



### DRR IN ACTION CASE STUDY

## Environmental Field Advisor deployment in an emergency response

### Theme of the Case Study

Green Response / Enhancing Preparedness for Effective Response

### Country

Bangladesh

### Case location

Cox's Bazar

## Background

Through the Green Response Initiative, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) aims to improve the environmental outcomes of its emergency response activities. As part of these efforts, an Environmental Field Advisor (EFA) has been deployed to the Population Movement Operation (PMO) set up in response to the massive influx of people into Cox's Bazar district from Rakhine State, Myanmar. The arrival of almost one million people into a poor farming and forest environment has had a significant environmental impact. This increases the difficulties and potential conflict of the host community and, complicates and delays recovery operations. It is important that emergency response activities do not further exacerbate the environmental damage.

## What did the action seek to change?

The IFRC seeks to improve the environmental outcomes of the actions it takes in response to the crisis in Cox's Bazar. Largely, the work is inward looking at IFRC projects and programmes seeking to reduce negative impacts and enhance activities that may produce a positive environmental impact. Primarily, this work is focused on improving ongoing projects within the response but in addition it aims to collect information to highlight broader issues that may affect other future response activities.

## What were the key actions taken to achieve this change?

A limited Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was conducted to identify issues of significant concern both for immediate action or for future institutional improvement. Simultaneously, work is done with sector and project leads to identify areas of significant environmental impact or where improvements can be made. It is important that these changes and improvements are implemented without negatively impacting the effectiveness and efficiency of the operation.

*Photo: Clean surface water sources are scarce in Cox's Bazar refugee site. Existing surface water ponds accumulate solid waste including organic and latrine waste, turning ponds into veritable health hazards and breeding grounds for disease-bearing vectors. February 2018.  
| Patrick Fox, Swedish Red Cross.*

## What were the essential steps taken along the process to bring about this change?

Step 1	Conduct initial scoping of EIA study to identify key issues
Step 2	Work with sector and programme leads to identify improvements
Step 3	Integrate changes into programme plan
Step 4	Institute monitoring plan to capture impact of changes

## What SFDRR principles<sup>1</sup> were applicable to this change process?

- Principle 1 **Addressing underlying risk factors cost-effectively through investment versus relying primarily on post-disaster response and recovery.** By working to prevent environmental harm particularly associated with increased erosions and landslide risk, the project reduces underlying risk factors in a cost-effective manner.
- Principle 2 **Coherence of disaster risk reduction and sustainable development policies, plans, practices and mechanisms, across different sectors.** The EFA deployment works across all sectors of the emergency response to promote sustainable response, recovery and development practices.
- Principle 3 **Accounting of local and specific characteristics of disaster risks when determining measures to reduce risk.** The focus of the EFA deployment is on improvement of ongoing work within the emergency response and as such, it is cognisant of specific local characteristics.

## What were the Achievements and the Impacts?

As the work is currently underway it is not possible to identify long-term impacts. However, achievements made from the deployment to date include:

- IFRC joining the UNHCR/IOM/WFP/FAO initiative to provide LPG as a cooking fuel to all households in the camp community to combat the massive deforestation caused by firewood collection;
- Increased general awareness of environmental issues within the PMO including waste management at warehouse sites;
- Assistance with small scale improvements such as Danish Red Cross' Micro-DRR and community greening project.

## What were the key Lessons Learnt?

The deployment of an Environmental Field Advisor within an emergency response is an effective way to identify environmental issues and improve environmental outcomes. It is important as an environmental advisor to support ongoing work by the sectors and focus on providing solutions to improve outcomes, not focus on issues that are unsolvable or disrupt programmed activities.



Camp communities in Cox's Bazar use wood for construction or as firewood, collected from formerly dense forest land. Now the area of refugee residence is almost completely void of any vegetation and trees, putting the population at risk as rains easily turn into rapid runoff and flash floods with heightened possibility for landslides. February 2018. | Patrick Fox, Swedish Red Cross.

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Primary responsibility of the State, Shared responsibility, Protection, All-of-society-engagement, coordination mechanism, empowering local-decision makers, Multi-hazard approach and inclusive risk-informed decision-making, Sustainable development, Local and specific risks.

## What were the Good Practices arising from this action?

Good Practice 1	Rapid deployment and assessment of issues focusing on providing real time solutions rather than report writing
Good Practice 2	Working in a positive supportive manner with sector and programme leads to provide positive solutions to environmental issues
Good Practice 3	Deployment of a knowledgeable and experienced environmental field advisor able to rapidly complete the initial assessment

## Policy Relevance to DRR in Action

The case study highlights the importance of, and a method by which humanitarian actors can take responsibility for the environmental impacts of their emergency response activities. The deployment of an EFA to work across all sectors of an organization's response activities and raise awareness of environmental issues increases the effectiveness of response activity, particularly in promoting recovery and development. In addition it reduces the, often externalised, environmental costs of disaster response that normally is passed onto the host country.

## Key Messages from this Case Study

A healthy environment and functional robust eco-system is fundamental in reducing disaster risk and increasing resilience to disaster events. By improving the environmental outcomes of emergency response activity, it is likely to speed recovery of the affected community and reduce the likelihood of impact of future disaster events.

The awareness within many humanitarian actors about the environmental impacts of emergency response activity is poor. The externalising of environmental costs to the host countries and communities, particularly in displacement situations, causes conflict and hardship than can be avoided.



## References for this Case Study

1. Environment Assessment Report, IFRC Bangladesh Population Movement Operation 2017
2. Environmental Field Advisor proposed work outline
3. IFRC, Green Response Snapshot 2018

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