigate this, the evaluation interviewed nearly all senior UNICEF staff who played leading roles in the overall or programme/sector management from the beginning of the response through May 2018. Third, the evaluation team was made up of experts with profiles to match the areas in which UNICEF has responsibility. One team member with expertise in health and nutrition joined the team after the other team members had already begun collecting data. This interfered with the team’s ability to collaborate and constrained feedback sessions with UNICEF staff for the presentation of the inception report and first impressions. To address this, the team held regular virtual meetings.

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12 For reasons of clarity, as much as possible, the evaluation uses the term ‘programme’ to refer to UNICEF’s work and the term ‘sector’ to refer to the coordination structure for the various programmatic areas (i.e., nutrition, health, WASH, child protection and education.)
PART THREE

KEY FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION

Preparedness and scale-up
The entire international community, including UNICEF, was caught off guard by the size and speed of the refugee influx. Despite strong indications of massive human rights violations in Rakhine and the lack of humanitarian access, the lack of information from Myanmar about a potential massive outflow meant that UNICEF was under-prepared for such a crisis. Despite this, UNICEF’s scale-up efforts were impressive. Strong and experienced leadership, some appetite for risk, smooth contracting processes and strong human resource management contributed to the rapid scale-up. However, limited partner capacity hindered UNICEF’s ability to keep pace with the refugees’ needs.

Advocacy
From the start of the crisis, UNICEF has appropriately focused its advocacy on three key obstacles to this response: the weak protection environment; the extreme congestion...
in the camps; and the problematic inter-agency coordination model. The evaluation found that UNICEF’s advocacy for a better protection environment should have been stronger, given the organization’s normative role and its rights-based agenda. What UNICEF says can be just as important as what it does. It rightly raised the issue of the extreme lack of space in appropriate fora, though it should consider documenting the consequences of congestion on its ability to respond to facilitate more evidenced-based advocacy.

The evaluation found that coordination structures that combined different coordination models caused confusion, delays and unnecessary agency tensions, and negatively impacted UNICEF’s ability to deliver for children. UNICEF was right to raise this issue and the evaluation found that the organization was a strong advocate for improved coordination, though it should have formally raised its concerns at the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Concerns about the response’s coordination extend beyond this crisis. It is crucial to the effectiveness of UNICEF’s coordination responsibilities in nutrition, WASH, child protection and education to clarify how the refugee coordination model, led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), will be implemented in the future. UNICEF should actively engage in discussions about the future of the inter-agency coordination structure in refugee responses.

**Strategy**

Although UNICEF did attempt to define its strategies, especially at the programme level, its overall strategy was found wanting. First, the rights lens was weak. All humanitarian organizations involved in a refugee response should structure their work around refugee rights, which should in turn underpin all aspects of the response. Second, the overarching strategy should have addressed the significant gender dimensions of this crisis. There was also insufficient reference to how UNICEF would address protection risks such as abuse, exploitation, trafficking and gender-based violence.

The overall strategy also neglected how the context, including congestion in the camps, would impact the organization’s ability to deliver and how UNICEF would adjust its programming accordingly. In addition, while the evaluation team recognizes that UNICEF has a wide range of responsibilities and commitments, the context meant that not all priorities could be implemented simultaneously, and as a result, some HAC targets were not reached. While there was tacit prioritization, UNICEF should have been more explicit about this and about sequencing. The organization would have been entirely correct to manage the expectations of its stakeholders by sequencing its response activities without infringing on its mandate. This would have helped other agencies define their own priorities, either in support of or complementing UNICEF’s approach.

The overall strategy should have better articulated intersectorality, a term that signifies strong links across sectors, which should work together in combining their services. In particular, the education-in-emergencies approach, which provides an opportunity to work across sectors, was weak.

Finally, although UNICEF’s strategy could be discerned from a collection of various materials, the evaluation team did not find a document that articulated UNICEF’s overall strategic vision, its main plans in service delivery, its advocacy and communications work, the technical support it might need from the regional office and headquarters, the technical support that it would provide to partners, and the financial and human resources needed to carry out the response. The HAC and the Response Plan appear to be more a collection of sector-specific work plans than a strategy, and were designed to communicate UNICEF’s funding requirements. UNICEF should reflect not only on the content of its strategy but on how to better articulate its overall strategy in future emergency responses.

In terms of programme strategies, the findings are more positive. Programme strategies were highly relevant and there is ample evidence that appropriate adjustments were made to address emerging and evolving risks. The concentrations on the prevention of disease outbreaks, improving WASH conditions and addressing the nutritional status of the Rohingya was appropriate. Gaps included the inadequate attention given to gender (see below), UNICEF’s failure to integrate the critical life-saving aspects of an education-in-emergencies approach, and the inadequate attention given to adolescent education. The faecal sludge management strategy is somewhat vague and underestimates the scale and complexity of this area of work in this unique context.
Rights, protection, gender and gender-based violence

The characterization of the Rohingya refugee response by a key informant as “old-fashioned” and reminiscent of some of the inadequate humanitarian responses of 1990s was apt. UNICEF did not sufficiently emphasize addressing protection, mainstreaming gender and addressing gender-based violence issues – a significant concern given the organization’s commitments to these priorities. An initially assistance-driven operation should have been quickly followed, if not accompanied, by a protection-orientated, rights-based response. Indeed, the quality aspects of the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) and Sphere and companion standards derive from the fact that they are rights-based. As noted, with some exceptions, gender mainstreaming aspects were insufficiently considered and implemented in the first several months. Programming to address gender-based violence was critically delayed. While plans were eventually made to address this, the evaluation found clear evidence of the lack of implementation of gender-based-violence-related services at least until February 2018. In UNICEF, gender-based violence falls under the responsibility of child protection, an arrangement that, in a crisis like this, doesn’t give it the attention it requires.

Effectiveness, coverage, timeliness and quality

The evaluation found that UNICEF has reached many of its programme targets against stated objectives in each of the five sectors it assessed, though some areas of work did fall behind. Due to the extreme speed and scale of the influx, the evaluation understands that quantity was prioritized over quality in the first weeks and months of the response. This approach was appropriate to reaching affected populations. But with quality must follow quantity, and this did not happen across all areas of work. Some of the reasons for this were outside of UNICEF’s control, for example, the extreme congestion, the speed of the influx and the almost non-existent infrastructure. Other factors included gaps or delays in recruiting key staff positions, lack of implementing partner capacity and inter-agency tensions. In April 2018, the implementation of several priorities that should have been well underway had only just begun.

The response would have been more effective had inter-sectorality been better addressed. The push for greater integration needs to come from the top. The evaluation found that the CCCs, which guide how UNICEF responds in all emergencies, include little guidance on inter-sectorality.

The evaluation found that C4D, a service unique to UNICEF, has had an added value in the context of several UNICEF programmes. C4D also found its role and place by actively contributing to the Communicating with Communities Working Group. While this may be seen as positive, it leaves the question open as to the value of C4D in relation to sector-wide initiatives to engage with affected populations, communicate with communities and foster accountability to affected populations. The degree to which UNICEF C4D adds value for the wider
humanitarian community in emergency contexts may require further examination.

**Sector leadership**
There is a mixed picture of UNICEF’s performance in regard to its (sub-)sector (co-)leadership, which resembles the different levels of progress that the evaluation has seen within and among the programmes. The factors that could contribute to better sector leadership range from ensuring continued senior staffing (nutrition) and pushing for inter-sectorality (child protection and education), to ensuring a collective and genuine partnership approach in which UNICEF contributes to but does not dominate the sector (education).

While many of UNICEF’s partners were positive regarding UNICEF’s lead role in the sector, the evaluation also found that in some cases, the sector was dominated by UNICEF, while in other cases, UNICEF programmes were too distant from the sector. Finding the right balance is challenging and requires a collaborative spirit and open dialogue.

**Partnerships**
UNICEF was found to have strong relationships with its partners and many of these partners expressed positive views of UNICEF’s contributions to the partnership. The evaluation found evidence that (national) NGOs appreciated UNICEF’s sector leadership and their contractual relationships with UNICEF. That said, the NGO capacity in several programme areas was found wanting, something that not all sectors anticipated in time. The absence of UNICEF’s traditional partners in Cox’s Bazar contributed to this. The capacity-building effort, which should also be done in collaboration with other agencies and the Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), should pay attention to national/local NGOs’ understanding of the (international) legal frameworks, rights and standards and mechanisms that offer protection to Rohingya children.

**The quality of information**
The evaluation found that parallel data collection systems that are not necessarily compatible do not allow for easy comparison between the work of UNICEF programmes and the sectors. Much of this issue relates to the perennial problem of the division between individual agency responsibilities and collective arrangements in information gathering and coordination. The evaluation also found that data collection is too focused on coverage and the number of people reached and not enough on quality. Finally, advice from consultants and visiting staff was not always adequately absorbed.

**Supporting functions**
The human resources, supply and funding functions generally supported the response well. UNICEF deployed a significant number of staff from the Dhaka office, other Bangladesh field offices, and from its surge capacity in a timely manner. However, the evaluation observed an over-burdened field office and a growing disconnect (less collaboration and communication) between the office in Dhaka and the office in Cox’s Bazar. Funding was only a challenge in the early days of the response, which UNICEF overcame, thanks in part to Emergency Programme Fund loans. While the supply function has been stretched, and could have benefited from additional surge capacity, particularly in the early part of the response, it has generally worked well.

**Monsoon preparedness**
UNICEF took monsoon preparedness very seriously and did what it could to put plans in place. In several ways, monsoon preparedness has helped to mobilize actions and accelerate steps that have contributed to an improved response overall.
CONCLUSIONS

The future of the response

As noted, at the time of the field mission and in the weeks following, the evaluation observed and learned of improvements in UNICEF’s programmes and in the sectors. This included several new staff deployments, the revised HAC for 2018, and comments made in response to an earlier draft of this report.

The revised HAC for 2018 explains that UNICEF will follow four key strategies: 1) saving lives and protecting children and their families in the camps; 2) promoting social cohesion and confidence building with host communities in Ukhia and Teknaf; 3) system strengthening and accelerating programme implementation in the Cox’s Bazar District; and 4) applying lessons learned in the above strategies to the national level.13

The evaluation sees the relevance of these strategies, but cautions that the first priority should be to implement the objectives described in the HAC appeal in an effective and efficient manner. It is always important for humanitarian agencies, especially those such as UNICEF that are also active in longer-term development, to look at the future and plan ahead. However, at a time when there are still many things to be done in the camps and host communities, as this evaluation has found, an even wider focus and longer list of priorities carries risks.

In terms of improving the situation in the camps, although retrofitting/upgrading better quality services and facilities is an extremely complex undertaking in this densely-populated area, this work needs to be done. The evaluation has identified several immediate steps that should be taken. In WASH, for example, upgrading would involve the targeted and precise removal of some shelters in the most densely packed areas to allow space for gender-

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13 The June 2018 UNICEF situation report, which was produced at the time of writing this report, notes that UNICEF is following these four strategies. United Nations Children’s Fund, “Bangladesh Humanitarian Situation Report No. 33 (Rohingya influx),” UNICEF, June 2018.
sensitive latrines and better faecal sludge management. The designing and building of deeper latrines will also help to reduce the frequency of desludging.

However, before perceiving retrofitting/upgrading only as a set of physical activities in terms of adding quality adjustments to existing camp structures, UNICEF should fully integrate protection, gender and gender-based violence into its overarching response strategy. These should be the tenets of its interventions in all programmes and sectors. The evaluation has observed steps taken in this direction, with the development of gender-based violence integration action plans for each of the programme areas. Protection activities for adolescents should be expanded to address many of the unique risks that adolescents face and prevent negative coping mechanisms.

On the normative side, work remains to be done, especially when it comes to upholding the rights of refugee children (e.g., regarding documentation and family reunification). A critical issue in this context is the possible relocation of up to 100,000 refugees to the Bhasan Char island in the Gulf of Bengal. The United Nations position on this matter combines principled and practical considerations – including that refugees must have freedom of movement – and the United Nations is involved in technical assessments of living conditions on the island.\footnote{United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Relocation to Bhasan Char Island’, UNHCR, April 2018. According to the resident coordinator, this position paper was adopted as the United Nations’ position.} Even if the refugees freely relocated to the island, unless they can access continuous ferry services, the principle of freedom of movement will
not apply. UNICEF has said that it will provide “support to Rohingya who may move to other parts of the country.” Based on this statement, the evaluation understands that UNICEF will provide services to the island, should refugees move there. Given that this is an issue that inherently and fundamentally involves protection questions and rights issues, the evaluation recommends that UNICEF clarify its position from a normative standpoint and frame that position as a set of advocacy messages.

Furthermore, efforts to retrofit services should be focused on inter-sectorality. Even with new land available, the standard space for people in camps is unlikely to be realized. Services and facilities should therefore be combined as much as possible, taking gender, age and disability into account. One possibility, which may not be feasible in all sites, is the re-grouping of stabilization centres, outpatient therapeutic feeding centres, targeted supplementary feeding programmes and health services, which should either be in the same compound or in close physical proximity so as to ensure strong referral pathways.

Inter-sectorality should also be pursued through shared or combined (inter-sector) vulnerability mapping for better targeting of services in both camps and host communities.

**Overall conclusions**

While it would be wrong to conclude that the needs of Rohingya refugees have not been adequately met by UNICEF and the wider humanitarian community, the living conditions in the camps are appalling and do not meet the minimum standards for humanitarian assistance. This is not to deny the good and admirable efforts of the humanitarian responders working under difficult circumstances, nor to downplay UNICEF’s impressive achievements, as described throughout this report. Rather, it is to caution readers that much work remains to be done for the international community to uphold the rights of the Rohingya refugees.

All conclusions about UNICEF’s response must be understood in the unique context of this crisis. The speed and scale of the influx that began in August 2017 was almost unprecedented. At an average of 20,000 refugees per day in September 2017, the 700,000 Rohingya fled from Myanmar to one small stretch of land, creating the world’s largest and most densely populated refugee camp. The influx, combined with the lack of information about the exact situation in Rakhine and (potential) massive outflow of Rohingya, made it impossible for authorities and agencies on the ground to prepare. While 45 square metres is the emergency standard for the average area per person in a temporary, planned or self-settled camp setting, in the densest parts of the camps, the average area per person is 8 square metres. Due to this extreme congestion, many of the standards and indicators that have been carefully crafted since the late 1990s to ensure a minimum level of quality in humanitarian responses, have not been met.

The needs of the arriving refugees were enormous. The Rohingya are victims of egregious human rights abuses in Myanmar. This is compounded by the trauma and violence they experienced crossing into Bangladesh. Within the camps, hundreds of gender-based violence incidents are reported weekly. Children face serious protection risks such as psychosocial distress, neglect, abuse, separation from caregivers, child marriage, child labour and trafficking. In part because of poor access to health services in Myanmar, the newly arrived Rohingya refugees had an extremely low routine immunization coverage of less than 3 per cent. Malnutrition is at acute emergency levels in the camps, with one child in every five suffering from malnutrition.

Overall, the evaluation team found that despite the obstacles posed by this crisis, UNICEF rose to the challenge. UNICEF’s services reached many Rohingya children and their families and undoubtedly addressed their plight. The evaluation has noted a range of impressive achievements in areas such as scaling up, advocacy, sector leadership and service delivery. However, the evaluation also found critical challenges and identified several areas in need of improvement.

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16 The evaluation has developed a matrix that provides a basic summary of the key considerations connecting various sectors.
17 Comparable only to Rwandans in Tanzania and (then) Zaire in 1994 and the Kosovars in Albania and Macedonia in 1999.
18 This applies to the Sphere Minimum Humanitarian Standards in sectors such as shelter and WASH.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented below follow from the evaluation’s findings and conclusions. This section outlines the main priorities for improving UNICEF’s response to this crisis, and where relevant, UNICEF’s response to emergencies in general. It should be noted that, to UNICEF’s credit, many of these recommendations have already been acted upon.

**Recommendation 1: Information and analysis for preparedness**

There is a need for strengthened forecasting capacity, intelligence gathering and analysis. The lack of information from Myanmar on the situation in northern Rakhine State meant that UNICEF (and the entire international community) were caught off guard and were under-prepared to respond to this crisis. The evaluation recommends that UNICEF invest in collecting better political, social and economic intelligence for forecasting to inform its preparedness actions. The intelligence should be cross-border (and, where necessary, cross-regional), include local context and, where possible, be shared with other agencies. The intelligence should be translated into risk analysis and preparedness plans. [For action by: UNICEF Headquarters]

**Recommendation 2: Coordination**

While the ISCG remains a temporary mechanism, there is an opportunity to make improvements and strengthen accountability. UNICEF should raise the findings of this evaluation with the Senior Executive Group and the ISCG. Linked to other initiatives to strengthen coordination, it should work with the resident coordinator and the head of the ISCG to clarify lines of accountability and relationships, including the roles of sector leads with their home agencies and with the inter-agency coordination structures. [For action by: UNICEF Bangladesh and the Cox’s Bazar field office]
Share the relevant findings from this evaluation about coordination with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and promote the inclusion of the future of the refugee coordination model on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee agenda. In this process, review accountability issues in this model and make use of the cluster approach experiences. [For action by: the Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPS)]

**Recommendation 3: Context analysis for planning and advocacy**

The extreme lack of space has meant that the minimum standards for humanitarian action, which are grounded in human rights, have been difficult to meet. The evaluation recommends that UNICEF document the specific ways in which the congestion has impacted its ability to deliver and has ultimately denied Rohingya children and their families their rights. This work should inform UNICEF’s future strategies to respond to this crisis, both overall and in regard to specific programmes that were found to lack a thorough reflection on the context in which UNICEF operates. It should also be used to support UNICEF’s continued advocacy in this area, by providing a stronger position grounded in evidence. [For action by: UNICEF Bangladesh with support from the Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA)]

**Recommendation 4: Strategy**

Review UNICEF’s strategy for 2019 and beyond. Ensure it includes an analysis of the context (in line with recommendation 3), identifies existing and potential issues and obstacles and explains how the strategy will address these. Be explicit about prioritizing and sequencing activities. This strategy should include a greater emphasis on inter-sectorality and gender, be underpinned by a rights-based approach and emphasize the centrality of protection in all aspects of UNICEF’s work. [For action by: EMOPS, the Programme Division, ROSA and UNICEF Bangladesh]

Review how strategies for Level 3 emergencies are informed, developed and adjusted throughout a response. Review what documents UNICEF uses for communicating its humanitarian strategies and priorities and what documents it uses for resource mobilization, and determine whether the HAC and UNICEF’s response plans (which are a combination of strategy and appeals) should be reconsidered in future emergencies. [For action by: EMOPS]

**Recommendation 5: Rights, protection, gender and gender-based violence**

Review UNICEF’s guidance on advocacy in emergencies. Promoting the rights of children must involve robust advocacy messages, which should not only be transmitted publicly in UNICEF communications, but also in private in dialogue with governments and humanitarian decision-makers. The review should consider UNICEF’s comparative advantage as an advocate for children in crisis contexts, how to maximize the relationship between operational response and advocacy, and UNICEF’s advocacy position in relation to other actors. [For action by: EMOPS]

Strengthen efforts to address protection risks, including gender-based violence. In so doing, the relevant offices should strengthen and deepen inter-sectoral work among all programme sections and ensure attention to psychosocial support, children with disabilities and similar other risks and vulnerabilities. [For action by: UNICEF Bangladesh with the support of ROSA and the Programme Division]

Strengthen efforts to mainstream gender in all aspects of UNICEF’s response. With the help of gender experts in ROSA and UNICEF Headquarters (and/or an external gender expert) and using the most recent studies about Rohingya refugees’ behaviours and practices (including UNICEF’s knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and practices study), ensure gender is integrated across all sectors (and that all of the actions from the ISCG Gender Matrix have been implemented). [For action by: UNICEF Bangladesh with the support of ROSA and the Programme Division]

The relocation of Rohingya to Bhasan Char island or their return to Myanmar inherently and fundamentally involves protection questions and rights issues. UNICEF should develop a position on these issues from a normative perspective and ensure that this position is framed in a set of advocacy messages in coordination with other United Nations agencies. [For action by: UNICEF Bangladesh with the support of ROSA and EMOPS]

**Recommendation 6: Positioning of C4D**

Review the extent to which C4D fits (better) within the humanitarian community’s work on engaging with communities in emergency situations and assess whether and what investments are needed. [For action by: EMOPS and the Programme Division]
Recommendation 7: Innovation, out-of-the-box thinking and next steps
The Rohingya refugee crisis is, in many ways, an extreme situation. Exceptional steps are therefore needed to confront certain challenges. Among other issues, areas of weakness that can’t be strengthened using traditional approaches necessitate that UNICEF think outside the box. These include the following:

Capacity building of local and national NGOs: Some of UNICEF’s traditional capacity-building partners aren’t present in Cox’s Bazar. UNICEF should experiment with innovative ways of building the capacities of its partners, for example, by seconding staff members for financial management, peering and mentoring rather than training. This should include capacity building on protection and rights issues. [For action by: UNICEF Bangladesh with the support of ROSA and the Programme Division].

Faecal sludge management: Due to the layout of and congestion in the camps, the densely-populated space in the highly rural environment, and the initial lack of design for pit emptying, the issue of faecal sludge management is extremely complex. Given that no off-the-shelf solutions are available, in a sense, the world’s technical capacity needs to be mobilized to identify solutions. Working with the sector, UNICEF and other key stakeholders should experiment with new ways of addressing this issue by engaging the private sector and universities. [For action by: the Programme Division, the Supply Division, ROSA and UNICEF Bangladesh].

Recommendation 8: Integrated programming and working arrangements
The evaluation team observed a growing disconnect between staff in Dhaka and Cox’s Bazar as well as a need to work more inter-sectorally. The evaluation recommends that UNICEF undertake a light management review that would consider the reallocation of roles and responsibilities. The review should look at ways to promote staff work across programmes (and not in silos) and develop a matrix management model that would facilitate stronger working relationships between the Dhaka and Cox’s Bazar offices. This review should also examine how an education-in-emergencies approach can forge closer programmes linkages through the education programme. [For action by: UNICEF Bangladesh]

Ensure that the revision of the CCCs looks at strengthening inter-sectorality and builds links between UNICEF programme areas. [For action by: EMOPS]

Recommendation 9: Knowledge management and data
UNICEF’s response has been supported by numerous visiting advisers from Headquarters, ROSA and the global clusters, as well as expert consultants. Given the already numerous demands on staff, some of this advice has not been absorbed. UNICEF should further invest in knowledge management. This could include developing a standard format for reports made by visiting advisers and setting up a system for monitoring the implementation of their recommendations or adapting the Emergency Management Team’s Action Tracker system. [For action by: the Emergency Management Team and UNICEF Bangladesh with the support of ROSA].

The evaluation observed that different datasets are being used in the response. While these datasets may serve different purposes, their compatibility should be ensured from the outset. UNICEF should review the commonalities and differences of the information and data needed at the programme level and the sector level and ensure that these datasets are compatible from the onset of data collection. [For action by: UNICEF Bangladesh].
ANNEX 1: EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The following questions may be revised or refined during the inception phase of the evaluation.

1. What has been UNICEF’s contribution to the wider effort to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable people who reside in camp settings, are integrated within Bangladeshi communities and are in host communities? How has the wider effort impacted UNICEF’s work?

2. UNICEF’s ability to address the needs of increasing numbers of refugees:
   - How prepared was UNICEF for the influx of refugees?
   - From September 2017, what has been UNICEF’s ability to meet its commitments compared to the calculated need [coverage]?
   - What factors contributed to or hindered the ability to grow alongside the increased caseloads?
   - Looking ahead from March 2018, what is UNICEF’s ability to deliver on its commitments versus present
and projected caseloads [including against potential shifts noted in the United Nations risk assessments]?  

3. **The appropriateness of UNICEF’s strategy and programmatic choices:**
   - How relevant are UNICEF’s present and planned interventions to the needs of the population? To take account of UNICEF’s mandate, commitments (e.g., the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs)) and the division of labour established through relevant coordination mechanisms.
   - Are there gaps in UNICEF’s current programming response against the established or projected needs?
   - If so, what are the reasons for the gaps and what is needed to close them?

4. **The quality of and use of information used to guide the response:**
   - What is the quality of the situation analyses and needs assessments (whether inter-agency or UNICEF led) used to estimate caseloads and project future needs?
   - Are the monitoring systems, reviews and assessment exercises sufficiently comprehensive and accurate to guide UNICEF and partners?
   - How comprehensive are the participatory approaches used to secure Rohingya and other stakeholder inputs in the different information gathering efforts? Is the voice of the affected populations obtained in an effective, pro-active and culturally respectful way?
   - How well are these diverse information sources being used to inform and adapt the response?

5. **The quality of the programming response.** To what extent has the response:
   - Been **effective**? (in achieving stated objectives)
   - Been **timely and proportionate**? (in scaling up for adequate coverage)
   - Been **of high quality**? (consistent with relevant standards and policies, i.e., the CCCs and Sphere Standards)
   - **Delivered for different groups**? (according to disability, gender, adolescents, ethnicity, religion, caste, refugee/host-community)
   - Been **accountable to affected populations**? (in an effective, pro-active and culturally respectful way)
   - Been **efficient**? (compared to alternatives)

6. **Managerial support** to the programmatic response, with a focus on the Level 3 Simplified Standard Operating Procedures:
   - Are the accountabilities among offices (especially the Cox’s Bazar Field Office, UNICEF Bangladesh, ROSA, UNICEF Geneva, the Supply Division and Headquarters) clear? Did this arrangement work well?
   - How well did human resources support the response? Are there skills/staffing needs required to meet its commitments that UNICEF has not identified or moved to secure? If so, why has this situation arisen?
   - How well was the response supported by funding and funds management, including risk-informed projections? How did funding affect results?
   - How well is the supply function, including considerations of coping with the obstacles in the working environment, able to deliver necessary supplies on time and at the locations needed?

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OBJECTIVE 2: Determine how well UNICEF is working with implementing partners and other agencies and the Government, for both the near- and medium-/long-terms.

7. System-wide coordination, leadership and advocacy:
   - When UNICEF has the cluster lead role (or nearest structural equivalent), how well is it fulfilling its role as cluster/sector lead? To include necessary consideration of how the wider humanitarian effort has impacted UNICEF’s work.
   - When UNICEF does not have the cluster lead (or there is no cluster mechanism), how well is UNICEF using and promoting the Principles of Partnership?
   - How well is UNICEF managing relations with the Government of Bangladesh through the several channels employed? How well is it able to balance and coordinate the different roles with which it engages the Government [advocate, technical partner, cluster lead, etc].

8. Working with implementing partners to deliver the programmatic response:
   - Does UNICEF have a set of partners able to execute the present and pending programmes to the necessary scale, timing and quality?
   - To what extent did UNICEF provide adequate training/capacity building, monitor and address partner performance and establish minimum standards?
   - In which ways are UNICEF or United Nations partnership processes facilitating or constraining effective programmatic response?

9. Efforts to address long-term goals while responding to the current challenges:
   - Is the UNICEF team effectively planning or actually initiating actions linking the emergency response to longer-term development goals? How effective are these efforts, (particularly in education and child protection)? What are the constraints? To pay special attention to steps to strengthen resilience and preparedness in national/local systems.
   - How is the programme in UNICEF Bangladesh being adjusted to the new context and needs of the population in Bangladesh? What are the difficulties, including opportunity costs, if any, encountered internally and externally (i.e., UNICEF internal structure and processes, donor requirements)?

OBJECTIVE 3: Identify actions to improve the response.

10. What actions are required in order to improve the response and to prepare for future needs?

Link to the full evaluation report
https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_103442.html