



# MARKET-BASED LIGHTING FOR REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES IN BANGLADESH

## Lighting, sanitation and the risk of gender-based violence

Case study 3: Bangladesh, Rohingya refugee camps, Cox's Bazaar

### What was the approach – when, where and why?

The south-eastern-most part of Bangladesh is currently home to close to one million Rohingya refugees, the majority of whom live in sprawling camps in Cox's Bazaar. Over 700,000 have fled Myanmar since August 2017. However, there have been three waves of displacement over the past 20 years, meaning some refugees live within host communities.

There is recognition that many households among the host community are extremely vulnerable and their needs have largely been overlooked in the response. As part of Oxfam's three-year strategy, there is a focus on providing host communities with direct support as well as fostering social cohesion between Rohingya and host communities. Working with local markets is one strand of this approach.

Assessments and monitoring that have taken place since August 2017 have consistently highlighted protection risks for both host and refugee communities related to the lack of lighting at night. Respondents unanimously said that they would feel safer if they owned lights and public lighting was installed in their surroundings.

Solar lights are available on the local markets in the Cox's Bazaar and Teknaf areas, although these are limited in both quantity and quality. Some better-off host communities buy solar panels to light their houses, but solar energy is generally inaccessible to the poorest and most vulnerable Bangladeshi nationals – and almost totally unaffordable for Rohingya refugees. Many households therefore spend their evenings and nights in darkness.

Oxfam staff undertook a household survey and found that there were multiple reasons why a family may need light in the evening – while at the same time noting that local markets were both functioning and accessible. Vulnerable households lacked the purchasing power to buy solar lights, but in theory, markets could supply.



Lights available to buy locally. Photo: Corrie Sissons/Oxfam

In a new, innovative pilot project for Oxfam globally, Oxfam's Host Community Protection team is working to establish a market-based solar light project – working with low-capacity Bangladeshi traders to guarantee supply of solar lights, and providing commodity vouchers to households to ensure demand. This activity culminates in a voucher-exchange fair, where local traders bring solar lights to communities that are hosting



Discussions with local traders in Cox's Bazaar.  
Photo: Corrie Sissions/Oxfam

refugees, and vulnerable households can exchange a voucher for solar lights of their choosing.

Oxfam conducted a market assessment to understand supply lines, trader capacity, household preference and trader willingness to engage in a humanitarian programme.

Traders were overwhelmingly interested in participating; they had been dismayed at the effect of the influx of the Rohingya refugees on the local markets, as NGOs were distributing huge amounts of goods in-kind and circumventing their shops. Furthermore, many of the traders were wary of the Rohingya refugees, calling them 'antisocial' or 'criminals' and feeling that all the assistance went to them. In reality,

however, many had not met or served any refugees. Most traders did not have connections to suppliers of high-quality solar lights but were willing to be connected.

Following demand for multiple lights and drawing on lessons from Oxfam's global research in other countries, Oxfam decided that each household would receive a commodity voucher for high-quality solar lights available in-country (either a d.light S30 or Sun King Pico) plus additional vouchers to buy a selection of three lower-quality lights, which traders are able to access via existing suppliers. Prices and volumes were negotiated with traders, who were then trained in Oxfam best practice, humanitarian principles, safeguarding and safe programming. Oxfam also explained how voucher fairs work and signed agreements with the traders for specified solar lights.

### Anticipated benefits

This project is anticipated to have three overarching benefits:

1. It will facilitate access to high-quality and multiple solar lights for vulnerable refugee and host-community households in the Teknaf area. Households will be able to exchange vouchers for lights they choose themselves, increasing their sense of safety at night and giving them more dignity than a simple distribution and bringing a 'market' to their village for the day. This also avoids the need for women to travel to markets, as they may be unable to do so for cultural reasons.
2. By directly contracting local solar light vendors and linking them with large suppliers, Oxfam is indirectly supporting local markets and fostering market linkages in Bangladesh while not undermining local trade and economic development. Traders who participate in the programme can make profits which will benefit the local market in Teknaf and foster positive perceptions of Oxfam and the work we are doing to support host communities.
3. In bringing together the local traders and Rohingya refugees it is hoped that there can be a measurable impact in terms of reducing tension and fostering social cohesion. By serving refugees, traders will come to understand their situation and to see that the communities can co-exist; this in turn can have positive socio-cultural impacts and promote positive sentiments which can spread throughout the market and host community. In addition, bringing together host communities and refugees in the fairs demonstrates Oxfam's commitment to local communities.



Solar lights available to buy. Photo: Rachel Hastie/Oxfam

The pilot programme will take place in November 2018, and an updated case study will subsequently be released.

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