Recurring natural disasters, such as floods and cyclones, continue to exacerbate poverty-related issues, including food insecurity and malnutrition, in many parts of the country. A massive influx of refugees in 2017 from Burma into Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar District, one of the least developed districts in the country, has prompted a large-scale humanitarian response.

SITUATION

- Attacks by armed actors on Burmese security posts in August 2017 and subsequent military operations in Burma’s Rakhine state, home to the majority of Rohingya, have caused a major humanitarian crisis in neighboring Bangladesh. The violence in Burma has forced over 743,000 people—mostly Rohingya refugees—to flee into southeastern Bangladesh, joining more than 212,000 Rohingya living in the country prior to August 2017, the UN reports.

- The majority of Rohingya refugees live in 34 extremely congested settlements in Cox’s Bazar District, where they remain completely reliant on food assistance to meet their basic needs. The influx has nearly tripled the population of Teknaf and Ukhiya upazilas in Cox’s Bazar District, which currently hosts the highest concentration of refugees in the world. Host communities in the area are highly vulnerable, and face food insecurity and limited livelihood opportunities.

- While levels of extreme poverty are in decline, approximately 31 percent of Bangladeshis still live below the national poverty line, according to the UN World Food Program (WFP), and are affected by natural disasters such as flooding and cyclones. Approximately 25 percent of the population in Bangladesh remains food insecure and 36 percent of children younger than 5 years of age suffer from stunting, a common measure of chronic malnutrition, WFP reports.

RESPONSE

- In FY 2019, USAID’s Office of Food for Peace (FFP) contributed over $123 million for emergency food assistance for vulnerable communities in Cox’s Bazar District. FFP partners WFP and World Vision provide emergency food assistance to Rohingya refugees and implement self-reliance activities such as community kitchens and disaster risk reduction projects. With FFP support, ACF, WFP, and World Vision conduct cash-based income-generating activities in host communities in Cox’s Bazar.

- FFP supports both WFP and the UN Children’s Fund to implement nutrition activities for refugees in Cox’s Bazar, where children under 5 years of age and pregnant and lactating women receive specialized foods to prevent and treat acute malnutrition.

- FFP partners with CARE International, Helen Keller International and World Vision to implement multi-year development programs to promote agriculture, livelihoods, maternal and child health, women’s empowerment and disaster risk reduction in multiple regions throughout the country. In FY 2019, FFP contributed more than $41 million to these non-governmental organizations in support of these efforts.

Photo: Rohingya women and their children gather to receive WFP nutrition assistance. WFP/Saikat Mojunder