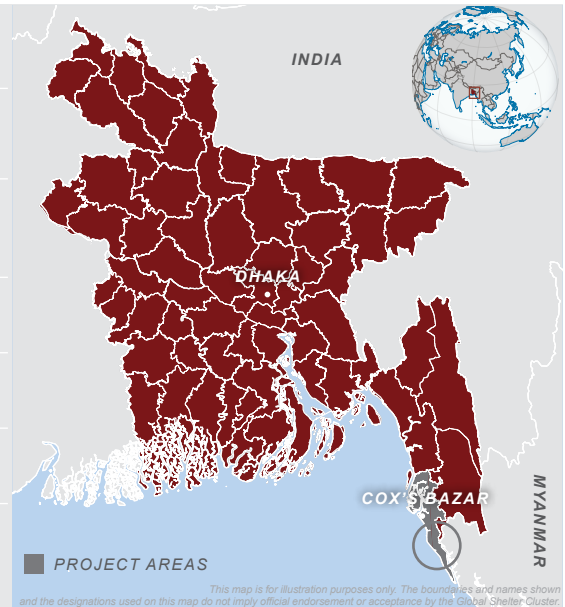


CASE STUDY BANGLADESH 2017–2018 / ROHINGYA CRISIS

KEYWORDS: Site planning, Coordination, Disaster Risk Reduction

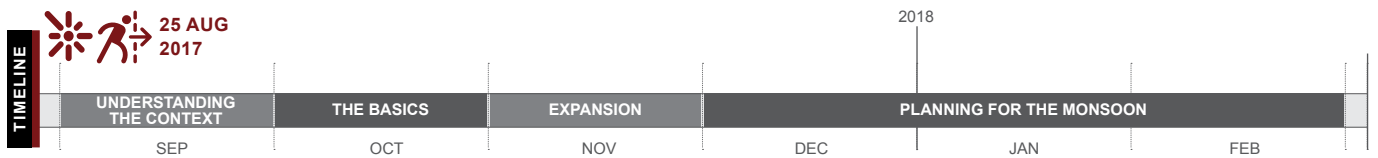
CRISIS	Rohingya Refugee Crisis, Cox's Bazar, 25 August 2017–onwards
TOTAL PEOPLE AFFECTED*	260,000 households (1.3 million individuals), incl. host community
TOTAL PEOPLE DISPLACED*	134,200 households (671,000 new arrivals) 120,480 households (602,400 refugees) in KBE
PROJECT LOCATION	Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion (KBE) Site, Cox's Bazar
PROJECT BENEFICIARIES	Over 120,000 households (600,000 individuals).
PROJECT OUTPUTS	Site planning for the KBE site
SITE DENSITIES**	10–20m² per person in fully developed areas



* Figures as of 25 Feb 2018. Joint Response Plan (JRP) for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis.
 ** Typical planning figures are between 45m² and 60m² per person depending on the context. In exceptional circumstances, 35m² per person is acceptable.

PROJECT SUMMARY

In less than two months, over 400,000 refugees self-settled around existing refugee settlements in Cox's Bazar. This case study highlights the challenges site planners faced in the first six months working in this context. More refugees continued to arrive, secondary displacement increased, and agencies requested additional land to provide infrastructure and basic services. The case study chronicles the first attempts to map and understand the spontaneous settlements, identify additional land and design the first planned resettlement areas, to prepare for and mitigate the effects of the imminent monsoon season.

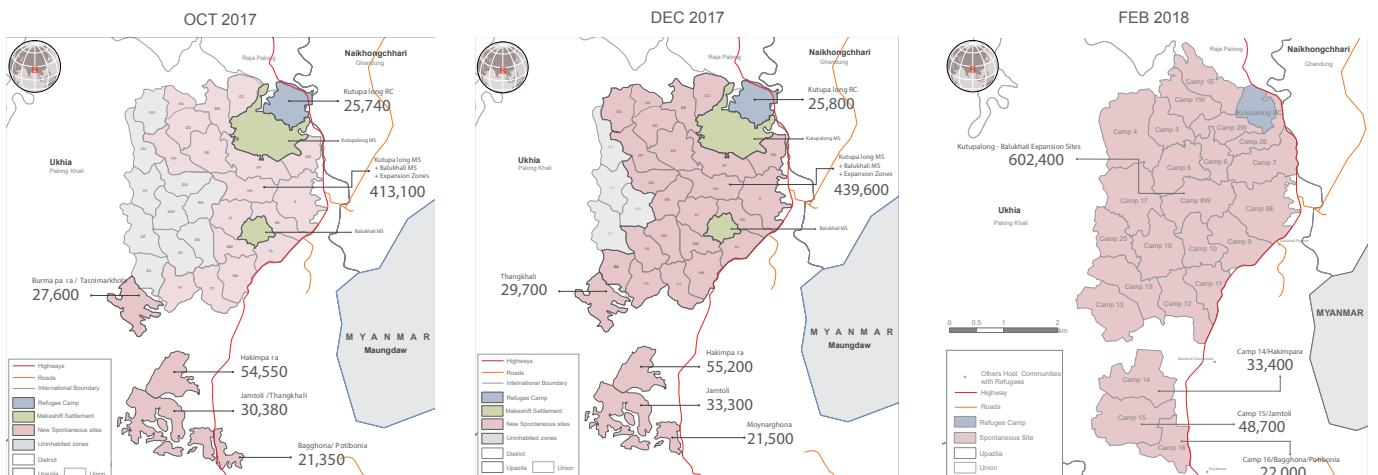


STRENGTHS

- + Early decisions were key to shaping the response.
- + Drones helped understand the site and terrain, and communicate to the government.
- + Disaster risk prevention specialists were brought in early.
- + Good inter-agency collaboration.

WEAKNESSES

- Site planners struggled to find an efficient technical forum.
- Resources were spread unequally across the entire site.
- Lack of an agreed zoning system caused confusion.
- The Macro Settlement Development Plan was not adopted.
- Refugees were not engaged in site planning early on.



After 25 August 2017, new refugee arrivals settled around existing settlements along the border with Myanmar. In six months, over 600,000 refugees were living in the Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion site, occupying the whole expansion zone allocated by the government of Bangladesh (maps: ISCG).

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

For information on the 2017 influx and the Shelter-NFI response, see overview A.13.

Before the 2017 influx, no site planning, basic layout or erection of emergency shelters had started in the areas around the existing Rohingya settlements.¹

Starting in late August, in less than two months, over 400,000 refugees arrived in and around these settlements. One year later, the whole area was regarded as the largest refugee camp in the world, hosting 631,000 refugees.² The massive influx dispersed into the existing settlements and host communities along the border, with the majority heading to the largest existing refugee camp of Kutupalong and the make-shift settlement of Balukhali.

Given the scale and speed of the influx, actors on the ground focused on providing life-saving assistance for the most vulnerable and let others self-settle. As a result, when site planning teams from the lead agencies started to draw up the first plans, they were faced with an unregulated and organically growing camp. Refugees were leading the decision-making on where to settle, where to pave new footpaths and bridges, and how to provide shelter for their families.

The hilly site was prone to flooding and landslides, and this was exacerbated as the need to rapidly settle the refugees further destabilized the slopes, removed natural drainage and infiltration capacities, and increased the chances of intense flooding. This became particularly relevant with the approaching monsoon season.

This case study focuses on activities and decisions made in the first six months of the emergency. It includes the very first attempts by site planners to understand the extension of the Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion (KBE) areas and the start of a formal process of site planning. This period can be broken down into four distinct phases, ending in February 2018 as works began to prepare the site for the monsoon.

PHASE 1 – UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

In the first weeks, the rains and lack of road infrastructure made movement within the KBE site extremely difficult and time consuming. There were no maps of the expansion and no formal roads.

¹ Prior to August 2017, there were over 100,000 Rohingya refugees living in the KBE area. The existing sites were planned, to a certain extent.

² As of 31 Aug 2018. JRP Mid-term Review.

Understanding the scale of the camp was difficult, as new arrivals were pushing the boundaries further north and south at alarming speed, with the most significant expansion to the west towards the national forest reserve. A breakdown of the area to enable better inter-agency coordination prompted the creation of the first “zones”.

Combining these maps with early population figures paved the way for the first estimates of densities and, more importantly, forecast potential population capacities. The maps also revealed the urgent need to improve access. The “Army Road” was commissioned, following the western border of the first expansion zone at the time. Another key decision taken was the rapid creation of the Transit Site alongside the existing “highway” and close to the Kutupalong Registered Camp.

The focus of this phase was on settling the new arrivals and assisting the most vulnerable with their immediate needs. A lack of staff and partners called for flexibility in roles and, as a result, site planners were drawn into other duties and field assignments, such as assisting with urgent relocations. In hindsight, it would have been better if site planners had focused more on the bigger picture, without getting too involved in field operations.

The majority of settlements grow organically and are shaped by the physical environment and the locations of key infrastructural elements. So, decisions made during the first few months of the emergency have ramifications for years. It is important to be balanced when evaluating the urgency of decisions and the growth of settlements whilst understanding their long-term impact.



© Richard Evans / UNHCR

Prior to the establishment of the transit centre, refugees self-settled on improvised plots using whatever material they could find, as agencies did not have time to plan in advance of people settling.



© Philipp Hübner / UNHCR/SDC

ZONE 00 IN OCT 2017 BEFORE THE EXPANSION

PHASE 2 – THE BASICS

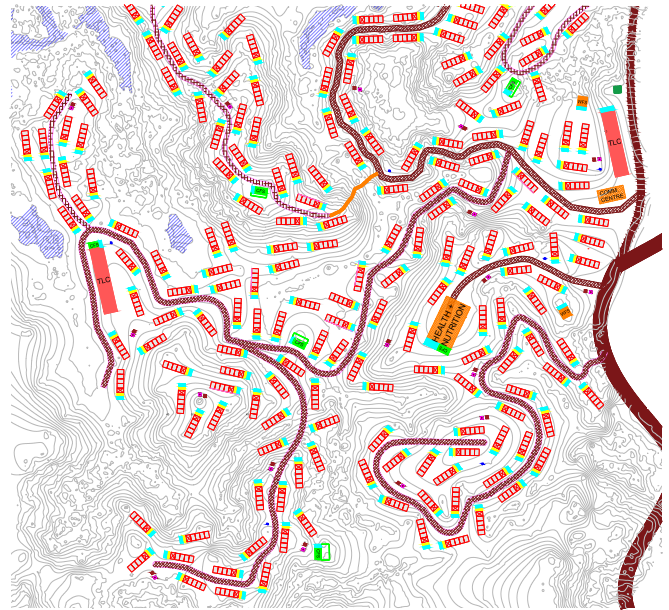
Following the production of the first maps, density calculations and an open channel of communication with the government, an additional 1,000 acres of land was released to the humanitarian community to accommodate the new arrivals and reduce population densities around the existing sites. The issuing of the new land enabled site planners to prepare in advance of refugees settling. For the first time in two months, land was surveyed and formal site plans were drawn up using international humanitarian standards and following contextualized best practice. However, it was still a race against time, as the unsustainable densities in existing settled areas were forcing refugees to spontaneously expand into the new land.

One of the very first areas in the expansion (labelled OO) was largely designed before refugees settled. Crucial land was reserved for schools, clinics and community buildings, while areas prone to landslides and flooding were demarcated as unsuitable for shelters.

As the understanding of the topography, geology and drainage patterns improved, the original zonal maps became more detailed. General consensus within the humanitarian community led to the use of the same base map, employing the notation of AA, BB, CC, etc., dividing the camp into zones ranging in size from 45 to 150 acres, each corresponding to approximately 20,000 refugees.³ This sub-division was widely adopted by the Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) and partners on the ground, yet, it was crucially not adopted by the Government’s Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC), the Army and the refugees themselves, who were all using different zoning systems. There was a significant failure to communicate and coordinate between stakeholders, resulting in confusion and delays as key groups could not “talk the same language”.

This phase was chaotic, with new actors and funds coming in, and activities being geared up. With the needs outweighing the resources, an efficient and coordinated response was needed. However, spatial communication issues (due to lack of maps and agreed notation) rendered coordination challenging. Agencies were unable to effectively follow-up on cases and track resources, and time was lost in the field as assessments could not be compared, because the exact locations could not be specified. GPS was not commonly used by agencies and geo-referenced data reporting was not standardized. This led to duplication, such as distribution in the same areas.

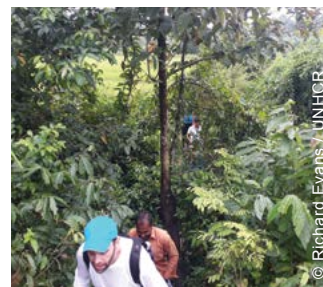
³Based on average population of AA–NN in October 2017.



Site planners started to draw the first plans following minimum agreed standards in October 2017, and some of the expansion zones were prepared in advance of refugees settling (Plan: Phoebe Goodwin / UNHCR).



In the initial phase of site planning in the field, drones were used to identify prime land for communal facilities, that was demarcated by teams on the ground.



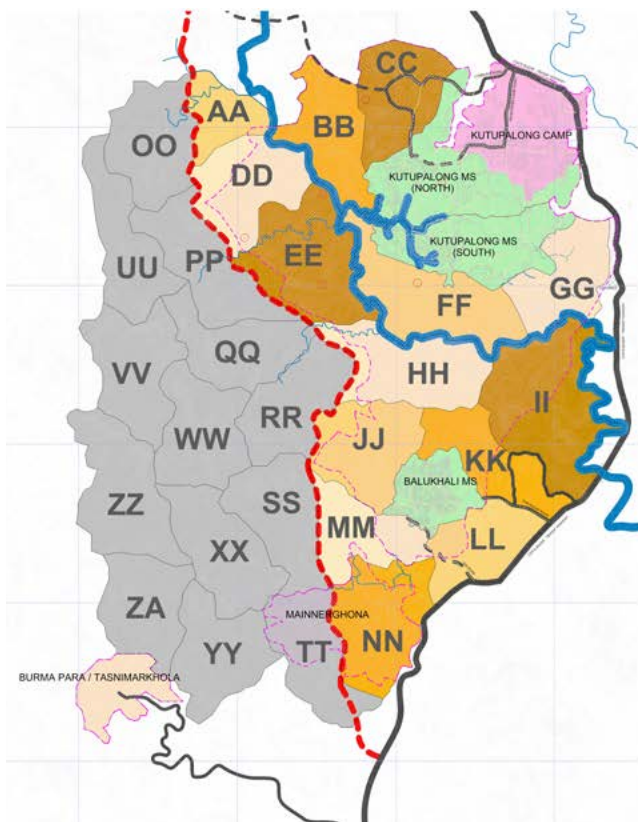
Access to the site was challenging and agencies fenced the west side of the zone to prevent uncontrolled expansion towards the natural reserve area.



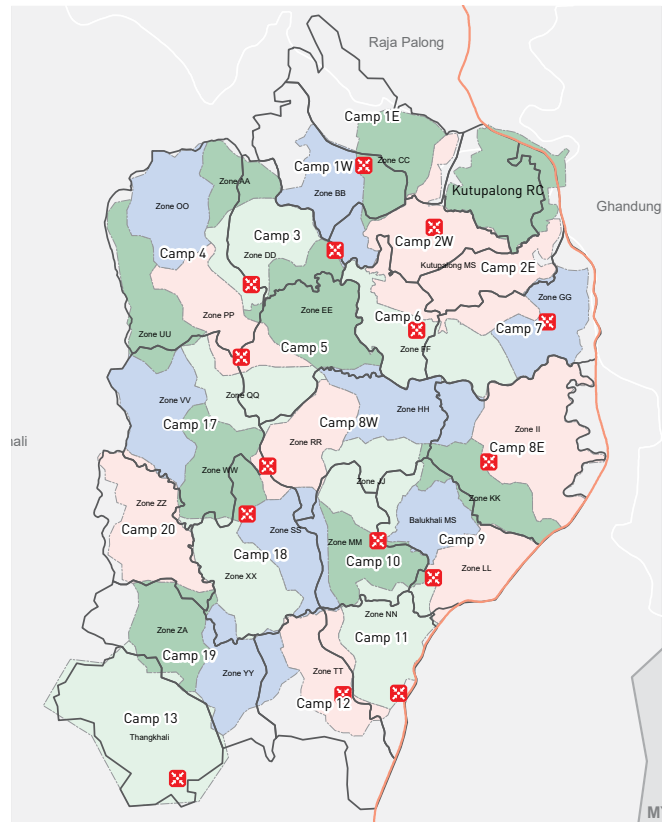
ZONE OO IN AUG 2018 AFTER THE EXPANSION



Drone image of zone OO after refugees settled, in February 2018. Densities were lower here than in other parts of the site, and services were relatively well distributed. However, this also meant that assistance was not evenly spread throughout the site, as other areas remained very dense and lacked services (Source: NPM, 14 Feb 2018).



The army road was opened along what used to be the western border of the KBE site at the time it was designed, before the further expansion in the grey zones. The humanitarian community used the notation AA–ZZ for about four months, to divide zones of comparable size (Source: ISCG, 30 Sep 2017).



The government, humanitarians and refugees were all using different zoning systems, which created confusion and caused coordination challenges. To address this, the Site Management Sector conducted a lengthy exercise to adopt a joint approach between the government’s “camp” system and the international community’s zones (Source: ISCG, 12 Feb 2018).

PHASE 3 – EXPANSION AND MSDP

The groundbreaking work undertaken in zone OO was now replicated by all parties involved in site planning, to varying degrees. The use of drones facilitated the collection and sharing of geo-referenced, visual information. Standard Operating Procedures for partners to engage with the site planners were created. For the first time, sectors took an active role in the site to ensure that there was land allocated for their ambitious and often unrealistic funding proposals. This hectic period was a “land-grab” by agencies who planted flags, marked out land and constructed facilities without due diligence or understanding the specifics of the site. Resources were concentrated on green-field areas where construction was seen as an easy win, rather than attempting to negotiate land for services in areas already settled. In a notable example from one area of the expansion zone, there was no space for shelters as all land was reserved for community buildings.

This prompted the development of a Macro Settlement Development Plan (MSDP), with the aim to compile and analyse all data into a single geo-spatially referenced “live” document that would zoom out from an isolated zonal plan perspective to a holistic macro scale across the whole site. The MSDP was intended to be a live planning and advocacy tool to allow decision makers to plan for the future, striving for an equitable distribution of and access to relevant services and infrastructure. Using a series of themes, including health, WASH, roads and bridges, infrastructure and environment, it was designed to have government ownership and to act as single repository for all the site planners to feed into.

The MSDP demonstrated that, in a matter of weeks, the whole KBE site would exceed planning densities and so additional land would be needed, especially if decongestion of the areas surrounding the original camp was to be attempted. Densities of less than 10m² per person were creating conditions comparable to the worst urban slums in Dhaka and, due to poor access to life-saving services in many areas, the Health Sector’s warnings were becoming more and more vociferous.

Although well-conceived, the MSDP largely failed to fulfil its potential due to issues of coordination and ownership. The ad-hoc and untested coordination platform was unable to grasp the need for this tool and lift it above the confusion of inter-sectoral coordination. If the MSDP had gained traction, it would have enabled improved planning for the location of key facilities and infrastructure, which have a direct impact on long-term development of the settlement.

PHASE 4 – PLANNING FOR THE MONSOON

By the end of 2017, the last of the new arrivals settled and the MSDP was updated with new themes. Planning was shifting away from the immediate allocation of land and provision of life-saving services to the medium and long-term perspectives. Exposure to the situation of the camp and a familiarity with the landscape resulted in an intergovernmental organization specialized in disaster preparedness being commissioned to undertake a landslide risk analysis of the main KBE site. Flood risk analysis was conducted by the lead agencies working on site planning.

It immediately became apparent that the monsoon rains starting in May/June, coupled with the annual cyclone seasons, could trigger a second wave of displacement, with resulting landslides and flooding potentially causing significant damage and loss of life. As the initial results of the analysis were released, coordinated actions were taken to mitigate against the natural hazards.

The unique nature of the context has underlined the importance of site planning for the long-term safety of the refugees. It has highlighted the need to strengthen the role of site planners and elevate their voices within the coordination platform, as informed and early decisions will improve coordination and, in the long run, significantly improve the lives of those affected by displacement.



Without an agreed site plan or camp management structure in place, new arrivals started to level ground for shelter and self-settle.



The additional 1,000 acres were quickly occupied in the span of a few months. Given the scale of the site, a macro-settlement approach was needed to identify the strategic location of facilities and plan for the future growth, infrastructure and likely scenarios.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

WEAKNESSES

- Partly due to the confusion created by the unorthodox co-ordination structure used in the Rohingya response, partly due to the unfavourable location and terrain, **site planning teams struggled to find an efficient technical forum** and “be heard” by the Inter Sector Coordination Group. Various bolt-on technical working groups were formed to try and bring those involved in site planning together. **These working groups often lacked focus and output due to unclear terms of reference**, as there was no precedent.

- Although one zone was planned in advance and more focus put on ensuring minimum standards there, this meant that **resources were spread unequally across the entire site**.

- **A lack of agreed naming and zoning system resulted in confusion**, wasted resources and delayed further key processes, such as a unified address system.

- **The Macro Settlement Development Plan largely failed**, as it was not adopted by the inter-sectoral coordination body.

- **Refugees were not engaged in site planning decisions early on**. This was partly due to the localized site management structure lagging behind the growth of the settlement, and the government camp officers being involved only in 2018.

STRENGTHS

+ **Early decisions were key to shaping the response**, such as the building of the “Army Road” bisecting the camp and the development of the transit centre on private land.

+ **The use of drones proved vital** to not only understand the scale of the sites and the terrain, but also to communicate to the government and international community the need for intervention.

+ Recognizing that – with the coming of the monsoon season – the refugee crisis could morph into a physical disaster, **specialists in disaster risk prevention were brought in early** to advise and contribute to the planning.

+ **The lead site planning and site development agencies worked jointly** to formulate contextualized standards, develop the macro settlement development plan and conduct hazard mapping within the site.



Major infrastructure (such as the Army road and culverts) was needed to convert a forest land into a liveable settlement.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Demarcation and sub-zones need to be agreed and finalized by all parties as soon as possible.** This process should start immediately, with authorities (military, line ministries, etc.) taking leadership and ownership of the decisions, then trickling down through the humanitarian structure. There is a need to quickly understand the communities’ pre-existing structures, as adoption will be quicker if actions are aligned to such social systems. There is often no time or perceived need for wider consultation. A single body of site planners should be given authority and trust, with a clear timeline for finalization. Delays will cause significant interruptions in service delivery. There must be a wider roll-out to communities and actual physical demarcations on the ground, so that refugees can orient and base themselves within appropriate spatial parameters, leading to location addresses.
- **Macro settlement development planning must start immediately.** A unit within the site planning department should start looking at the macro scale of settlement development from the outset. It is important to identify where and how refugee settlements can integrate with host communities and share/enhance existing infrastructure and services. This responsibility must be clearly entrusted to a lead agency who has the skill-set, unless the host government has shown willingness and capacity to take on such a task. The role of the government is crucial, especially when requiring additional land. But the planning will lose relevance unless it keeps pace with the speed of the emergency and humanitarian agencies’ demands for land (e.g. hospital, logistic hubs, etc.).
- **Site planners must plan for a variety of possible scenarios, to understand what the site will “look like” 3, 6, 12, 24, 48 months into the future.** Site planners have a role to help interpret the topography, geomorphology, geography, natural hazards and the subtle interplay between the physical site and its socioeconomic development. They can also foresee the spatial impacts of population growth within refugee settlements. Key site planning interventions conducted early could allow for positive expansion and diversification of livelihood opportunities for refugees, increasing their independence and self-dignity. Site planners should have the authority to raise such issues to senior management, so they can be heard with equal value to other sectoral or organizational priorities.
- **Bold decisions must be taken early and with “no-regrets” philosophy.** Decisions related to densities or to where key services are provided will have long-term ramifications and impacts, affecting the residents for years to come. When relocations are part of a well formulated site plan that allows for longevity and natural growth, short-term disadvantages are largely rewarded with the significant improvement of refugees’ living conditions. The longer people reside in an unsafe or inappropriate location, the more resistant they are to secondary displacement.