

REAL TIME EVALUATION OF IOM'S ROHINGYA RESPONSE

Executive Summary

K. Van Brabant and S. Patel, CMC, 6 November 2018

Setting

Within a few months after end of August 2017, some 670,000 Rohingya were forced to flee from Rakhine State to Cox's Bazar district. They arrived with few possessions, in poor physical and mental state, in an environment where sites with full infrastructure had to be carved out for forested hills in the Ukhia and Teknaf subdistricts. The response was equally massive, with the number of organisations and agencies involved increasing from some 15 to 135 over the following six months.

IOM has been one of the major contributors to that success. Present for many years, it massively scaled up, taking on four major responsibilities: a) Its own programmatic work, directly and with implementing partners, in site development, shelter & NFI, health, WASH, protection, Communicating with Communities (CwC) and site management, while also maintaining and expanding its local version of Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM); b) sector lead or co-lead for site development and site management, shelter & NFI, and CwC; c) setting up and management a procurement and supply line for several agencies, notably for fuel and WASH products; d) leadership then co-leadership for the overall response, a situation it had never been in before. This is a particularly remarkable challenge as this was the 7th L3 IOM responded to in 2017. Noteworthy is also the constraining policy environment by the Government of Bangladesh, that wants this to be a 'temporary situation' only.

In October 2017, IOM appealed for US \$ 119.77 million. A second appeal, in March 2018 was for US \$ 182.1 million. As of June 2018, IOM's appeal was only 22% funded. The collective Joint Response Plan found itself equally severely underfunded in the same period.

This Real-Time Evaluation (RTE)

The Terms of Reference (ToR) state the purpose of this RTE to be "*a formative, forward-looking evaluation to improve ongoing decision making and management of IOM's emergency response to the humanitarian crisis in Cox Bazar as well as at a global level. (...) The RTE will provide IOM with real-time and practical recommendations to facilitate operational improvements to strengthen the emergency response during the period covered by the 2018 Joint Response Plan (JRP) and, if already applicable, the stabilisation and development focused interventions.*" Its audience is internal.

The ToR state three focus areas:

- Focus Area 1: Retrospective: "A review of the IOM's Cox's Bazar humanitarian response to date, including the quality and relevance of IOM's ongoing interventions."
- Focus Area 2: Forward looking: "Identification of opportunities for longer-term programming in Cox's Bazar and a review of IOM Cox's Bazar strategy to transition from what is primarily a humanitarian response to a more stable and development focused model as the situation allows."
- Focus Area 3: "Implementation of IOM's internal L3 procedures in supporting IOM's response at HQ, RO, and country level to identify gaps and provide recommendations for improving procedures."

This RTE report covers Focus Areas 1 and 2. Focus Area 3 is the subject of a separate report.

The multiple sectoral activities and responsibilities of IOM in this setting, the complexity resulting from a large number of actors, the controversy over the leadership of the overall response, and the time frame under consideration that had to be taken back to 2013 and forward to end 2021, made this a very challenging exercise. This RTE concentrates on Needs and Population Assessment, Protection, CwC/Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), and coordination, and possible medium-term scenarios and attention points. References to site management are included inasmuch as they relate to the above topics. This RTE does not review IOM's huge contributions in site development and the delivery of basic services, such as shelter, NFIs, health and WASH. As per the intent of the ToR, the RTE gives more attention to the broader strategic level, and less to IOM's own response programming.

Field work in Dhaka and Cox's Bazar took place between 30 June and 12 July 2018 and was carried out by a two-person team, made up of Mr K. Van Brabant and Ms S. Patel. Even with a narrowed focus, this proved a very short time to cover much ground. By and large the report refers to the situation in July 2018 but, in successive drafts, more recent documentation has also been incorporated, and some developments.

The report draws on a variety of sources: interviews and group conversations with many colleagues from IOM and other agencies, as well as Rohingya and some individuals associated with the host community. The RTE team had a chance to conduct observations in Camp 1, Camp 18 and Camp 20 extension. That qualitative information is only partially complemented by the low number of responses to two out of the three surveys. On the other hand, the report draws on a broad range of IOM and non-IOM documents, including several that summarise relevant surveys.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

a. Overall appreciation

The scale and speed of the refugee influx was overwhelming. The physical and mental condition they were in was poor. The sites where they eventually were located were forested hills without any existing infrastructure. That major morbidity and mortality were avoided is a huge, collective success. IOM has been one of the pillars and major contributors to this success, thanks to its presence on the ground, its good relations with the Government of Bangladesh (GoB), its establishment of an interagency coordination structure in the spring of 2017 and its ability to scale up rapidly. IOM is also very well placed to be a major actor in the transition to stabilisation, recovery and development-oriented programming.

The actions reviewed here (NPM, protection, CwC/AAP and coordination) are all highly relevant. NPM overall has provided great value in a data-scarce environment, with broad coverage, regular updates and maps that contribute to coordination effectiveness. IOM has a significant protection component in this response and may be leading in Gender-Based Violence. But the collective protection services are not, currently, able to meet the needs, in terms of coverage and effectiveness. This is partially a result of the surprising failure of service sectors to integrate some basic protection measures from the outset. CwC/AAP faces serious resource and contextual challenges, that have impacted on its effectiveness. Overall, there is a *major participation deficit*, that keeps the refugees disempowered beyond the restrictions imposed by the GoB.

While data are routinely gathered with sex and age disaggregation and with attention to vulnerability, this does not automatically lead to programming that addresses gender roles, admittedly not easy with a Rohingya population that for decades has been under stress. Overall, the affected populations, be

they refugees or host communities, are also assumed to be fairly homogeneous social groups, an assumption that must be tested in further programming with and for both.

The strategic challenges for the overall Rohingya response are:

- Evolve from a life-saving and supply-oriented response to a people-centred one with substantive participation of the affected populations;
- Improve the interagency coordination to produce more cost-effective and integrated outcomes;
- Protect the refugees from forced repatriation;
- Evolve from emergency relief to transition, recovery and developmental programming that stimulates economic development in Cox's Bazar district, to the benefit of those residing there.

b. Needs and Population Monitoring (NPM)

A critical contribution to the collective response: The NPM regular site assessments have been the single most important source of comprehensive, and updated, information for the collective response. It can be complemented by other surveys and research data but none have the same coverage and are regularly updated. If NPM had not been there when a mega-response took shape, IOM or another agency would have had to set it up. That would have taken significant time and come at higher cost, compared to the actual expansion and adaptation of the already existing NPM to new circumstances. The maps are another crucial contribution to the collective response, also enabling more geographical coordination.

Separation between data gathering and data interpretation: While the division of roles between data gatherer (NPM) and data analyst and interpreter (sectors) is understandable, it also creates a potentially problematic disconnect. Data gathered (NPM products) are more widely available and easily accessible, than the analysis and interpretation, which can give rise to misinterpretation and misuse of data, by the very many who do not participate in the sector- or working group discussions. NPM sees itself as a service provider. As such, they can disagree with certain requests / questions that their 'clients' would like them to pursue in their research, but they do not feel authorised to challenge/correct their 'clients' on problems with the data they get from other sources, or on interpretational errors of NPM data. Here the division of labour between a qualified research entity and those who analyse and interpret creates room for error. The introduction now of more mixed methods may reduce this risk.

Beyond majhis: NPM acknowledges the limitations and possible biases of heavy reliance on male majhees. Women and children should have been deliberately included several months ago, as systematic source of information, particularly as IOM's own 'women's participation survey' of Jan. 2018 found evidence that women's needs were not being heard or answered. Several agencies had set up children, women and girl-friendly spaces in several sites months ago, and some Rohingya women have also been recruited by aid agencies. Concerns about how informed and 'representative' certain Rohingya women would be as KI, could have been tested without too much effort. Greater diversity of KI is now being introduced as of Round 12.

No comprehensive treatment of 'access': Different sectors propose access related questions for each NPM round but are not systematic or comprehensive in the factors they inquire about. This leads to variable treatment of the multiple factors that determine 'access'. That creates a risk of misinterpretation, notably an impression that people have more access than they do, e.g. when access is just considered as no more than 30 minutes' walk to a service point.

Information management problems in the collective response: The collective information management is said by IOM colleagues to have been negatively affected by the high turnover of

Information Officers in different key agencies, and the apparent institutional reluctance of some, notably UNHCR, to share data.

Recommendations regarding Needs and Population Monitoring

R1: NPM: Urgently achieve the evolution to a mixed method and a more inclusive approach to key informants, ensuring that women and children are heard directly and consistently.

R2: NPM: Be systematic in conveying the methodological base and caveats of the report, and upfront explicit about who the KI are.

R3: NPM: Be proactive on the ‘access’ issue, rather than let sectors pick and choose some factors that determine access or not.

R4: CO, SEG: If obstacles to interagency data sharing persist, take the issue to the highest level (SEG. Agency HQ, donors), as a matter affecting the coordination abilities of the overall response.

c. Protection

Protection needs remain unmet: The refugees have many legal but also physical protection needs that remain unmet in the collective response. This is partially the result of lack of agencies with protection expertise, insufficient experienced staff among the agencies present, and insufficient funding. Partially however this also results from an unjustifiable lack of integration of protection from the outset and in basic services sectors, in contradiction with established good practice and guidance.

Law and order: To maintain the civilian character of the response, the aid community has encouraged a greater role for the Bangladesh police rather than the army. Attention remains required to the evolving sense of security of the refugees, who at times have expressed a higher degree of confidence in the army than the police.

Prevention: Relevant and competent efforts continue to be made to provide case management support to survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV). IOM’s GBV work is setting the standard and has also provided training to others. But as a significant proportion of GBV happens in the camps and therefore seems to occur among refugees, prevention requires more active mobilisation of community leadership and community-based protection practices.

Information sharing: The sharing of protection data between agencies runs into similar problems as with population data. This needs to get resolved.

More organisational support: Not in the least because of the alarming levels of GBV and trafficking, the protection work can benefit from more attention and support from Dhaka and HQ for this response. The RTE found that IOM has at times been slow in deploying enough experienced people to fill key protection positions. Support is also needed in terms of wider advocacy and the pursuit of better funding. IOM protection colleagues in Cox’s Bazar regularly organise donor visits with a focus on protection and counter-trafficking and provide briefings. IOM is not seen, by other actors, as an agency with significant protection expertise. This response creates an opportunity to influence that perception. On the other hand, IOM institutionally is not set up for lobby/advocacy work, which has a different purpose and conveys issues differently than the Communications Department does.

Recommendations related to Protection

R1: HQ, CO: Highlight more, to donors and the GoB, the continuation of unmet protection needs, advocating for more funding and acceptance of more protection specialists.

R2: HQ: Deploy additional staff with solid protection, PSEA and CT experience to support the awareness raising and training of IOM staff, partners where needed and other agencies.

R3: Cox's Bazar emergency response: Ensure that protection (and AAP) are more strongly integrated in site management and technical sectors from the outset, formally via terms of references for sectors and working groups and their coordinators, and in practice via briefings to new recruits and ongoing monitoring of staff behaviours and operational outcomes.

R4: HQ: Integrate protection into the L3 procedures and expand the institutional capacity to rapidly deploy very experienced protection staff to multiple complex crises simultaneously, over time establishing IOM as an active player in protection.

d. Communicating with Communities/Accountability to Affected Population

Challenging conditions and appropriate initial priority: IOM has given appropriate attention to engaging the affected populations, e.g. via outreach workers, a participation survey, FGDs. The CwC WG, which it coordinates, is a valuable component of the overall response. Collaborating agencies like Translators without Borders, BBC Media Action and Internews, and more recently Fondation Hironnelle, are adding value through their efforts to reduce the translation challenges and initiate participatory community radio. IOM appropriately co-funds some of these, though delays in administrative and financial processing have at times reduced their efficiency. An initial emphasis on messaging to the affected populations, and its continuation for the monsoon and cyclone season, were appropriate. Throughout the first year of the crisis response, repeated efforts have been made to consult with refugees, assess their evolving information needs, and their use of Feedback and Complaints Mechanisms (FCMs). The operational challenges are significant however, and include language barriers, funding shortages, staff attitudes and Rohingya preferences for personal communication, particularly on more sensitive issues.

Confusion about the relationship of CwC, AAP and substantive participation: There can be excellent communication without accountability, and accountability without substantive participation in important decisions. There is conceptual but also institutional confusion over this -as noticeable e.g. in job descriptions- which needs to be clarified. There are also different understandings of whether IOM's practices for participation and accountability are limited to aid-programming issues over which IOM has direct control only, also take on those that concern the aid-programming of other agencies, and extend to issues of concern to a population that are not aid-related? As supporter of the CHS and the Grand Bargain, as a UN agency defending various human rights Charters and Conventions and, in this context, also as co-leader for the overall response, IOM's ambition and objective must be substantive participation and accountability, with a readiness to hear and respond to all issues raised. "CwC", with its connotations of 'communication', does not adequately express that ambition and obligation.

AAP not yet sufficiently mainstreamed: Notwithstanding many good initiatives, including within IOM programming, AAP, like protection, so far has not been fully mainstreamed into the different service delivery sectors of the overall response. There is a significant participation deficit in the overall response, even if some agencies do well in their circumscribed projects. This is the case in relationship to service provision but even more striking with regard to broader concerns of notably the

refugees. The absence of genuine participation of refugees in the current discussions about the reform of their governance is unacceptable. Contributing factors to this can be the multitude of sectors and working groups in the coordination set-up, the possible belief that this is not life-saving and hence not a priority, and the lack of self-awareness about the power than humanitarian actors wield. CwC, as a working group, also has no formal leverage over sectors.

Delayed shift from a needs-based to a rights-based and people-centred approach: Overall, the collective response still has to make the shift from a needs-based to a rights-based and people-centered approach. CwC, or rather ‘AAP’ understood as aiming for participation beyond FCMs, has a central role to play in this, within IOM and within the response as a whole. This is more than a technical-programmatic issue. It also requires a change in mindsets: The prolonged portrayal of a population as needy, vulnerable and even traumatised, and hence with reduced ‘agency’, de facto diminishing their ability to influence decisions over choices and actions supposed to be for their benefit. Many reports signal that the Rohingya now demand a greater say in what is being decided for them.

Recommendations on AAP-CwC

R1: IOM HQ/CO/RO: Clarify institutionally the practical understandings of CwC, AAP and participation, with the goal being substantive participation and accountability. The right of refugees (and affected populations) to have a say in matters that directly affect them, beyond basic services, is to be explicitly acknowledged. So too the responsibility to pass on issues that may not be within IOM’s remit, to those concerned.

R2: Rohingya response: Accelerate, within IOM programming, through the -renamed- AAP WG and the SEG, the AAP and participation objectives in the Rohingya response: e.g. through the fielding of additional experienced AAP staff with community mobilisation experience that can engage with the different affected populations; systematic inclusion of Rohingya from the outset in decision-processes that will affect them; more open listening without preset agenda; more extensive collaboration with Rohingya-based organisations such as the Centre for Social Integrity and interaction with other emerging Rohingya community organisations; collective advocacy to donors to better fund approaches to turn a needs-based into a more people-centred response, through IOM’s sectoral coordination roles and role as co-leadership position in the SEG.

R3: CwC WG: Change the heading to ‘*AAP-participation WG*’ and bring in (as per the WG ToR,) a local co-chair for the WG, to strengthen the engagement with the host community.

e. Coordination

A tolerant perspective: Those with a tolerant view of coordination challenges will see the ups and downs of the coordination story in the past year with leniency: “*Any coordination system in the world takes time to develop and mature; key actors and stakeholders need to mature with it.*”¹ An appreciate perspective will also underscore that the coordination today is better than it was three months ago, when it was already better than six months ago.

A critical perspective: Others on the other hand, especially NGOs but also donors, remain critical of what was widely perceived as excessive competition, especially among UN agencies. As one INGO

¹ Interview with senior UN official.

aid worker, with extensive comparative experience put it: “*the Rohingya crisis response has been one of the most competitive environments I have ever seen*”.² There is particular sensitivity about the perceived absence of accountability because of the leadership controversy. As one UN official put it to a donor representative: “*where there is no clear leadership, there cannot be accountability!*”.³ The argument can be made that the ultimate responsibility, and accountability is a collective one, of the Resident Coordinator and the two Co-chairs of UNHCR and IOM. Collective responsibility is acceptable, when it is indeed acknowledged and acted upon.

Form over function: The point must be made that the conversations around coordination seem to turn far more around ‘models’, ‘lead agency’, and ‘reputational risk’ than about its practical purposes: this should be to meet people’s needs, protect their fundamental rights, strengthen their capacities and resilience, as fast, comprehensively, equitable and cost-effectively as possible. Structures of ‘coordination’ do not automatically generate ‘collaborative’ attitudes. More focus is needed on behaviours around problem-solving, than formalistic models. An ICVA NGO support mission in July 2018 called for an inclusive process to design a coordination structure that will “ensure a principled, accountable and effective response now and in the future.”⁴

Coordination competencies: Leading the coordination of a sector, working group or totality of activities in a particular site, with a diversity of agencies and personalities, over which one has no formal authority, requires solid technical or thematic expertise, but also many soft skills. The quality of sector- and working group coordinators in the overall response has been variable, including among those deployed by IOM.

Recommendations regarding Coordination

R1: CO, SEG: *The coordination review:* Continue to influence the main coordination review exercise to ensure that it is inclusive, and results in more (time and cost) efficient, effective and accountable inter-agency coordination, that links shorter-term relief with medium-term transition and recovery perspectives, and actively draws on input from the different affected populations. Effectiveness at outcome level is more important than models and agency leadership.

R2: HQ: *Coordinator competencies:* Ensure that IOM-deployed sector and working group coordinators have the experience and personal and professional competencies to foster collaborative practices among diverse actors with different views.

f. The medium-term

Medium-term planning is urgently needed but politically sensitive: The probability that most Rohingya refugees will return to Myanmar in the foreseeable future is extremely low. Medium-term planning is urgently needed, not in the least to determine where further infrastructural investments have to be made before the 2019 monsoon season, but officially not accepted by the GoB.

Key scenario determinants: Key determinant factors identified, that- in various combinations- will shape the medium-term scenario are: decongestion or not, particularly of the mega-camp; levels of aid funding sustained or declining; significant economic investment in Cox’s Bazar district or not. The

² INGO senior staff member interviewed in February 2018.

³ Interview with donor representative in February 2018, but the point was reiterated by a senior UN official to the RTE team during an interview in the summer of 2018.

⁴ ICVA NGO Support Mission July 2018: Key recommendations: 2.

announcement by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank of significant development funds for the district, creates an opportunity to pursue the least bad scenario of decongestion with inclusive economic development. Towards donors, some of which have already lined up 3-year funding, this can be argued in terms of the humanitarian-development nexus.

More substantive engagement with host community needed: Notwithstanding significant negative environmental and economic impacts on the poorer sections of the host community, empathy for the Myanmar refugees remains fairly high. However, the host community currently does not get the information about the projects the aid community is already implementing for their benefit, and their ability to participate in what have to be tripartite discussions also with the local authorities, is too limited. CSOs, local to Cox’s Bazar rather than from other parts of Bangladesh, are well placed to be strategic players and allies in this regard.

Localisation as strategic objective: Localisation (and a participation revolution) is one of the Grand Bargain commitments IOM has endorsed. Whereas in practice, this tends to become an objective when the funding for international organisations declines, a more effective paradigm is to consider ‘reinforcing’ local capacities (also from at risk and affected populations) a strategic objective. To that effect, generalising prejudices about local CSOs need to be kept in check. Creative thinking about socio-economic development must be mobilised as fragmented projects rarely have a multiplier or cumulative impact effect.

Rohingya community development: The improved security of the Rohingya refugees creates an opportunity for this community to develop itself. This has equal value for successful repatriation as successful prolonged stay or integration in Bangladesh. This is currently not happening in a deliberate manner.

Recommendations on the Medium-Term Strategy

R1: CO, SEG: Use informal channels of communication with GoB officials to discuss the approaching investment dilemma, the implications of likely decline in relief aid and the opportunities created by the promised development funding.

R2: CO, RO, HQ TRD: Start shaping IOM’s transition, recovery and development strategy, with active attention to projects and investments with economic multiplier effect, not just basic service delivery and disaster risk mitigation projects. Include the reinforcement of local capacities to the point where they can take over as a strategic objective.

R3: Cox’s Bazar emergency programme, sub-office, CO: Encourage the maturing of Rohingya community-based organisation, and open up space for their substantive participation, together with but also beyond ‘elected committees’.

R4: HQ, CO and Cox’s Bazar sub-office: The Transition and Recovery Unit in Cox’s Bazar, currently a bit in the shadow of the emergency response, needs to evolve to an equal level component, in terms of seniority and calibre of staff, and strategic and operational management attention. It needs to have the capacity to broaden and deepen the relational network with local authorities in the district, but also with Cox’s Bazar local CSOs and other influential social, economic and political actors in the district. These will be important channels for two-way communication, and citizen participation.